

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Security Studies

Master's Thesis

2019

Tomáš Zrůst

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Security Studies

**Saudi-Iranian rivalry through cooperation
with non-state actors: Balance of power theory
and alliance-making in changing Middle East
dynamics**

Master's thesis

Author: Bc. Tomáš Zrůst

Programme: Security Studies

Supervisor: Mgr. Jan Daniel, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2019

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague

Tomáš Zrůst

Reference

ZRŮST, Tomáš. *Saudi-Iranian rivalry through cooperation with non-state actors: Balance of power theory and alliance-making in changing Middle East dynamics*. Praha, 2019. 77 pages. Master's thesis (Mgr.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies, Department of Security Studies. Supervisor Mgr. Jan Daniel, Ph.D.

Length of the thesis: 179 684 characters (with spaces)

Abstract

This diploma thesis is focusing on applying balance of power theory on case of regional competition in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran and its reflection in three particular proxy conflicts – Syrian civil war, conflict over influence in Lebanese political system and conflict over stability of Bahraini regime. Assumptions about decreasing relevance of the theoretical background in more complex contemporary settings are challenged by concentrating on evolution of the theory and mainly role of non-state actors in these conflicts and balancing. The primary aim is to challenge the originally strictly state-centric theory, indicate ways to broaden its applicability and make contribution to the discipline by evaluating overall role of non-state in balancing and balance of power theory in general. The thesis firstly examines each case study separately, with focus on perception of threat and balancing behaviour of both regional powers and perspective of ties with respective non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, Shia majority in Bahrain and opposition in Syria, including their position and influence in the conflict, in context of regional competition and balancing in general. The work then uses a comparative approach with emphasis on contrast of context to identify key findings, which helps to make conclusions about actual role of non-state actors from both empirical and theoretical perspective and identify consequences on the state of the theory and possible ways forward. The thesis aims to show that the realist theory is able to adapt to rising role of non-state actors not only in terms of a balancing tool, but also a regular actor of the whole regional competition and regional balancing, who can influence not only dynamics of significant proxy conflicts, but also competition between regional powers.

Abstrakt

Záměrem této diplomové práce je aplikace teorie rovnováhy moci na případ regionální rivality na Středním východě mezi Saudskou Arábií a Íránem, a také na způsob, jakým se promítá v případě tří konkrétních proxy konfliktů – Syrské občanské války, politickém konfliktu v Libanonu a konfliktu o stabilitu a podobu režimu v Bahrajnu. Argumenty, týkající se oslabující relevance této teorie v současné daleko komplexnější mezinárodní bezpečnostní situaci, jsou v tomto textu konfrontovány soustředěním se na vývoj teorie, a především na roli nestátních aktérů ve vybraných regionálních konfliktech a v procesu balancování. Primárním cílem této práce je konfrontace původně striktního přístupu k teorii z perspektivy národních států, naznačit možné způsoby rozšíření aplikovatelnosti teorie, a přispět k rozvoji oboru zhodnocením role nestátních aktérů v balancování i teorie rovnováhy moci. Diplomová práce

nejdříve zkoumá každou případovou studii zvlášť, přičemž se soustředí na povahu vnímání zkonstruované hrozby, konkrétní reakce a chování aktérů, i vliv vazeb na nestátní aktéry, jako například Hizballáh, šíitská většina v Bahrajnu nebo syrská opozice, a to včetně jejich pozice v konfliktu i v kontextu regionální soutěže a balancování. Práce volí komparativní přístup s důrazem na kontrast kontextů, aby tak mohla identifikovat klíčové poznatky, které pomohou zformulovat závěry o roli nestátních aktérů, a to jak z teoretické, tak i empirické roviny, a identifikovat důsledky poznatků na stav teorie i její další vývoj. Práce se tudíž snaží dokázat, že realistická teorie se dokáže adaptovat důležitější roli nestátních aktérů, a to nejen jako nástroje balancování pro regionální mocnosti, ale i jako plnohodnotné vedlejší aktéry regionální soutěže a balancování, v rámci něhož mohou ovlivnit nejen dynamiku konkrétního proxy konfliktu, ale také regionální mocenské rivality.

Key words

Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syrian civil war, Bahrain, Lebanon, balance of power theory, non-state actors, proxy conflict, regional competition, the Middle East, structural realism

Klíčová slova

Saúdská Arábie, Írán, Syrská občanská válka, Bahrajn, Libanon, teorie rovnováhy moci, nestátní aktéři, proxy konflikt, regionální soutěž, Střední východ, strukturální realismus

Název práce: Saúdsko-iránské soupeření prostřednictvím spolupráce s nestátními aktéry: Teorie rovnováhy moci a vytváření aliancí na měnícím se Středním východě

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to supervisor of this work Mgr. Jan Daniel, Ph.D. for his valuable help from the very beginning of the work on the thesis and for his willingness, sincerity and constructive comments throughout the whole process.

Also, my huge thanks belong to my family, closest friends and especially Markéta for their endless support, patience, love and that they were there for me when needed the most.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. Balance of power as a structural realist theory	6
1.1. Principles of structural realism	6
1.2. Balance of power theory	8
1.3. Evolution of the theory	11
1.4. Alliance-making aspect of the balance of power theory	13
1.4.1. Ideology/identity	14
1.4.2. Foreign support	15
1.5. Balance of power and the Middle East.....	16
1.6. Drawbacks of the theory and its criticism	17
1.7. Application of the theoretical background	19
2. Methodology	21
3. Core and development of Saudi-Iranian rivalry in the Middle East	25
3.1. Core of the competition	25
3.2. History	27
3.3. Contemporary context	28
4. Balancing between Iran and Saudi Arabia in regional proxy conflicts	31
4.1. Profiles of competing regional powers	31
4.1.1. Saudi Arabia	31
4.1.2. Iran	32
4.2. Examination of chosen proxy conflicts	34
4.2.1. Lebanon	34
4.2.2. Bahrain	40
4.2.3. Syria	48
5. Evaluation of the findings	57

5.1. Summary of empirical findings	57
5.2. Research questions	59
5.3. Impact on theoretical background (balance of power theory)	62
5.4. Role of non-state actors in the theory	63
5.5. Continuing relevance of the theory	64
5.6. Contribution of the examination to the discipline	65
Conclusion	67
Summary.....	69
List of references	71

Introduction

The post-Cold war security environment in international system has been significantly changing in last few decades. We are witnessing decreasing relevance of solely interstate conflicts on expense of intrastate ones, which are, at the same time, gaining transnational dimension and are often influenced by strong activity of non-state actors, that are not limited by borders of national states and are able to spread their activities to neighbouring countries and areas. This development generates assumptions about decreasing relevance of realist theories, mainly in case of balance of power theory and its structural realism background. The reason behind these opinions is argued to be absence of two main realistic principles - anarchical environment, and threat of survival (Walt, 1987). Nevertheless, the theory itself is still evolving from its traditional definition by Kenneth Waltz (see Waltz, 1979), and is trying not only to react to changing strategic settings, but also adapt and remain a highly applicable and relevant theoretical paradigm. On the other hand, such development is also creating doubts about new phenomena and concepts, which have been brought into consideration, and following debate inside the realism itself. Examples of these developments are, for instance, Walt's approach, emphasizing role of threat and balancing on lower instances of international system (Walt, 1987), inclining away from understanding balancing as a purely military effort or different perception of threat causing balancing behaviour (see Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 3).

Another factor creating doubts about relevance of the theory is its state-centric nature, weakened in the international system by mentioned rising importance and activity of non-state actors in many conflicts, especially proxy wars. The interaction between states, whether it is in terms of mutual conflict, cooperation or even alliance-making, is undermining the original nature of the theory, placed into Cold war environment and interstate conflicts, and forces the theoretical paradigm to adapt and find a way to surpass the original limitation of state vs. state interactions and broaden its applicability. As will be elaborated later in the text, the asymmetrical balancing (see Nexon, 2009) will be one of the available ways, but with non-state actors being able to be a part of alliance with states and even be part of balancing practices, there is still need for further argumentation about their developing role and place in the theory.

Therefore, the text of this thesis will not only try to build on the original definition, but also include evolution of the theory and prove its continuing relevance and applicability. The text will aim to do so by including non-state actors into whole application and will seek examination of their role and in the originally state-centric theory and broaden and extend the

range to which the theory can be applied in chosen empirical context - regional competition between Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and related proxy conflicts. Additionally, with this approach, the thesis will also challenge the state-centric nature of the theory and separation of hard and soft balancing and thus will try to make new contributions to the theoretical field.

The security situation in the Middle East is often labelled as a "new Cold War" and a clear empirical example of modern balancing, which makes it an appropriate case for this work to focus on, when talking about balance of power. Saudi Arabia and Iran as two competitors for regional hegemony are present throughout the region with an aim to strengthen its overall power position and benefit on an expense of its adversary (Kausch, 2015). Alliances and ties with governments, political actors or even non-state actors then form separate geopolitical and ideological blocs (see Duran, Yilmaz, 2013), on which their regional stance depends, and causes reflection of the competition in specific countries and related conflicts, as the empirical part of the following work will demonstrate on cases of Lebanese political conflict, struggle over Bahraini regime and Syrian civil war. These three cases were chosen for a purpose of testing the theory in different settings and observation of reflection of regional competition in particular countries to offer variety of contexts and thus benefit from broader empirical findings. In Lebanon, both regional powers are present due to their interest in the political system, whether it is for purpose of geopolitical benefits or interests with close actors in connection to competition, such as Lebanese government in case of Saudi Arabia or Hezbollah in case of Iran. In Bahrain the stakes are primarily stability of Sunni regime and position of Shia majority in the country after events of Arab Spring, which led to Saudi intervention. Finally, in Syria the value for both regional powers stem from possible gains from stabilization or fall of Baath regime and consequences of the civil war on the regional security in general (Tzemprin, Jozič, Lambaré, 2015). Empirical examination will thus seek to identify key findings regarding balancing and role of non-state actors in each conflict and in process of shaping interests and activity of both regional powers in post-Arab Spring security environment, and later argue about role of non-state actors in balancing in both empirical and theoretical sense, also with conclusions about relevance and applicability of balance of power theory.

The text will start with elaboration on chosen theoretical background and methodology before getting to the actual empirical analysis. Theoretical part will be focused on principles of structural realism, traditional balance of power theory, its evolution and drawbacks, related alliance-making concept, along with nature of application of the theory in the Middle East, and following methodological part will summarize selected methods, aims and defined research

questions, which were redefined in comparison with the research project. The empirical chapter will then begin with defining the context of the examination and core of the regional rivalry in the Middle East, which will be followed by identifying characteristics of Saudi Arabian and Iranian identity, foreign policy and ideological bloc in general, before focusing on mentioned case studies and later evaluation of empirical findings and placing them into background of the balance of power theory and structural realism with an aim to define overall conclusions.

1. Balance of power as a structural realist theory

Balance of power theory, as one of the traditional ideas in international relations, has a long academic tradition and to this day receives a significant amount of attention, related to both conviction about its lasting applicability to contemporary politics, or its decreasing relevance in new strategic settings. Therefore, the paradigm of structural realism, with its perception of international politics as power-centred, maintained its value, as will be illustrated in this work, and still holds potential for expansion and further development. Before empirical analysis, the text will begin with review of the classic balance of power theory and its structural realism background, which will serve as a main theoretical foundation, but the thesis will also strictly emphasize its alliance-making aspect and will aim to include the role of non-state actors in this overview as an evidence of ongoing evolution of the theory. In the end, the picture of the theory should be able to offer space to work separately on subsystemic level and transcend the traditional state-centric perspective.

1.1. Principles of structural realism

As was indicated, the bases of structural realism provide general assumptions about the nature of system, to which the specific theory is applied. Structural realism slightly follows the original realist theory but has its own original characteristics, which are seen as an appropriate background for examination of regional rivalry.

Generally, realism sees power as the main factor in international politics and existence in anarchic environment is derived strictly from power and power capabilities. The concept of power is, with various interpretations, seen either as a use of military, economic or political force, or simply ability to influence others according to own interests and desires, and in structural realist perspective is perceived as the main currency in international relations. In this context, nation-states are considered to be key actors in international system, whose policies are goals-oriented and concentrated on defending its national interests, being the main objective of power aspirations, whether it is by force or not. But unlike the original theory, structural realists do not see focus on power being connected to human nature and place the structure and architecture of the international system or examined unit in the centre of calculations. (Dunne, Kurki, Smith, 2013, p. 77-78; Sheenan, 1996, p. 5-8).

The original definition of structural realism, mentioned in the book *Theory of International Relations* by Kenneth N. Waltz, is providing a deep insight of the bases of structural realism, including mentioned centre of focus - structure. Waltz perceives it as being

mainly composed and defined by its units, in other words political structures, that are in constant interaction. Therefore, he defines structure of the international system, through three characteristics of its units: their ordering principles, their character, and distribution of capabilities.

In the first case, he pinpoints differences between hierarchic domestic units and anarchic and decentralized international structure. According to Waltz, domestic units entail relationships of superordination and subordination, which differentiates them, whether in international politics units are not formally differentiated and their relations are based purely on coordination. Hence in hierarchic systems, units are mutually related and are functionally differentiated, which is not the case in anarchic system, where their differentiation is a matter of capabilities. In international system, power is estimated by comparing the capabilities of various units, but it should not be perceived as a characteristic of unit, but rather a system-wide concept (Waltz, 1979, p. 80-101). What this adds to basic overview and to following analysis, is a need to not only focus on the system but follow a need to take nature of particular actors into account, when applying such approach. In space with absence of hierarchy, the closer look into actors aims, resources or identity bases provide a clear picture about role of specific actors in power competition and where lies their potential for the main powers or potential to influence the state of equilibrium. This approach can be applied specifically to particular non-state and with their profile see, in which it overlaps with the role of the regional power, in case of this work, and how it impacts the whole regional balance.

Additionally, structural realism is based on five basic assumptions. Firstly, it argues, that the great powers are the main actors in the international system, in which anarchy is the ordering principal. The second assumption highlights offensive military capability of all states. Thirdly, structural realism argues, that states can never be certain about the intentions of other actors. The fourth assumption sees survival as the main goal of all states. And the fifth assumption presents states as rational actors, which are able to define strategies to maximize their prospects for survival.

These premises thus present the system as anarchic, which forces all actors to adapt to self-help world. Intentions of other actors are not clear and there is a high possibility that they will take advantage of their power and offensive tools to inflict harm and alter the balance of power. With little trust in the system, all actors should focus on making attempts to achieve power gains on the expense of others, maintain security and sustain territorial integrity or domestic political order in harmony with the goals of survival (Dunne, Kurki, Smith, 2013, p.

79-80). Hence, to get deeper understanding of the core motivation of states and practices to attain mentioned goals and be able to place it in bigger picture of the structural realist paradigm, presented Waltz's perspective of the structure is still key to follow.

To be more specific, in context of regional rivalry, the text will be theoretically closer to offensive realism, supported by authors such as John J. Mearsheimer. This perspective strictly relies on structural arguments and claims, that states should always look for opportunities to acquire as much power as possible, pursue hegemony (Dunne, Kurki, Smith, 2013, p. 80-81), and goes against the defensive realist, such as Kenneth Waltz, who do not see pursuing hegemony as an effective strategy and prefer mainly balancing the aspiring hegemon to make him less secure (Waltz, 1979).

These characteristics and paradigm of structural realism as a whole will thus serve as a tool for creating appropriate environment, in which the empirical part with examination of case studies will be placed, along with principles of balance of power theory, on which the text will elaborate in next segment.

1.2. Balance of power theory

Although the traditional balance of power theory offers many distinct definitions, which any work can be built on, the following section will also emphasize the evolution of the theory and how an adaptation to new or rising phenomena is reflected in its construction.

Generally speaking, Kenneth Waltz, as the classic author of the theory, defines two requirements for balance of power system: anarchic order and units motivated by survival. The consequences of anarchy are that states are forced to be functionally alike and behave in the same way. Concerns about survival also conditions and influences behaviour of the units, as they worry about division of possible gains or potential dependence on others (Waltz, 1979, p. 121). In other words, basic notion remains, that states seek to focus on survival and protection of its independence. Additionally, they aim to attain power in anarchical international system, so they are not under control of other actors and their own will is, as a consequence, strictly limited. Therefore, with threat of losing security or even elimination, weaker actors are predicted to group together to form balancing coalitions, influencing their military, political and economic relations (Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 4-5). Talking about relevance of this definition in contemporary world and settings of this work, the conceptualization will not be that straightforward. In case of examined regional competition, the notion of survival and focus

on security will remain key for the work, but in case of anarchic order, the application to regional subsystems is not entirely possible, as will be illustrated later in the chapter.

Apart from basic assumptions and principles about international system, specific behaviour and practices are also a big part of the theoretical framework, especially when it comes to reaction to emerging threat, or sustaining power equilibrium. Balancing, defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat, is a key theoretical term and more common and logical behaviour, as states try to protect themselves from actors with superior position or resources, and place their sole survival at risk. Waltz argues, that by joining the weaker side they hope to increase its influence in the system or prevent being left to mercy to more powerful coalitions. Also, actors could seek to create new formations for its deterrent potential, hidden in possible dissuasion of adversaries from offensive action towards them. Waltz thus sees balancing more common mainly because of the choice of freedom over subordination and, in the end, when examining state's considerations, prioritizes security over power. (Waltz, 1979, p. 126-127).

The theory also defines a bandwagoning, contradicting type of behaviour, related to an alignment with using attraction and attraction of power and strength, and, in some cases, an attempt to avoid an attack, share benefits of victory or achieve any form of appeasement (Walt, 1987, p. 17-21), but with focus on regional competition over overall hegemony, this term is not considered to be important for the analysis, and balancing will thus remain the main term, when it comes to conceptualizing behaviour.

Despite perception of balancing as the dominant and most common and effective behaviour from mentioned works of Walt or Mearsheimer, the discipline offers more deeper view on these concepts by extending balancing to more specific types of behaviour – hard and soft balancing. While hard balancing refers to the traditional notion of creation or aggregation of military power through creation of alliances and strategies states accept to build and improve their military capabilities and maintain formal alliances, soft balancing is based more on cooperative exercises or usage of diplomatic tools, that means less emphasis on military tools, or creation of formal alliances. Strategies connected to soft balancing are based on practices with limited military consequences, on more open policies or collaboration inside international institutions (Nexon, 2009, p. 342-342; Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 3). For asymmetrical relationships between regional powers and non-state actors these terms represent a value not because of the balancing core, but nature of the tools, either military, diplomatic or economical tools, by which the relationship is sustained and is able to achieve purpose.

From this overview it can be concluded, that power is the central concept, around which the theory and its principles are formed, and presents international society as equal in default, i.e. moving on continuum of power vs. weakness. The power politics, caused by human nature or systemic environment in realist perspective, then translate into pursuit of power in international community. The community is in regular contact and consist of states with certain policies and objectives and use combination of diplomacy and military power to pursue them. In this point of view, states engage entirely in struggle for power and its accumulation is their main objective for achieving national security (Sheenan, 1996, p. 7-13).

But with emphasis on evolution of the theory in its application, the work identifies another key concept, connected to the balance of power theory - threat. Walt claims, that states tend to balance against threat and not entirely against power itself. In other words, Walt argues, that either balancing or bandwagoning is taking place only when threat is present, i.e. that “states tent to ally with or against the foreign power that poses the greatest threat” (Walt, 1987, p. 21). Implication of this assumption can be, that more powerful states may not be a reason for weaker actors in the system to necessarily incline to balancing and it can actually be caused in situation, when they feel directly threatened. This, according to Walt, could be a result of various constructive factors, such as economical, technological and military capability or population, geographic proximity, and importance of offensive capabilities or actual intentions. Large offensive capabilities are prone to provoke a resisting alliance or threaten the sovereignty or integrity of nearby states. The intentions are thus also closely related to potential capabilities and may reflect in behaviour of other actors, and, generally, in degree the aggressive actor is perceived as a threat (Walt, 1987, p. 22-26).

To put these two concepts into joint perspective of broader theory, the basic relationship between concepts of threat and power needs to be touched. Most balance of power theorist are convinced and claim, that threat inheres in power, i.e. weaker states tend to balance stronger side as it threatens them, and they dread the accumulation of power against them. On the other hand, argument of Fritz and Sweeney is built around notion, that threat must be independent of power and the theory must extend its focus to notion such as interest, ideology or regime types and not limit perception of threat to a situation of survival (Fritz, Sweeney, 2004, p. 289-290). Power and threat are thus not opposing principles, from which any author should prioritize one to be able to work with the theoretical concept, but factors, that when are included next to each other and are made compatible, can bring a broader analysis going further than simple collation calculations and power estimations.

The text will try to confirm this assumption by making power and threat function together through differentiating between traditional threat to survival, which was mentioned as a core characteristic of the traditional theory, and wider perception of threat. The threat to survival, will be considered as a stronger catalyst for balancing of the two, for example in a form of military action, i.e. hard balancing, and indicator of relevance of the traditional theory in the empirical reality. The latter term will be connected to threat, which will not directly threaten the independence and sovereignty of the actor, but still represents a danger for sustaining ties and position in another countries, conflicts, alliances etc., and prove of rising relevance of modern theoretical development. In context of regional competition, this threat is considered to be enough to result in balancing behaviour and materializing all principles related to behaviour in realism paradigm, as it is connected to interrupting or weakening overall position in the region and in the rivalry itself, and not purely threat in the traditional security sense. In other words, the thesis will get closer to the opinions, that threat inheres in power, especially in the chosen empirical context, as the core lies in power balance and its consequences for overall regional position, which can be threatened and weaken state's interests or influence of ideology.

1.3. Evolution of the theory

Issue the text touched in the previous paragraph, is related to application of balance of power theory to the contemporary world. There is no doubt that the changing strategic settings offer space for emergence of new phenomena and argumentations inside the theoretical paradigm. From purely theoretical point of view, the end of Cold war and end of great power competition on global level, with related absence of dynamics of balance of power on this scale, has, according to authors, such as Stephen M. Walt (Walt, 1987), moved the focus from systemic to subsystemic level, i.e. to regional level, where the presented dynamics are also highly relevant. Therefore, when a military power or coalition within a region gains too much power or represents a direct threat, other actors from the region can form balancing alliances to counteract this threat, with objective of achieving equal distribution of power, preventing war, or achieve domination (Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 204, p. 7-8). Walt also claims, that in contemporary world balancing is more common in these regional subsystems and is convinced that regional level has more potential for application of balance of power theory than classic focus on great powers competition (Walt, 1987).

With extended focus of the theory on various levels, the literature brings attention to different types of actors, which many perceive as a challenge to the state-centric perspective of

realist theory. Although some authors refuse that emergence of non-state actors in lines of the theory would challenge the state-centric nature of the system, as these actors lack material capabilities to engage in balancing on their own, their presence and influence on regional dynamics cannot be overseen and it is considered to be clear, that behaviour of non-state actors definitely reflects attributes of balancing, including using an armed violence against a state with clear political objectives. (Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 107)

Despite state-centric nature of the classic theory, its conceptualization offers an extension to other perspectives, in which new phenomena are reflected. Main term is, in this regard, without a doubt an asymmetrical balancing. Asymmetrical balancing is a result of rising role of new smaller actors, such as non-state actors, who are not able to match conventional military capabilities of states in general. With aim of this work, this term is considered as one of the crucial theoretical terms to mention. It contains both efforts by states to balance indirect threats these actors can pose, and, on the other hand efforts by non-state actors and their state sponsors to challenge other states using asymmetric tools such as terrorism or insurgency, taken advantage of by other states to potentially mitigate the power of relatively stronger regional opponent. In other words, asymmetric balancing is not limited to state vs. state interactions but is able to extend the applicability of the classic theory to interstate level ties or state versus non-state interactions. (Nexon, 2009, p. 341; Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 3, 16)

On the other side, there are various differences of regional perspective of balance of power that the application of the theory needs to be aware of. Mainly, regional systems are not pure anarchy, as external powers from different parts of the world are often directly or indirectly present or engaged, for instance by material or political support, and thus are able to play a role of police, protector or guarantor in regional politics and conflictual situations. Instead, the regional balance is not considered autonomous and with its hierarchic structure is dependent on position and activity of regional powers, global powers and other higher instances, such as regional organizations, and on a way, how these actors engage (Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004).

Following these arguments, the theory is also now working with assumptions, that in high-conflict or conflict-prone regions, such as the Middle East, states will tend to balance their local rivals or revisionist states, which pose the greatest threat not only to their independence, security and political integrity, but also their overall position in the region, as the ties and mutual threat to integrity are intensified by geographical circumstances. In regional systems, balancing is consequently more intense and directed to the most dangerous states (Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 240-243). This means, that with these defined propositions, regional subsystems do

not have to be perceived as only another dimension of great power competition and extension of global dynamics of balance of power, but as separated units with their own dynamics. Consequently, they would not be formed purely by global competition, but also by specific local settings, and with its own set of key actors balancing each other for the same purposes, as it was seen during the Cold war between great powers on global level of international relations and security.

This work will use this approach to apply basic principles of balance of power to lower unit of international system and different set of actors, to not only attempt to extend the scope of the classic theory, but also its validity to other spheres of international security, such as presence and influence of non-state actors and alliances with them. The intention will not be to entirely challenge the state-centric perspective of the theory, but rather enrich it.

1.4. Alliance-making aspect of the balance of power theory

From basic assumptions and notion of the balance of power theory, the text can now move to argumentation regarding alliance-making, being an essential part of the theory's dynamics or its direct consequences.

As Snyder reminds, although alliances are a central phenomenon in international relations, the discipline lacks separated and cohesive theory. Therefore, alliance-making in general is a part of other established theoretical backgrounds. On the other hand, he is aware that it is hard to isolate alliances and alignments as a separate phenomenon, because of the complexity it offers – not only context of security policy, but also interests, domestic politics or even ideological bases. Hence there is a need to be aware of many layers of alliances, not only one issue or adversary the alliance targets, but also mutual relations, characteristics and nature of interaction.

Due to these conceptual gaps, the context of alliances in this text will be connected purely to balance of power theory. Walt pinpoints, that when it comes to alliance making in context of balance of power theory, power of state, the availability of alliance and security context are one of the most important factors for their formation and durability. His argument, that weaker the actor, the more likely it is to bandwagon rather than balance, as it has little to offer to balancing sides (Walt, 1987), along with the stated conditions, will be considered crucial for examined cases of asymmetrical balancing. Weaker non-state actors are more likely to be influenced by stronger regional powers thanks to shared interests and perspective on events in the specific country, especially in a tensed security environment transcending to

regional level, and thus increase the probability of an alliance and cooperation, and, eventually, shifting the balance and state of events.

Apart from the alliance making aspect related to balance of power theory, the empirical part will also build its analysis on factors such as identity or foreign support, to provide a closer look into specific tools and means of the alliance making aspect of the proxy conflicts and regional competitions in general.

1.4.1. Ideology/identity

That the debate does not end in background mentioned above, is reflected not only in Walt's work on alliance-making, but generally in the discipline itself. Illustrating through Walt's text, the role of ideology cannot be ignored. Although any impact of ideology is going against pragmatic realist assumptions about behaviour of actors in international space, term of ideological solidarity has still been a part of discussion. Referring to alliances based on common political, cultural or other values, ideology is argued to have impact on decision making, as alignment with similar states can be seen as a defence of particular political principles, involve more trust, less fear or increase legitimacy of such alliance (Walt, 1987, p. 33-35).

The importance of ideology in alliance making, although less recognised by the realist framework, should not be completely underestimated. It cannot definitely explain the formation all by itself, but it still offers variety of key points for the whole phenomena. From Walt's perspective, ideology plays biggest role for an actor, when it feels secure, applying to any way of achieving easier defence and difficult conquest in the system, increases the importance of ideological considerations and emphasis on ideology during alliance related choices. This, according to Walt, leads to ideology being significant only in a world, where defence is dominant, thus making ideologically based alliances less dangerous. Therefore, close relationship between ideological factors and security considerations should not be overlooked. Diverse ideology can be seen as dangerous threat, as military power and thus be behind any balancing or bandwagoning decisions, if well defined. With this notion, it means that greater role of ideology in domestic politics can highly influence choices and opportunities for external international alliances and argumentation in their favour. (Walt, 1987, p. 37-40).

In regions with ideological multipolarity, such as the Middle East, the factor of identity is considered to be a partial substitute form of authority. With a lack of regional establishments identities is able to define and shape inter-state relations. In this case, identity or ideology play

a crucial role in the theoretical application, because of its ability to illustrate power projection and define roles of the states in the system or unit (Ethesami, 2014, p. 35-36).

As Gause illustrates, by pure logic of the theory in the Middle East, due to different settings and ideologies, Turkish-Saudi-Israeli-Egyptian alignment against Iran would make sense, but in reality, Turkey or Egypt leaned toward Iran and Israel, for instance, is trying to stay away, considering only open coordination with Saudi Arabia. This is seen as an example, that power alone do not define the structure of the system and role of identity needs to be considered in addition, especially in this specific context. On the other hand, the Middle East is also an example of how states with common identity, based on religious ideologies, can also be adversaries and seen one another as a threat. Either way, in bipolar or multipolar settings, adding an aspect of ideology into examination could be a way not only to get deeper into the context and attempts to explain specific behaviour related to alliance decision-making, but also make the considerations more relevant into chosen context of proxy wars and regional competition (Gause, 2017).

1.4.2. Foreign support

Walt also examines the role of foreign support on alliance formation, perceived as a special form of balancing behaviour. Provision of economic or military assistance is argued to communicate similar intentions and create enduring alliances. This factor will be also key in upcoming analysis of the chosen case study, as the material support is one of the decisive ties generated between states and non-state actors, if their practical interests are common.

Core assumption of the theory is that with bigger aid provided to one actor to another, the probability of mutual alliance increases. The impact of support and influence of donor over the recipient of the support is argued to be higher with rising significance of threat, value and nature of the support. This is valid especially with military assets, and asymmetry between both actors, fuelled by rising position of the donor in the international or regional settings or domestic situation. Of course, with donor being weakened, its control over the recipient is decreasing and, in case of equal capabilities, dependence, and following adaptation to interest of the other, becomes mutual.

Despite drawback of foreign aid, as a clear signal of intentions or strengthening of other actor, it still encourages a positive perception of the donor and creates reliable proxies, which can become dependent and vulnerable to manipulation for purposes of the stronger role of the donor in the given environment, thus increasing its threat to others (Walt, 1987, p. 41-46).

1.5. Balance of power and the Middle East

When it comes to application and construction of the theory for application in the Middle East, the characteristics of traditional global perspective are transferred into settings of regional subsystems. Authors either rely on role of main regional powers, i.e. states with large population, considerable national wealth, substantial armed forces and possibly small nuclear component, with aim to achieve domination over the other (Ethesami, 2014), or conceptualize the regional competition into form of different ideological blocs, each with different identities, ideologies and nature of foreign policies (Duran, Yilmaz, 2013). Either way, such defined main actors are argued to have capacities to determine regional balance and purpose of its ties with different types of actors, creating settings for asymmetrical partnerships and asymmetrical balancing in general (Ethesami, 2014).

The nature of application of balancing in the Middle East is thus derived from characteristics of these sides and their policies of containment, deterrence, regional arms race, shifting military balance or protection of national territory. The application of the balancing thus inclines primarily to the hard balancing, although with new authors revisiting applications to Middle East do argue, that external challenges to security and domestic legitimacy are also based on transnational ideological platforms or economic needs of dependent states, i.e. on budget security. In this sense is also argued, that relations in the Middle East requires reliance on multiple levels of analysis and insights in order to fully understand the regional alliances and balance of power dynamics (Ryan, 2019).

The application of the theory on the Middle Eastern phenomena is also influenced by an absence of binding institutional framework, which brings arguments about possibility of working with the region as an anarchic unit and thus help to capability of the traditional theory to be applied, but, as Ethesami argues, this stance should not be seen as the most accurate and effective for the purposes of examination, because of influence of multipolarity of identities and their transnational nature, which in region bring some form of authority. Therefore, understanding the regional subsystem and separating it from a global context might be key for understanding dynamics such as proxy wars or means of hard balancing between regional powers and highly increase applicability of the theory to such a specific case. (Ethesami 2014).

Through the perspective of the region being its own and separate unit, we can thus talk about presence of balance of power in the Middle East as an isolated phenomenon, seeing proxy wars and uprisings as a tool for balancing, which, in state-centred classic theory, would not be initially possible. In the case of period after the Arab Spring, and new emerging dynamics

influencing regional situation, such as weakening of the US, phenomenon of failed state, emergence of terrorism, spread of asymmetric wars or activity of non-state actors, brought authors, such as Eksi, to redefine the whole theory to adjust it to these settings with various types of actors and new types of policies. In his paper, Eksi talks about presence of balance of proxy war in the region. Building on the concept of proxy wars, particularly Deutsch's definitions, describing proxy wars as international conflicts between two countries in a third country, he claims, that this phenomenon became an expression of interests and a way of distribution of power, thus making them compatible with the whole structural realist setting (Eksi, 2017, p. 138-139). Their rising relevance make them also more appropriate to be included and conceptualized into various framework, to react to evolution in international security. This thesis will be aimed to go this way and thus reflect these emerging concepts in analysis of the chosen cases.

1.6. Drawbacks of the theory and its criticism

Limitations of basic premises and assumptions of balance of power theory have also been under a radar by many authors. Particular concerns or criticism towards applicability to contemporary world or international security in general have been touched both by critics and main realist academics. This short segment will summarize some of the available arguments, related to the profile of theory, which will be later used as a theoretical framework for analysis.

In Theory of International Relations, Waltz himself brought attention to basic critical points towards structural realism and the theory. For instance, he counters arguments about missing accuracy of notions about primary motivation of states to maximize power by claims, that these authors miss the basic assumption of the theory, which do not perceive states as unitary actors and multiplicity of the system is actually one of the propositions included in the theory. Other criticism, such as the theory does not explain the particular policies of states, is argued to be partially true, but not a relevant point, because Waltz does not see the theory inclining to have universal gravitation to explain every single step actors make, as its value is in highlighting uncertainty in international space and distinction between national and international politics (Waltz, 1979, p. 118-119, 121-122). States really may not act according to theory's assumptions, but that is caused by the influence of internal conditions, which are outside of the theory's reach (Waltz, 1979, p. 124).

The balance of power theory is also often labelled as vague, due to its restrictions to be relevant in contemporary world. One of the most pinpointed limitations are definitional problems surrounding the notions of balance, power or equilibrium, and conceptual ambiguity.

Basic terms, such as balancing, theoretically built strictly around concept of power, are bringing uncertainty about the core motivations of actors and, if these assumptions are actually reflected on actual empirical evidence. As already mentioned, the centrality of the concept of power has been partially abandoned by some by including a factor of threat and its perception. In other words, the discipline has been examining, if a behaviour of actors in international system is motivated by power balance or danger posed by stronger states, therefore if they are more likely to balance the opponent, as the classical theory predicts, or rather bandwagon with the stronger side if the threat is not so strong or hides significant benefits (Fritz, Sweeney, 2004, p. 286). The main criticisms then lead to arguments, that balancing is not more common as argued and the theory thus nor provide clear understanding of actual dynamics of the international system.

Snyder is pointing his critical arguments towards Walt's definition of the theory, focused more on a factor of threat. He sees Walt's definition of the theory as an attempt to change balance of power theory into balance of threat, which, with concentration on intentions and capabilities of aggressors, ignores factors regarding the defensive side and brings, in his opinion, even more uncertainty to what balancing really consists of (Snyder, 1991, p. 126-127). In similar regard, Snyder criticises the Walt's definition for its strict and limited focus on alliance, being the only mean of balancing and leaving impression, that balance of power theory is entirely about alliance making. The balancing-bandwagoning dichotomy also does not, in lines of the classic theory, leave space for another options, such as neutrality, improving relations with third party or conciliate or compromise with the threatening state. Therefore, Snyder sees this particular interpretation of the theory as limiting and not offering space to other various possibilities actors in international system potentially have to react on threatening circumstances (Snyder, 1991, p. 128).

After the end of Cold war, the criticism and drawbacks of the theory are even stronger. In unilateral setting, its operation value is considered to be decreasing and its basic assumptions are thus highly challenged. Primarily, with the U.S., still not entirely challenged as a global power, the basic dynamics of the theory are no longer applicable to the systemic level. Also, hard balancing is argued to be no longer the primary and automatic response to aggressive behaviour, and, instead, soft balancing is seen to be the essential strategy in unipolar and globalized settings, if we stay in lines of the theory.

With argued inadequacy of the theory to explain state behaviour in changing international settings, the literature claims, that there is a need to look for ways to broaden the concept of balancing and the theory in general, as the threats for independence sovereignty or

survival in general are still relevant (Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004, p. 367-370). This point will be later reflected in different operationalization of terms “threat” and “threat for survival”. Despite not being a reason to abandon the latter term, the former one could be a way to effectively broaden the theoretical reach and expand the applicability to chosen cases and contemporary strategic context.

The mentioned critic points show possible ways for extension of the relevance of the theory and slight innovations, which could make it even more effective in the upcoming case studies. Approach of this thesis will combine argumentations about nature of threat with evident power calculations or concentrate on presence of both hard and soft balancing practices, when it comes to specific behaviour. The empirical part will also build on the fact, that the theory is not universal, but rather appropriate for chosen context and cases, in which the text will perceive the regional powers as two unitary camps with cohesive national interests, ideology and strategy, despite these characteristics are in reality more complex, due to internal politics, which will be touched only superficially.

1.7. Application of the theoretical background

As was already indicated, this work will make an attempt to build its empirical part on bases of classic structural realist theory, such as Waltz’s perception of balance and structure, use both power politics and factor of threat as one of the key principles, and also incorporate non-state actors as part of the competition on international space, with emphasis on related factors of ideology, material support or using proxy wars as balancing tool. The theoretical framework will thus be placed into non-typical and very complex contemporary circumstances to see, if their notions and changing nature can be considered relevant and provide valuable empirical conclusions. Mentioned drawbacks, such as focus on the alliance-making or concept of threat, will not be perceived as limitations, but possible helpful extensions, which can prove, that the theoretical framework is still able to explain and understand actual dynamics in the changing international system and its sub-systems.

Chosen Middle Eastern environment offers a very specific background for effective application of the theory. Post-Arab period offers very fragile security situation, as any conflict has serious consequences on overall regional stability and power balance, highly power oriented behaviour, and increased presence of regional powers throughout the region, which, along with absence of regional organization, creates settings very close to Cold war, to which realistic theory was originally connected (Kausch, 2015). To make the settings even more applicable, the thesis will work with the region as a separated and isolated unit, i.e. it will not include

international organizations or any external actors into analysis, to create environment close to anarchy, and will concentrate primarily on perspective of regional powers, such as their perception of threat, interest, behaviour and desired outcomes. Additionally, the evolution of the theory will be also reflected in focus on interests and activity of non-state actors, including nature of their ties with regional powers.

Empirical reality will thus offer opportunities to apply theory to different perceptions of threat, policies, ties and behaviour to specific and various contexts and provide a wider test. Firstly, Lebanon offers conflict over political system, nature of presence of regional powers in the system itself, and strong role of non-state actor in aspect of alliance making and balancing. Bahrain, as a second case study, provides settings for examining importance of geographical proximity, role of ideology in conflict over political regime closely aligned to one of the regional powers, and consequences on perception of threat. Finally, Syria, as the only purely armed conflict, will be an example of more traditional environment for application of balancing, focused on military activity and material support, but, on the other side, will probably be a strongest case on examination of actual role of non-state actors in the theory, due to significant fragmentation of various sides of the conflict, and significance of their involvement in alliance-making with both regional powers.

Therefore, different contexts will show in the end, which concepts and approaches actually applies and can be considered as a sign of adaptation of the theory, which are relevant and where in the combination of the traditional theory and its evolution is the place and role for inclusion of non-state actors.

2. Methodology

The following chapter will seek to explain methodological aspect of the work, i.e. what tools and methods will be used for achieving defined goals or what type of data and sources this text will work with. This segment will thus seek to draw a clear structure to the work and its desired arguments and outcomes.

As was thoroughly explained in the theoretical chapter, the thesis will build on premises of classical balance of power theory, but at the same time will emphasize its evolution and inclusion of actors weakening the original strict state-centric perspective. Presence of non-state actors will be the most important aspect of the innovative attempts and representation of the changing strategic context, to which the theory is trying to adapt. For this purpose, the text will work with broad definition of non-state actors, being actors or organizations, both armed or not-armed, which are not connected to state structures and have their own political objectives. But the balancing, perceived as allying with others against the prevailing threat by joining the weaker side to increase influence in the system (Walt, 1987 p. 126-127), will still be examined in a definition of the traditional theory with an attempt to prove, that the original approach is still applicable and relevant in the contemporary world, and is still able to adapt and thus generate new and valuable findings when it comes to proxy wars or proxy-oriented foreign policy. Where this work will try to reflect different approach, is differentiation between threat, reflecting Walt's approach of balance of threat (see Walt, 1987) and threat of survival, which will be closer to the original theory defined by Waltz (see Waltz, 1979). Threat of survival will be seen, in harmony with Waltz's perspective, as a direct threat to independence, internal security of the actor and its sovereignty (Waltz, 1979), whereas threat in general will be a looser concept, such as danger of economical, diplomatic or geopolitical nature, related to increased strength of other actor (Walt, 1987), which is not, on the other hand, a direct threat to actor's independence or sovereignty. Case studies in forms of proxy wars, defined as international conflicts between two countries taking place in third country (Eksi, 2017, p. 138-139), will be a logical and suitable settings for stated aims of the analysis.

Hence, the thesis will apply a comparative approach to series of disciplined case studies. Comparative analysis will consist of three different cases of proxy conflicts in the Middle East, which were selected according to its specific characteristics and are able to offer reflection of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry in specific settings, and required behaviour or stakes, they have for the regional powers – Lebanon as a sectarian inside specific political system, Bahrain due to

attempts of both regional powers to gain control over the whole political regime, and Syrian as an important regional armed conflict with various external actors involved. The thesis will also concentrate on a contrast of the context, by which the empirical reality will be examined and later connected to a validity of chosen theoretical background, i.e. structural realism, balance of power theory and alliance-making. The role of non-state actors in the empirical examination and theoretical context will also be highly considered (Karlás, 2008).

For this reason, the empirical part will be structured accordingly to firstly focus on each case study separately and examine its specific dynamics and their implication to the balancing act between two regional powers, before making overall evaluation and creating a coherent picture on a wider scale. Conclusion will thus summarize findings from both empirical and theoretical point of view, highlighting valuable findings the work offers for examination of Saudi-Iranian rivalry and application of balance of power theory to regional settings and activity of non-state actors.

To be more specific, the thesis will use qualitative approach, with aim to firstly explaining roots and core of the rivalry and power, political and sectarian dynamics of the conflict, with later clearly separating two sides according to their ideology, aims and overall motivations. These dynamics and characteristics will be later explained in the empirical part through concentration on chosen case studies of different proxy conflicts to provide coherent and complex picture for the theoretical application (for similar approach see Tzemprin, Jozič, Lambaré 2015).

Apart from concentration on implications of the theoretical background on chosen case studies, the text will also base its conclusions on answers to three research questions and its sub-questions defined below.:

RQ1: Is nature of balancing and alliance-making in the Middle East different from how realist theory defines it?

RQ1a: Do regional powers balance against perceived threats or factor of survival?

RQ2b: Do regional powers incline to traditional hard balancing or does their behaviour reflects more complex approach?

RQ2: Can non-state actors be perceived as key components of the balance of power theory and therefore capable of interruption the logic of the original state-centric approach?

RQ2a: Do regional powers balance directly against each other or against non-states actors aligned with one of them?

RQ2b: What role do non-state actors play in the examined cases?

Research questions are derived from chosen theoretical background and related approach to mentioned application and will help to work with the theory in empirical reality. They will also serve as a mean to give the thesis's argument structure and will serve as a key tool for concluding remarks and highlighting important findings the works brings and success of its initial aims. There are formed to cover both theoretical and empirical aspects of the examination, i.e. they are related to applicability of the theory on the regional competition in the Middle East and on alliances with non-state actors, and if allying with non-state actors is really that influential to regional dynamics and thus to structural realist background.

It should also be added, that definitions of the research questions are very different from a research project, as their original nature was considered general and vague, and the decreased number of main research questions and inclusion of sub-question is believed to be more appropriate way to work with the theory and more effective to for structure of the work and working towards its both theoretical and empirical aims.

Regarding data and sources this work will mainly build on secondary literature, such as academic articles or books related to structural realism, balance of power theory or the Middle Eastern dynamics or specific practices of Saudi Arabia or Iran, sources offering value in bringing facts and important data about foreign policy of both regional powers or conflicts, which will be used as case studies, or even sources providing discourse of key authorities or policy makers, if it is able to draw clear picture about certain policies or practices related to case studies. Due to strong concentration on theoretical background and even nature of the selected topic, opportunities to rely on strictly primary sources will be minimal, for instance only in case of official discourse, or none. Previous analysis of the competition, examination of regional dynamics, along with theoretical literature, i.e. secondary literature in general, are hence considered to be suitable for the purpose of the thesis.

Upcoming parts of the thesis will switch attention to the empirical subject of the work. Next chapter will be focused on drawing the context of the case studies and the rivalry in general by identifying cores of the rivalry and presenting its history and contemporary dynamics. Following core part will then present characteristics, profiles and identities of both regional powers and their blocs, if we decide to use such terminology, before finally analysing selected

case studies and get to evaluation of the findings, summary of the arguments and concluding remarks.

3. Core and development of Saudi-Iranian rivalry in the Middle East

3.1. Core of the competition

Despite not being the only adversarial relationship in the Middle East, Saudi-Iranian competition is considered to be the most significant and decisive rivalry for the security situation of the whole region. It is both influenced by it, mainly through reflection in many local conflicts and efforts to steer the course of events according to specific political preferences of each side (Ersoy, 2013), and the dynamics of the region make this rift tensed. This new Middle Eastern “Cold War” with rising relevance of power shifts and alliance making, thus contributes to strengthening of relevance of realist principles, as will be illustrated in the following chapters of the text. (Kausch, 2015, p. 2).

Generally, the core of Saudi-Iranian relations is considered to be very complex and there are different opinions about what forms this regional competition. One of the most common perspective is placing ideological and geopolitical factors as the main mean of extending regional influence and placing itself in the most advantageous position. Context behind this principal is primarily differences of political systems and ideological orientations, i.e. Saudi Arabia being conservative Sunni monarchy respecting status-quo and Iran, on the other hand, being a Shiite Islamic republic with revisionist goals all around the region, especially by seeking revolutionary change in the Gulf. In this sense, both countries act according to strong self-identification and the specific identities and worldviews are in clear rival relationship. (Ersoy, 2013, p. 51)

Therefore, Saudi Arabia’s ruling family fears the impact of democratic reform or political Islam inside its state and around the region, while Iran is dealing with ongoing power struggles weakening the system, and on the outside tries to extend the impact of political Islam and possible Islamic revolutions in other areas of the Middle East and disrupt the contemporary status quo. Proxy conflicts, the primary focus of this work, are thus seen as the most effective way of doing so (Kausch, 2015, p. 7-9).

Also, sectarian divides play a significant role in the competition. While Saudi Arabia remains committed to the ultra-conservative form of Islam, known as Wahhabism, while not being tolerant to religious diversity, Iran is perceiving its role as the chief defender of Shiite rights, but tends to be dismissive of the basic divide of Islam. Both countries, in consequence, view itself as the main leader of the Islamic world – Saudi Arabia because of both holy places

of Mecca and Medina being part of their territory, and Iran because of its geopolitical strength and system of Islamic republic (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 4-7). The ultimate aim of the competition remains the leadership of the Islamic world and switching sectarian divides of the region on the side of the respective regime. (Tzemprin, Jozič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 190).

Apart from ideological factors or sectarian divides, the competition is also reflected in more material terms, particularly in a sense of pursuit of rapid military modernization. One of the most influential factors is a nuclear threat. Despite the fact, that nuclear threat is a dispute between Iran, Israel and the USA, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are also important actors in this regard, not only due to possible threat posed by Iran, but also their own capabilities, which might be strengthened as a balancing act.

It is not only a possibility of enhancing nuclear programmes in Gulf to counter the threat of Iran, but also membership of Saudi Arabia in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to strictly oppose Iranian efforts through diplomatic stance, which has to be taken in account. That is also the reason behind Saudi Arabia opposing the Iran nuclear deal from its beginning. According to Saudis, the deal will not only fail to dismantle any technical capabilities Iran possess, which will not stop them from restarting the programme in the future, but also lifting the sanctions can give Iran more space and resources to work with in the region and hence the geopolitical balance can be completely shifted (Tzemprin, Jozič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 195-197).

As is argued in literature, whether we are talking about ideological, political or material core of the competition, all of these aspects of mutual ties and the rivalry itself are giving both sides sufficient tools to mobilize its resources and allies to provide legitimacy to their policies and provide them with a wider focus and applicability (Ersoy, 2013, p. 51-52).

To offer a full picture, it needs to be added, that the competition is highly influenced by role of the US. Iran considers the US to be the main military adversary, also because of its close relationship with Gulf states and Saudi Arabia. As is argued by Terrill, in some ways the competition between Iran and the Gulf is mirrored by the one with the United States, especially in discourse or perception of specific threats (Tyler, Boone 2012, p. 6). But as the aim of this work is to work with the bipolar competition through balance of power theory, using role of both countries in specific conflicts, the work will for this purpose put the role of the US on the sidelines.

Therefore, the nature of the rivalry is, on one hand, related to theoretical assumption, that threat inheres in power, but, in this case, ideological, sectarian and reformist core of the

competition widens the scope of what threat can represent and what can cause balancing behaviour. This implies in approach, which cannot rely strictly on traditional definition, including only threat for survival, power-oriented behaviour or only hard balancing, but also on more complex behaviour, reflecting relevant characteristic of the rivalry in examined cases, and broader realization of alliances, not only based on material or military support. In other words, the core of the competition will lead the examination not only by geopolitics and material arms race, but also overall and broadly perceived regional power position from other aspects, such as sectarian divide, ideology, or relationship to status quo or reform tendencies.

3.2. History

A massive milestone in modern Saudi-Iranian relations was the Iranian revolution in 1979, which massively changed the geostrategic landscape of the region. Before 1979, Iran and Saudi Arabia were strategically very similar. Both states were conservative monarchies aligned with the United States against Soviet Union and communist revolution or threat of Baath Iraq, so their interests were considered close and mutual (Salem, 2016, p. 41). The revolution and strategic changes of Iranian identity and foreign policy thus changed the shape of the relationship. With anti-Western approach and strict Shia identity, Iran was determined to challenge the regional order by creating supporting pan-Islamic regional movement and oppose influence of the US, and thus be able to transform the structural profile of the region and emerge as a regional threat not only to Saudi Arabia, but many other states and actors (Hameed, 2017, p. 18; Tzemprin, Jozič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 188-189).

The changing settings in the region, following the Iranian revolution, started to reflect practically right away. In November 1979, celebration of Shia holiday of Ashura in Saudi Arabia got a political edge and ended with violation and was suppressed by Saudi Arabian National Guard, causing a few civilian casualties. Also, in 1987, when protests in Iran turned into riots, Saudi Arabia was blamed for these violations by Iranian authorities and even demanded turning over custody over the Holy Places. (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 7-8).

The Iran-Iraq war was arguably the other most influential event that sped the competition after the revolution. After Iran was invaded by Iraqi forces in 1980, majority of Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, backed Iraq. In Saudi's perspective, the Shia community was automatically viewed as sympathetic to Iranian side and consequently was a target of discrimination, which shaped the core of the competition for upcoming decades, including concerns about activity of Shia community inside Saudi Arabia's territory (Tyler, Boone, 2012). On the other hand, feelings of paranoia against Shia community and, generally, the Saudi

support of Hussein regime have been a fact, that stayed with a whole generation of Iranians and shaped the hostility against the Arab and Sunni states, despite the war was followed by a short period of détente and Iran taking neutral position in First Gulf War. Consequently, this period was not sustained for a longer period of time. (Salem, 2016, p. 41-42; Ersoy, 2013, p. 52).

The reflection of influence in the region continued on both sides in the 1980s. While Saudi Arabia formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with the neighbouring Gulf states with an aim to establish a regional security organization and achieve better coordination strengthen itself against the Iranian threat, or supporting Sunni non-state actors in Afghanistan, Iran, on the other side, contributed to the founding of Hezbollah in Lebanon to project its power across the region and show desire to pursue its strategic interests (Tzemprin, Jozić, Lambaré, 2015, p. 22). These efforts later continued with allying with the Syrian regime or support of the Palestinian Hamas and Fatah. This weaponization of foreign policy, as Salem describes it, continues practically to this day and with its intensification with new emerged conflicts, it is becoming one of the main tools of power projection and enhancing the regional status and role of the regional powers. (Salem, 2016, p. 42).

3.3. Contemporary context

Today, the geostrategic situation in Gulf and the Middle East in general is primarily influenced by consequences of the 2011 pro-democratic and anti-regime protests around the region, widely referred to as the Arab Spring. Starting in Tunisia and Egypt, this wave of popular resistance is impacting not only a security in the region, but also competition between regional powers. Especially in case of Egypt, the initial problems of Mubarak regime brought attention of both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Mubarak's regime served as a Saudi ally against Iran or worked against the interest of Palestinian Islamic group Hamas, funded by Teheran. On the other hand, rising role of Muslim Brotherhood created concerns in Saudi Arabia, but was praised by Iranian authorities with hope for following Iranian-style revolution. This case shows, how every change attracts attention of both regional powers and how both are ready to take advantage of any uncertain situation for their own benefit. (Tyler, Mackenzie, 2012, p. 10-13).

This phenomenon have also impacted situation in Gulf, which remains the most sensitive region for interests of both powers. The clear examples or cases are Bahrain, which will be elaborated on in the analytical part, and Yemeni civil war, where both actors are present in some form – Saudis by supporting former government and Iran by supposedly partnering with and funding Houthi rebels. A Sunni country, sharing borders with Saudi Arabia, has been creating major concerns in the kingdom and opportunity for Iran to not only gain strategic positions in

Gulf, but have a direct hand to create a tensed environment in Southern provinces of Saudi Arabia (Tzemprin, Jožič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 193). Another common and clear case in relation to Arab Spring and regional competition is Syrian civil war, where both sides are active in some way and their interest clash not only when it comes to future of Syria, but also political situation in Lebanon and position of Hezbollah. Syria, Bahrain and Lebanon in particular will also be a part of case studies in following parts of the work and thus its role in the competition will receive more attention.

Both cases clearly reflect new rising dynamics inside the region and tendencies of both states, when it comes to alliance-formation or decision-making. As a consequence, the Arab Spring significantly intensified the current geopolitics and mentioned allying and proxy war strategies. Non-state actors, from ISIS to Hezbollah or local militias, have played significant role in regional politics and challenged the traditional notion of states, security and alliance making, and with structural changes, caused by the decline of U.S. power and influence, the region is going through massive strategic change (Ryan, 2019).

Additionally, events, that have been taking place after 2011 only deepen the disagreements over the wave of unrest and policies of the other sides, such as mentioned material support or direct involvement. Threat perception and particular foreign policies and strategies are thus impacted by reliance on identities and described sectarian divides and on their own are able to generate mutual fear and feelings of paranoia, which thus lead to more active and aggressive involvement along the region, whenever any space to take advantage of emerges. (Tzemprin, Jožič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 192).

When talking about contemporary dynamics and their influence, the Iran nuclear deal has to be at least mentioned. Negotiations between Iran and the five members of U.N. Security Council and Germany, which are have been taking place since 2015, also created a big amount of concerns a strategic complication. With the deal, which could seal lifting sanctions against Iran and could benefit Teheran militarily, diplomatically and economically, and even improve relations with Western countries, Saudi Arabia does not hide its concerns about possible consequences of this agreement – better funded Iran, less restraints on its progress and no real control over possible reestablishment of the programme in the future. This process will thus create massive doubt on the other side, i.e. Saudi Arabia, who perceives these efforts as naïve and are highly sceptical. More particularly, from perspective of balancing or competition in general, Saudi Arabia has been following a need for reaction to counter their vision of loosen and stronger position of Iran by, for example, by recovering ties with Israel, strictly in the name

of security by sharing intelligence or conduct of joint military exercises. (Hameed, 2017, p. 24-25)

Therefore, the impacts of events of the Arab Spring or changing position of Iran due to negotiations regarding their nuclear programme have been creating environment of distrust, doubts and paranoia and are forcing both sides to take advantage of any given space to counter existing efforts. In these settings, the struggle for power and influence by applying rational interests and political preferences is getting more and more intense and the rivalry is quickly fulfilling its potential to be a determining parameter in political, economic, military and social developments, as it is, by used policies of with assistance of other actors, to influence all of these areas all across the Middle East and, especially, be a factor in internal factors of specific states (Ersoy, 2013, p. 51-53). This state of affairs in the region will be now in bigger depth examined through three case studies, on which the contemporary dynamics will be introduced in clear and coherent picture and with theoretical background of balance of power theory and realist assumptions regarding international space, will be provided with a structured explanation and description.

4. Balancing between Iran and Saudi Arabia in regional proxy conflicts

The following empirical chapter will firstly offer overall profiles and summarized positions and aims of both competing regional powers, i.e. Iran and Saudi Arabia, before getting to the core examination of three case studies, which will be examined separately in this chapter and structured according to the aims of the thesis and applied theoretical background.

4.1. Profiles of competing regional powers

4.1.1. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, as the dominant and largest state in the Persian Gulf, is declared as a conservative monarchy governed on the basis of Holy Quran and the Islamic law of Sharia, which represent the highest moral authority. The kingdom, ruled by the House of Saud and inclined to authoritarian rule, thus place itself in a leadership role of the Islamic world and from this fact derives its domestic legitimacy and firm position (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 59-60).

Along with Islamic roots, the Saudi identity is specifically derived from doctrine of Wahhabism, which even strengthens the conservative nature of the regime and society, favouring status quo. Wahhabism teaching places emphasis on monotheism, tawhid, i.e. unity of God, and dismissing other Muslims, who do not follow the practices and teaching from the early period of Islam, and follow other interpretation, seen as false or deviant from the Islamic core. Apart from achieving domestic legitimacy, the ideology is also used as a theo-political tool for spreading influence in the Islamic world. The Saudi kingdom promotes it also to counter Iranian influence throughout the region, as it feels threatened and, at the same time, is trying to overcome the pressure of democratisation or wave of Arab Spring in general by reflecting influence of Saudi monarchy in securitisation policies and authoritarianism throughout the region (Duran, 2013, p. 147-148). Contrarily, the ideology also begins to serve as a background for activity of many Salafi-jihadist movements. (Ünver Noi, 2013, p. 94-95).

Focusing on foreign relations, the kingdom's objectives are circling around maintaining security and stability on the Arabian Peninsula, defend Arab and Islamic interest, promote solidarity among Islamic governments and build cooperative relations with other oil-oriented economies (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 64). For this reason, the centre of Saudi foreign and security policy and of attempts to sustain regional order, is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). From initial economic purpose, the organization gained a military and security dimension and seeks

to protect regional monarchies from wave of radical movements and sustain stability in Gulf. Saudi Arabia is trying to keep its role as the protector of other Gulf monarchies against Iranian threat and guardian of the status quo and thus create control over the regional stability and its position in the region in general. Hence the GCC has a crucial role of Saudi Arabia and its unity is one of the key aspects of kingdom's calculations towards balancing Iran (Duran, 2013, p. 148-149).

Regarding the regional prestige of Saudi Arabia, the role of ties with the United States cannot be ignored. This relationship is not only built around oil imports and exports, but also around security dimension, as both countries share common concerns related to the Middle East security and stability in Gulf. These ties continue to be even more important for both countries than ever before in the context of rising Iranian nuclear threat and regional conflicts. Especially from the perspective of Saudi Arabia, the presence of the US in the region and maintenance of mutual ties remains a significant advantage and a mean for strengthening its overall power position (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 67-68).

As Eksi argues, the advantage of close ties with the US is not only matter of Saudi Arabia's international position. The existence of intra-regional allies, presence on international platforms and vast financial resources are additional factors, from which Saudi Arabia can gain in regional competition or build its balancing efforts on (Eksi, 2017, p. 297). Opposingly, conservative thinking and authoritative practices are making Saudi Arabia less attractive to many other actors and with overall influence of Arab Spring, this aspect can on its own put the kingdom into isolation, especially with concerns about human rights conditions in the country or poor choice of reactive decisions in countries inside the GCC, as will be showed later on a case of Bahrain (Duran, 2013, p. 150-151).

4.1.2. Iran

Iranian profile is mainly built around Shia identity and theo-political model, which has been the main tool for geopolitical rise since the revolution in 1979, and is a mean, by which Iran is trying to spread the revolutionary principles around the region. The 1979 revolution, which brought to power the previously exiled religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, changed the overall environment, in which legitimacy is derived from application of Islamic principles. The new constitution defined the political, social and economic order as the Islamic republic, relying on strict secular and religious authority of Shia Islam. The constitution also established a strong authoritative role of the Supreme Leader or position of the president of the Islamic Republic, who supervises the activity of executive branch. Focusing on geopolitical and

security aspects of Iranian role, it is also key to pinpoint, that Iran maintains two military forces. The national military is responsible for defence of national borders, while the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps's duties are connected to protection of the revolution and its principles not only inside Iran, but also abroad (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 78-79).

Politics related to Shiism are reflecting primarily through support of Shia groups in the Middle East, mainly in Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen or even in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. With material support and hard-power oriented model, Iran is also maintaining religious and cultural interaction and creating transnational religious network, by which Shia minorities are gaining more powerful position in their respective countries. This network is also called the "Shia Crescent", or, in context of Iranian ties with Syria and Lebanon, "the axis of resistance", which, in last decades, has become the main tool of Iranian foreign policy to spread and transcend the revolutionary model, related identity or Iranian national interest in general, as it provides specific policies with ideological legitimacy even beyond national borders. Is it crucial to add, that these policies and Shia-oriented activity has been intensified after the US invasion of Iraq, when the idea of Shia awakening, linked to rise of Shia majority in Iraq, took stronger and precise shape (Duran, 2013, p. 143-144).

While building its foreign policy practices around idea of reorganizing the international order according to the revolutionary picture, the anti-Western orientation of Iranian approach to international affairs is also crucial to include. From perspective of religious authorities, the Western countries have been trying to undermine the unity of Islam and the Muslim world (Ünver Noi, 2013, p. 93-94). This point of view was applied to the phenomenon of Arab Spring, which was seen as the reaction of Muslim world against the Western order forced in the region for decades, and inspiration by Iranian revolution was argued to be undeniable. However, what the Arab Spring also showed, was how strong sectarian limitations are in Iranian foreign policy practices and that Iranian leaders are not able to overcome them, when the situation reaches critical development, such as risk of losing regional ally, Syria (Duran, 2013, p. 145-146).

From more general geopolitical perspective, Iran can rely on strong intra-regional ties with Iraq or relations with Russia, advanced military industry and technological capabilities, including nuclear threat, which was mentioned in previous chapter, or strength of social and political movements in the region, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, and ties with these groups based on material or military support (Eksi, 2017, p. 297).

4.2.Examination of chosen proxy conflicts

Following section will be examining three chosen case studies, which provide a scene for further development of regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, each with different background, dynamics and stakes for involved actors – Lebanon, Syria and Bahrain. Aim will be to reflect and analyse nature and intentions of all actors, highlight nature of threat in each case and examine specific behaviour, including its influence on regional dynamics and position of key actors to combine empirical knowledge with goals related to theoretical background of the work and research questions in later evaluation section.

4.2.1. Lebanon

4.2.1.1. Context

Lebanon has been considered as one of the main turmoil areas, when it comes to debate about political or economic uncertainty in the Middle East, especially in a context of Saudi-Iranian tension. The end of Lebanese civil war in 1990, followed by approval of the Taif Accords in 1989, was one of the milestones, which saw a massive rise in involvement of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the country's internal politics and system as a whole. The Lebanese-Israeli conflict in 2006 and its aftermath, which resulted in fragmentation of Lebanese politics, even intensified number of opportunities to benefit from, such as wide support of Hezbollah activity or participation inside the Shiite communities for Iran, or Saudi economic investments in Lebanon and their support of Sunni communities in political arena, for example the March 14 movement (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 29-31). The factor of uncertainty, threat of possible unrest in the country, shared borders with Syria or Israel, and Iranian long-term involvement connected to Hezbollah, thus creates high stakes for both camps and generates chances for possible shift of dynamics and power equilibrium in the regional subsystem.

Since its founding in 1982, Hezbollah has been an important and active actor in Lebanese political system and with its emphasis on jihad and military resistance, political violence or progressing through political crises and is a stable part of political scene, with gain of first parliament seats in 1992 and first presence in cabinet in 2005. Its religious and military profile, in a shape of generating political instability or political assassinations, such as the killing of former prime minister Hariri on 2005, thus gained them a label of hybrid terrorist organization, which has been shared by majority of the international community (Azani, 2012).

4.2.1.2. *Iran's perspective*

These circumstances, placed in the context of Saudi-Iranian competition, then form separate perspectives of threat and possible consequences for decision-making. From Iranian point of view, endangerment of Hezbollah's rising position in Lebanon's political system and possible limitation of strong long-lasting ties, is probably posing the biggest threat. Its deepening would be seen as decline of Iranian regional stance, related to geographical reach to Syrian conflict or Israeli borders, and thus serious threat to its power position in the Middle East. On the other hand, geographical distance and absence of dependence connections to Lebanon related to overall Iranian security and power position do not transform the threat into a situation of survival, as will be illustrated in following segments of the text.

For purposes of the analysis, the factor of external intervention into Lebanese politics, is a major point to elaborate on, especially in chosen theoretical context of the thesis. Iran, as the main supporter of Hezbollah's activity and "a central state of the Muslim world", as is labelled by Hezbollah (El Hussein, 2010, p. 809), is able to reflect its national interest in Hezbollah's discourse and activity, while having certainty about organization's loyalty to principles of the Islamic republic and Islamic revolution (El Hussein, 2010). Political and ideological support is therefore clear in various ways. Hezbollah's loyalty to Iranian revolutionary model or to the Supreme Leader of Iran, and commitment to umma, which is derived from its origins as an umbrella framework for pro-Iranian organizations in Lebanon, attracts Iran's attention and resources even more. The shared ideology and Islamic identity are then reflected in Iran's participation in social programmes or provision of education and impact of media channels, such as Al-Manar TV channel, and networks of religious centres, which profiles Iran as power interested in Lebanese society as such and deepens the impact of Iranian ideology in the country, Shiite community and system in general (Azani, 2013).

External material aid, to sustain loyalty and activity of Hezbollah, is also apparent, despite the linkages were never directly confirmed. It is not only financial aid, estimated in millions of dollars a year from donors and organisations under influence of the Supreme Leader, but also provision of military personnel, including military officers, experts or intelligence, training of military forces or transfers of massive numbers of weapons, short-range and long-range artillery rockers, anti-ship missiles or aerial vehicles (Cordesman, 2015). This specific arsenal and funding help to sustain Hezbollah's military and terrorist activities with aim to gain stronger influence in Shiite society and generate crises in political system, from which the organization can benefit politically or economically. Revolutionary message, along with Iranian

guidance and funding, is sufficient for creating tension inside Lebanese political system and provides a base for execution of innovative and surprising attacks, such as assassination of resigned prime minister Hariri, for which Hezbollah was accused (Azani, 2012).

The asymmetrical ties between Iran and Hezbollah are therefore of a hybrid nature. Iran is providing support not only through material and military resources, but also by an ideological leader, reflected in specific social and education programmes and even propaganda in media. The strength of this alliance is also evident, as Hezbollah's is considered to be part of Axis of Resistance, the radical militant pro-Iranian alliance between Iran, Syria and strongest Arab non-state actors – Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas. It is best understood as a political alliance based on common enemies, mainly the U.S. and Israel, and the interest of both non-state actors are highly influenced by Iranian authority.

This additional aspect makes Lebanon a crucial part of Iran's regional calculations and the sustained strong role of Hezbollah in Lebanese system and in conflict with Israel is one of the priorities of Iranian foreign policy in the region. Any disruption of Hezbollah's position or Iranian influence in the country can be considered as a threat to Iranian regional position and potential for desired dominance, despite not being a potential disruption of survival of this position. The ideological lead and material support, i.e. practices connected to both classical hard balancing and more complex soft balancing, provided to Hezbollah thus stay a powerful tool of power projection in the Middle East. The ties being part of a broader unofficial coalition are an evidence of Hezbollah being a political mean for a power projection on broader regional context. A clear example is Syrian conflicts, which Hezbollah is framing according to Iranian leadership as a struggle between the 'resistance' and pro-Western Arab states. Hence, its backing and support of Assad can be considered as a balancing act against Syrian opposition and their own supporters, and usage of Hezbollah as a part of asymmetrical balancing in wider regional context (Bank, Mohns, 2015).

4.2.1.3. Saudi Arabia's perspective

Significant Iranian involvement in Lebanon and mentioned support of Hezbollah's activity, is, on the other hand, a clear factor of danger for Saudi Arabia. Lebanon under strong Iranian influence, including control over its politics, would be considered as significant threat to Saudi's regional position and safety of national interests.

Initially, during 1990s and on a verge of a new millennium when Rafik Hariri held a position of a Lebanese prime minister, Saudi-Lebanese relations were significantly closer than today. Hariri, as a Sunni muslim and successful businessman, was very close to Saudi Arabia

and Western countries, such as France, and his aims of reconstructing the country are argued to fuel conflicts in the political arena. But conflict with Lebanese president, who represented significant Syrian involvement in the country and also political rise of Hezbollah, as he was aligned to the organisation during his presidency, eventually led to open political conflict in Lebanon, which later resulted in assassination of Hariri, closer alignment with Syria and continuous rise of Hezbollah, which strongly weakened ties with the Saudi kingdom (Bosco, 2009).

Hence, labelling Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, in harmony with perspective of Israel, the US or, generally, the Western world, is one of the main symbols of activity against Iranian influence in the country, also with repeated accusations against Lebanese organisation and its hostile acts against all six GCC states and spread of terror in conflicting areas of Syria, Iraq or Yemen. Therefore, Hezbollah was labelled not only as a terrorist organization by Saudis, but also as a direct threat to the security of the Gulf. This fact made Saudi Arabia reflect on unacceptable position and activity of the organisation and decide to cancel grants to fund the purchase of arms and equipment for the Lebanese armed forces and security services, which was estimated to be around 4 billion US dollars. In these regards, Hezbollah became not only specific threat for security of Saudi Arabia and its position in the region itself, but a tool for persuasion of Lebanese government about intolerable portion of influence it has in the country, with hopes to achieve closer alignment and more space to act against such a threat. Such discrediting attempts allow Saudi Arabia to connect terrorism with Teheran and label the Saudi kingdom as the correct choice for Muslims, as the monarchy represent the correct interpretation of Islam (Legrenzi, Lawson, 2016).

But Saudi activity does not end with discourse and political action against Hezbollah. The monarchy is also actively seeking to challenge picture of Lebanese politics by enhancing ties with existing elites. For instance, after mentioned cancellation of funds to purchase military equipment, both countries recovered close ties and the discourse emphasized turning pages in mutual relations and discussions on the level of defence ministers (The Arab American News, 2017).

Saudi Arabia also uses political pressure to weaken Hezbollah's position in the system by retaining close ties with specific political actors to switch political progress in country. For instance, Saudis have been indirectly connected to anti-Syrian and pro-reform movements and parties, known as March 14 Alliance, as it is the main opposition against bloc of parties along Hezbollah. Additionally, the case of demise of Hariri's government, which was established after

a long deadlock in Lebanese political scene and contained representatives from both pro-Iranian and anti-Iranian camps, was one of the most influential and direct interventions Saudis organised in a long time. After the prime minister Hariri went missing for a few days, his resignation from Riyadh became as a surprise and was perceived as a direct attempt of Saudi Arabia to disrupt role of pro-Iranian forces in the national unity government. Supposed aim was to create political vacuum, which can be exploited to stop Hezbollah's participation in the government and increase opportunities for Saudi Arabia to align with main Lebanese political leaders, and, additionally, be a force against Iranian practices in the country, seen as disruptive or close to terrorist activity (Al Jazeera, 2017). This development is considered to be a clear indicator of this issue being related to a regional rivalry and not only to Lebanese affairs. This example thus shows, how Lebanon became a proxy field for undirect confrontation between both countries.

4.2.1.4. Role of Hezbollah

This events thus reflect, that Hezbollah's activity and position is not only a tool for Iran to gain more powerful position and decrease potential threats to its regional stance by practices of hard and soft balancing, but also a motivation for Saudi Arabia to disrespect these attempts and through political activity and support of opposing sides and elites switch power balance on its side by weakening Iranian alliance in the country. It is expected, that Saudi Arabia will continue to balance Hezbollah's position and Iranian influence with approaches to highest seats of Lebanese system and build positive relationships or even force direct and official support of Saudi monarchy.

Therefore, this behaviour creates a circulation of mutual reaction and deepening previous efforts to establish itself a position with influence, which could lead to easier reflection of Saudi's or Iranian interests in the country. In case of Iran, formation and support of Hezbollah is a tool, which has been showing its benefits, especially in unstable situation in Lebanese politics, which Hezbollah was able to exploit. Despite Hezbollah net being directly led by Iranian authorities, the established alliance based both on shared ideology, material aid or activity in social spheres, helps Iran to take advantage of generated crises to not only gain higher influence in the political system, but also in Shiite communities, whose support is vital also in wider regional context (Azani, 2013). Ties between Iran and Hezbollah are a clear example of asymmetric balancing, i.e. a relationship, in which both state actor uses activity of non-state actor to increase its overall power position in country and, consequently, in the region itself, while non-state actor benefits by receiving support and aid, which helps its own development.

Additionally, as will be illustrated in later case study, Hezbollah role in the Syrian conflict is considered to be another key reason, why threatening Hezbollah's role and Iranian influence in the country can be seen as a significantly threatening.

Saudi Arabia, in consequence, perceives Hezbollah activity as a direct threat posed by Iran and is constructing the threat to be connected to a security of the Gulf and the region as a whole to designate Iranian block as an adversary to true Islam. Saudi Arabia also chooses to place itself on the other side of Lebanese political spectrum and build relationships on a level of elites through political support, diplomatic activity or financial aid (Legrenzi, Lawson, 2016). Activity of Saudi Arabia can be perceived as strict balancing against any decision related to Iranian influence in Lebanon, represented by Hezbollah, and it can be concluded, that Hezbollah, as examined non-state actor, plays central role even in this case.

The reflection of regional competition in case of Lebanon is thus oriented around struggle over system and each power invests in opposite side of the Lebanese spectrum and chooses different approaches. Iran builds its position around alliance with non-state actor present in the system by both practices related to hard and soft balancing, while Saudi Arabia, despite circling its activity around discrediting and balancing against influence of Hezbollah, tries to build its position by diplomacy on level of elites primarily by activity closer to soft balancing. Aspect of close reach to the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah's activity over borders of Lebanon, and importance of Shiite community in religious context of the rivalry, also gives an additional dimension to struggle over influence in Lebanon, which transcends the borders of the country and its political system, thus increases importance of position of both respective powers in Lebanon.

4.2.1.5. Context of the research questions

In relation to given research questions of this work, the absence of survival factor for Iran, despite weakening of Hezbollah being considered to be a significant threat to its regional power position, and material and political support of the Lebanese actor, i.e. inclining to combination of both hard and soft balancing, makes the theoretical background of the case derive from the traditional balancing approach.

Additionally, the case of proxy competition in Lebanon brings attention to presence of asymmetrical balancing. Lebanon, as a weaker state vulnerable to sectarian conflict, is seen as a more effective way of balancing in regional context, than internal balancing, and use of non-state actor for shared aims of improved power balance and strengthening established network is a crucial part of such strategy. From a perspective of alliance-making, Iranian ties with

Hezbollah, sustained by material and political aid and ideological leadership, serves a purpose of creating deterrent power in relation to more general interests in the region, which are revolving around regional power balance and export of principles of Islamic revolution (Sagehdi-Boroujerdi, 2017).

Regarding the role of Hezbollah in the wider perspective, it is evident, that it stands directly between two regional powers, which forces Saudi Arabia to react directly to position and activity of non-state actor to influence the role of its regional adversary in the country, with the aim of the conflict being to gain significant control over the political system. But despite very close and long-lasting ties between Iran and Hezbollah (see Azani, 2012), the Lebanese organisation does not reach such level of importance, which would influence the shape of Iranian foreign and security policy in the region, which, on the other hand, has huge impact on activity of Hezbollah and its participation in conflicts in neighbouring countries.

Therefore, it can be argued, that this case shows how nature of balancing and alliance making in the Middle East can deviate from the traditional state-centric structural realist theory and incline to more modern and complex understanding, including crucial role of non-state actors in the dynamics of the regional competition. But despite Hezbollah's crucial role in Lebanese political system and related regional competition over it, the role of non-state actor does not exceed a tool of Iranian foreign policy or valuable ally in asymmetrical relationship. Hezbollah received a lot of support from Iranian authorities, which, at the same time, significantly increased degree and strength of Teheran's influence and reflection of its interests in organization's activity and raised questions and doubts about actual autonomy of Hezbollah.

4.2.2. Bahrain

4.2.2.1. Context

Kingdom of Bahrain, a small island country in Persian Gulf with population around million habitants, is considered to be another important space reflecting the regional power competition in the Gulf, also in a form of proxy conflict. Due to evident geographic, religious, economic and political proximity to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain is considered to be highly dependent on the Saudi kingdom. From a mentioned economic perspective, the dependence is derived from a fact, that 77% of Bahrain's is provided from Saudi Arabia, political dependence relies on Bahrain's membership in the GCC, and the ideological on the Sunni regime in the country. In this regard, it needs to be added, that the dependence is intensifying and is considered to be the main obstacle for any deeper reform in the country. (Pradhan, 2017; Kinninmont, 2012).

Bahrain's inclination to Saudi Arabia was not always straightforward. Iran's claims over the territory were related to regional power competition, direct reaction to close ties of the Al-Khalifa ruling family with Saudi Arabia, or a presence of Shia majority, estimated about 70 percent (Guzansky, 2015, p. 88), ruled by Sunni regime. The roots of official Iranian claims over the island country are dated back to period before actual independence of Bahrain, particularly to 1950s, when the Iranian parliament claimed Bahrain to be its 14th province with relation to Persian conquest of the island about four centuries ago. Iran recovered this topic in 2009, which resulted in extensive diplomatic crisis, despite later attempts to mitigate the situation by refusing any Iranian territorial aspirations. Bahrain thus remains an attractive target for power projection in Gulf. (Tzemprin, Hozič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 191; Anoushiravan 62-63). Therefore, Saudi Arabia, and many Bahraini officials, have been continuously suspicious of Iranian intentions in the country, despite lack of evidence (Kinninmont, 2012). Bahrain also insisted on strict orientation to Saudi support and financial aid, disrupting any potential ties to Iranian government and influence in general (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 16-17;).

The events and uprisings of Arab Spring, which erupted in February 2011, even increased domestic and international tensions related to the regime of Bahrain, i.e. regional conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the Sunni-Shia rift in internal politics and society, and Bahrain appeared at an intersection between both regional powers as a clear target for power projection in the Gulf. Popular demonstrations and protests, led by Shia majority, demanded wide economic and political reform of Sunni-dominated government and regime and called for Sunni-Shia equality in the system, more political freedom, or focus on socio-economic issues, such as unemployment, discrimination or poverty. Although the sectarian background of the protest is often highlighted as the core cause of discontent, the literature pinpoints importance of continuing dispute about sharing of power and wealth and underlying issues, such as unemployment or economic discrimination (Kinninmont, 2012; Pradhan, 2017)

The unrest itself resulted in numerous confrontations with police or armed forces or declarations of martial law, which created a significant amount of concern on the side of both Bahrain elites and Saudi Arabia. Hence, on the side of Saudi kingdom, the interpretations of unrest being secretly led by Iranian authorities to expand its influence and provoke similar conflict in neighbouring countries in the Gulf shaped very quickly. In Saudi Arabia, this scenario became the dominant perception of the popular protests and activity of local Shia majority. Later it also became the main justification of Saudi intervention later in 2011, when the kingdom, after Bahraini authorities allegedly sought help of neighbouring regional power,

sent around 1200 troops to Bahrain, along with around 500 police officers from UAE as a part of operation officially conducted by the whole GCC, with an aim to stop creating additional tension. Paradoxically, the intervention generated possibilities for further escalation of the proxy conflict, although the demonstrations themselves dropped in intensity quickly after Saudi presence in the country and the Bahraini King also stated, that the “formed plot failed” (Tzemprin, Jozič, Lambaré, 2015, p. 191-192; Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 18-19).

4.2.2.2. *Saudi Arabia's perspective*

Mentioned events are primarily of high importance to Saudi Arabia, with Bahrain's geographical proximity, membership in the GCC, significant oil reserves, aligned political system and Wahhabi religion as a grounding stone of both regimes and mutual ties. Bahrain thus mainly represents a high strategic importance for Saudi Kingdom and any disruption of its position and rise of Iranian influence is perceived as a serious threat to Saudi national security. These factors created a significant pressure on decision-making related to reaction to popular demonstrations and their potential rise (Tyler, Boone, 2012). It is also widely assumed, that Saudis place a significant importance on continuity of the established regime, control over the Bahrain's foreign policy and are also very sensitive to any opposition activity. Hence, disruption of any mentioned pillars of mutual ties is automatically considered to be significant threat to the Saudi kingdom by itself. (Kinninmont, 2012)

Additionally, the threat is highly influenced by broader ideological aspects of regional competition – Sunni-Shia rift. The fact, that the demonstrations were led mainly by Shia population, repeating their feelings of being discriminated by the political system, empowered mentioned interpretation of existing significant Iranian involvement in Bahrain and ideas about planned uprising against Sunni regime. This perspective even intensified the feelings of danger for Saudi Arabia, as successful attempt of Shia population to gain more democratic power would threaten the internal security, given the potential issues it would create in Saudi Eastern province, where the threat connected to possible discontent of its own Shia population is continuously present, especially if situation in Bahrain would potentially bring any benefits to its Shia population. In this case, Saudi elites fear, that any of these gains would be automatically demanded by Shiites in Saudi Arabia, and process behind response to events in Bahrain were therefore impacted also by possible impacts on domestic security and dynamics in Saudi society, such as potential secessionist agenda (Mabon, 2012, p. 7-10; Guzansky, 2015, p. 91). Although the official discourse, related to the intervention, emphasized Bahraini request for protecting the key infrastructure and oil refineries (New York Times, 2011), the discourse by

the GCC before the actual intervention accused Iran of meddling into the internal affairs of Bahrain. These claims were also fuelled by word of conservative Shia cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, who supported the uprisings and argued, that “all Islamic countries bear the responsibility to support Bahrainis in their fight.” Although Iranian president Ahmadinejad refused the allegations, Saudi Arabia still presented this link as a legitimate evidence (DW, 2011; DW, 2011).

In these regards, it can be argued, that the perceived threat was a matter of survival, which then influenced the nature of behaviour and practices Saudi Arabia conducted to sustain its power position. There were various factors contributing to such perception- threat of disrupting Saudi Arabia’s integral security or territorial integrity, destabilization of a member of international organization, which is seen as a key part of Saudi foreign policy or overthrowing an aligned regime in Saudi’s vicinity. These elements created environment, in which survival of regime in Bahrain was connected directly to survival of Saudi Arabia’s power position and its security. Hence, these circumstances pushed the decision-making process towards military involvement and mentioned military intervention, officially led by the GCC, i.e. practices of traditional hard balancing.

But the Saudi reaction was not purely of military nature and along with the aggressive approach encompassed practices related to more softer balancing behaviour. During close observation of the early stages of violence in Bahrain, the GCC foreign ministers approved a pledge of 20 million dollars to governments of Bahrain and Oman to support their socioeconomic development. With this plan, the GCC also issued a suspicion related to Iran’s support of Bahraini opposition and involvement in Bahraini internal politics (Friedman, 2012). Following the intervention, local authorities also established a control system over all mosques to ensure absence of radical ideas, which resulted in closure of many Shiite places of worship or mosques. Consequently, these procedures led to banning various Shiite groups and organizations, strengthening the Sunni profile of the country, and overall Sunni identity on a regional level (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 19). It can also be argued, that the fact regarding discourse emphasizing how all crucial steps and decisions were made not by purely Saudi Arabia, but executed in a name of the GCC, i.e. all Gulf Sunni regimes, was also a form of political and ideological statements against Iran and regional Shia crescent, and thus another form of soft balancing in broader context in the Middle Eastern dynamics (Friedman, 2012).

4.2.2.3. *Iran's perspective*

On the other hand, Iran's involvement in Bahrain, especially after eruption of the popular demonstrations led by Shia majority, at first represented more an opportunity to exploit the situation and gain stronger position at Gulf and destabilise political regime of one of Saudi Arabia closest allies. The interest in the uprisings primarily stemmed from the factor of Shia discrimination and Sunni dominance, perceived as a core of the discontent, which led to significant tension inside the Bahraini society, and the nature of possible presence of Iranian influence was connected to the phenomena of Shia crescent, seen as a Iranian ideological tool to create transnational Shia movement that engages masses, connect sympathetic Shia governments and movements throughout the region and expand Teheran's regional role and power (Barzegar, 2008). Saudi and Bahraini authorities often point out, that the Shia identity is a crucial Iranian tool for expanding its identity, by which the Islamic republic's attempts to mobilise masses, and through creation of ties, based on shared ideology, create advantageous power position in the region, describing it as a "Shiite plot" or "Shiite fifth column" (Guzansky, 2015, p. 88). The allegations of Iranian leadership role during the demonstrations, despite not having any empirical evidence, thus relied on suspicion, that any Shia activity against Sunni regime is a part of broader regional agenda. That was also reason, why repeated suspicion about terrorist activity by Iranian-backed groups and rising tension resulted in breaking formal diplomatic ties with Iran from Bahrain. (Bahgat, Ehteshami, Quilliam, 2017, p. 77)

The GCC led military intervention was perceived as an interference into Bahraini domestic affairs and highly destabilizing act and meant a clear impulse to pay even more attention to Bahraini events. Taking advantage of Saudi aggressive act to stand behind the protesters and strengthen its own credibility and geopolitical position in the Gulf, which supposed to be harmed by Saudis decisive action seemed as the main open opportunity (Guzansky, 2015). The actual danger for Iran after the intervention was present in the disruption of the possibility of expanding reach of its Shiite regional coalition, which was generated in Bahrain during Arab Spring, and in losing any potential ground to spread its direct influence over events through mentioned ideology and its cells in the Gulf and near Saudi territory, on which the text will later shortly elaborate (Knights, Levitt, 2018). We can thus argue, that the intervention did not generate any survival factor for Iranian side, as their involvement and role in uprisings were created mainly by suspicious Saudi discourse, and that the threat for Iran was in this case realistically connected only to the possibilities created by the events of uprisings –

failure of exploiting strong Shia force in one of the Gulf countries for its own geopolitical benefit in Gulf.

Actual Iranian behaviour, despite unconfirmed and unproven presence in the country, was mainly composed of rhetorical reaction to the intervention. Iranian leaders reacted with fury to the Saudi action and accusations moving responsibility to Iran, labelled the intervention as an “occupation” and even demanded approval of presence of the UN to “stop all killings in Bahrain” (Tyler, Boone, 2012, p. 19). Apart from adversary discourse against the Sunni regime and Saudi presence in the island country, the claims of Bahraini Shiite clerics about needed Iranian help in their struggle indicates a possible presence of spiritual guidance from Iran or even long-term support of opposition groups in Bahrain through links between Shia clerics in Bahrain and Teheran or media support, as literature argues (Mabon, 2012).

It is also known, that Iran and its proxy militias in Lebanon or Iraq have attempted to establish militant cells in Bahrain, whose activity evolved in the last years from amateur activity into force with combat experience and ability to mount effective explosive attacks. Iran provide various Bahraini groups with training on its territory or in Iraq, and increased number of attacks, especially on security forces, is claimed to be directly connected to Iranian support of such cells. (Knights, Levitt, 2018)

What can be argued, based on these remarks, is that in connection Shia community in Bahrain, and in the region in general, the Iranian behaviour is pragmatic in a way, that it is able to establish various types of ties to Shia community, both direct, such as material or political support and establishment of active cells, and undirect in a form of being an ideological authority. But any direct action or connection from Iran is not of a significant probability and rising Iranian influence in the country is thus connected to activity of Shia majority or established active cells supported by militias related to Teheran (Knights, Levitt, 2018).

Therefore, in a case of balancing over the decisive influence in Bahrain and over stability of its regime, Iran became an actor highly interested in any balancing acts once the discontent of Shia majority rose and resulted in intensive popular demonstrations. From Iranian perspective then created possibility of activating established cells and supporting broader Shia uprising and create opportunity to be significantly present in the Gulf and close to Saudi territory, i.e. threaten internal its internal stability in Eastern province (Mabon, 2012). This geopolitical and security context, hidden behind stability of Bahraini regime and Sunni elites, thus has clear consequences for regional situation. Not only, that Iran can establish itself a stronger power position with political presence in Gulf by weakening strictly Sunni regime, but

through a new momentum of Shia movement in the area directly threaten Saudi territory and deepen the survival factor of the threat.

4.2.2.4. Role of Bahraini Shia majority

The specific context and interests of the Bahraini Shia majority are in the regional context not the central issue, which generates mentioned significant interest from Teheran. On the other hand, internal issues, by which the Shia majority in Bahrain is concerned, such as voices calling for constitutional reforms, attention on socio-economic agenda or problematic of human rights, did serve as a catalyst for destabilization in Bahrain and later for street violence and tight policies established by Sunni elites in the country, which all created different opportunities for Teheran to take advantage of. These events only forced Iran to keep a close watch on Bahrain, but the nature of ties between Bahraini opposition and local Shiite community did not create a need for Teheran to incline to more aggressive balancing behaviour.

With no empirical evidence of any material support, the connection between the Shia community and Iran is mainly based on shared ideology or personal links of Shia clerics in Bahrain to Iranian authorities. Evidence are based on the fact, that their studies took place there, and they thus became a way of spreading ideals of Iranian revolution and respect towards Iran in the country. Hence it can be argued, that the relationship is based purely around ideological backing or spiritual guidance and with Iranian focus on geopolitical reality, along with examined ideology, not deeper interest in specific issues of Shiites in Bahrain. Lack of empirical evidence also suggests, that further involvement in the country is not probable. Iran thus remain pragmatic in its foreign policy and regional politics regarding Shiite communities and exploits advancement only if it is beneficial for tackling present security threats or space is created for enhancing overall position (Bahry, 1997).

Generally, Bahraini opposition and Shiite community is tied to Iran through the agenda of Shia crescent by its ideological background, anti-Sunni approach and the fact, that the events do have reach outside of the country, but it can be claimed, that the specific issues the demonstration addressed were and are a fight for the Shiites in Bahrain themselves. Therefore, it is expected, that Iran will not be active, unless new wave of events creates new possibilities to weaken Saudi influence in the country and make actual presence in the Gulf possible (Mabon, 2012; Barzegar, 2008).

4.2.2.5. Context of research questions

In perspective of given research questions, after popular demonstrations and rise of uprising in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia directly reacted to threat of survival, related to possible spread

of Shia discontent to its own territory, which would threaten its internal stability. For this reason, the Saudi kingdom chosen to react in terms of hard balancing, that means wide material support and resolute military action in a form of an intervention. Superficially, the Saudi kingdom accused Iran of being behind tensed situation in Bahrain, and from this point of view, the construction should form a picture of balancing against Teheran's influence. But in the core, despite mentioned allegations, the Saudi balancing act was primarily reaction to Shia discontent and violence, which showed possible potential of spread to Saudi territory (Mabon, 2012).

Iran's approach to Bahraini events was, on the other side, closer to softer balancing. It can be argued, that Iran did not react directly to a threat, as more to an opportunity, which arose with Shia demonstrations and, later, directly reacted to Saudi intervention in attempt to fuel the movement. If threat was present for Iran, it was only connected to religious rift behind the regional competition, i.e. Shia struggle against Sunni government and discrimination by the Bahraini regime, and general power position in Gulf. Iranian behaviour encompassed only empowering existing ideological links and rhetorical support of Shia majority in Bahrain, which was suppressed by the Saudi military action, and long-term attempts to establish active cells sustaining degree of the internal conflict (Knights, Levitt, 2018). Examined circumstances also reflect the weakness of Iranian interest in specific issues, which Bahraini Shia majority deals with, and overall weakness of mutual links, that are built only around the aspect of Shia crescent and ideological backing, with no further influence of the situation on Bahraini Shia community on Iranian policies and behaviour (Bahgat, Ehteshami, Quilliam, 2017).

Therefore, this case represents a balance between assumptions of traditional theory and weak links to more modern and complex phenomena. Despite Bahrain is a proxy field of the competition, threat to survival and reaction in terms of hard balancing from Saudi Arabia did not provoke the same action from Iran. The intervention, which was, according to Saudi narrative, a reaction to rising Iranian role in Bahrain, which could in some cases prove a presence of state-centric perspective, was in its core only reaction to possible danger to Saudi internal stability caused by uprisings. Bahraini Shia community and groups related to uprisings thus interrupted the state-centric assumptions, despite the non-state actor not being directly related to Teheran and is used only when the opportunity arises in terms of unformal transnational ideological movement and cells not connected directly to Iran but aligned militias. This fact was proven after the intervention, when Iran did not form any type of wider material support or increase its presence but only sustained existed links (Guzansky, 2015).

4.2.3. Syria

4.2.3.1. Context

The Syrian civil war is undoubtedly conflict with most attention, when talking about the Arab Spring and security situation in the Middle East. The civil war, which erupted at 2011 after series of antigovernmental protests in the country, was at first motivated by need for economic and democratic reform and later aimed against the long-standing regime and president Bashar Assad himself. The civil war later transformed into prolonged armed conflict with implications transcending the country and the region itself. The number of hostilities, in spring 2019 estimated about 511 thousand (Human Rights Watch, 2018), also makes it one of the bloodiest and most concerning armed conflict in last decades. Due to the continuing conflict, Syria remains fragmented and, as the UN report estimated, in 2013, Syria had already regressed 40 years in its development (Phillips, 2016).

In the context of Saudi-Iranian rivalry, the conflict attracts even more attention due to its internal sectarian environment and its consequences to both regional powers. Despite the country is ruled by Alawite minority, the predominant Shia group in the country, making only about 17 percent of the whole population (Izady, 2018), Syria has a Sunni majority of 74 percent. The way, how the conflict is able to shift a regional balance or increasing number of external actors enhanced the international dimension the civil had gained (Phillips, 2016). Additional factors, such as geographical proximity to Israeli borders or possibility of being able to be able to influence situation in Lebanon, thus makes it a strategic proxy field, in which both regional powers have been strengthening their presence and enhancing chances of possible geopolitical gains (Tzemprin, Jožič, Lambaré, 2015).

Syrian conflict became one of the main proxy wars between two regional powers, who are taking their opportunities in the country and are extending their own spheres of influence to maximise political gains (Pradhan, 2017). Syria's crucial position in the regional competition stems mainly from its long-standing ties with Iran and involvement in, so called, the Axis of Resistance. This alliance of various subjects, including Iran, Syria or non-state actors such as Hamas or Hezbollah, gives a stronger regional dimension to the bilateral relationship, due to shared regional aims and anti-Western position. This shared stance is sustained from the formation of close relationships during the 1970s and later during the Iran-Iraq war, as Syria was the first Arab country to recognize the new government in Iran (Wastnidge, 2017). The alliance was officially formed in March 1982 after series of bilateral agreements between Syrian foreign minister Abs al-Haim Khaddam with Iranian authorities, which were mainly of

economic nature, such as oil or trade deals, or touched basic military matters. Despite tensed confronting period during Lebanese civil war, in which interests of both countries conflicted, or Iranian presence in the issues of the Gulf countries, the interests aligned again during the Kuwait crisis and later during the Iraq war. Both regimes welcomed and supported toppling of Hussein's regime, but also together opposed long term US presence in the region and shared raised fears over shape of Bush administration's the War on Terror. Additionally, in the post-Cold war era, both countries deepened their ties, because Syria felt a need to stay close to Iran in order to promote its objectives in Lebanon and to gain advanced position in Arab-Israeli peace talks (Goodarzi, 2013).

More particularly, since the Iranian revolution, the core of the relationship is based on common foreign policy and security issues. Despite the original relationship being described more as a matter of convenience, the shared interests in the region and neighbouring countries strengthened mutual cooperation and created a solid core of formed alliance. For instance, in Iraq, these interests have been mainly connected to border and regime security after topping the Saddam Hussein regime, and in Lebanon to Iranian desire to protect Hezbollah position in the country, which have remained strong for decades. Lebanese politics thus became a space, where cooperation between Syria and Iran receives a specific shape and the realization of Iranian material and political support has been highly dependent on Syria (Wastnidge, 2017). Additionally, shared anti-imperialism and anti-zionism also contributed to strong partnership (Pradhan, 2017).

The Syrian civil war itself brought a test to durability of the Iranian relations and quickly transferred its influence into regional dimension. Iranian authorities did support popular protests around the region, as they interpret them within context of anti-Western and anti-imperialism perspective or by principles of Islamic revolution, but in case of Syria they were forced to defend regime of Bashar Assad, which tarnished their overall regional reputation. The influence of the conflict on regional and international dimension forced other regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, to initiate their own involvement to in autumn and winter of 2011 to increase their possible benefits for their power position, mainly by providing material and financial support to the opposition, on which the text will elaborate on later, and draw clear lines between conflicting camps in terms of regional dimension (Goodarzi, 2013). But the civil conflict soon became highly complex due to fragmentation of opposition and presence of other non-state actors, such as the Kurds, the Islamic State (ISIS) or Jabhat al-Nusra, and from wider perspective it became impossible to simply define borders between

particular camps. Such issue became problematic primarily for external supporters of opposition, as it still lacks united command and structure, making balancing in regional context significantly problematic and not straightforward to make them aligned with particular foreign-policy and geopolitical aims (Lund, 2013).

4.2.3.2. *Iran's perspective*

Therefore, Iran's perception of the protests, as a crucial ally of Assad's regime, was different than in other countries touched by the Arab Spring wave, and is framed in regional geopolitical narrative, not in sense, which sees the Arab Spring as continuation of Iranian revolution around the region. In this perspective, the Syrian civil war is not about Syrian people or domestic reforms, but about wider regional context, as the conflict is seen as an attempt to overthrow an Iranian ally and balance against Iran in general (Ahmadian, Mohseni, 2019). The long-term partnership with Syria, sustained and strengthened for decades, has been mainly built around shared interest in regime survival rather than complementing interests or shared ideology, and it is argued by academics, that it is the crucial factor, why it has been so durable. For this reason, the threat for Iran is evident. The Syrian civil war generated a threat for Iranian geopolitical stance and the authorities see possible toppling of Assad's regime as a massive blow for its security and foreign policy objectives. This scenario would mean, that Iran would lose a key strategic partner and an important ally in Levant and region in general, and its access to Lebanon, where Iran is active through support and control of Hezbollah, would be limited or even lost. For Iran thus became crucial to maintain existing links to Syria and Lebanon and frame its involvement in the conflict as a fight against terrorism and stepping down of Assad is considered to be unacceptable. (Mohns, Bank, 2012; Goodarzi, 2013).

Where the answer is not that clear, is if the factor of a threat to survival is present. When it comes to debate about threat to survival in relation to consequences of the Syrian conflict, the centre of focus remains ISIS, whose activity, if spreading and intensifying, has a potential to directly threaten Iranian territory and integrity. There has been voices in Iran connecting preservation of Syria to perseverance of Teheran, related to the danger of ISIS threatening Iranian territory, but it has to be added, that these voices are still marginal and the mentioned strategic and geopolitical perspective still remains the main interpretation of the conflict. (Wastnidge, 2017)

What can also be part of discussion about survival factor, is importance of the Axis to preservation of Iranian position or Iran itself. From the contextual overview, the danger of losing significant amount of access to both Syria and Lebanon would definitely change the

geopolitical considerations of Iran and make actual activity around the region harder, nor impossible. It is clear, that the Axis is a crucial tool of Iranian foreign policy and geopolitical calculations, and, in spite of the fact, that limitations of this formation would not mean a threat to core of existence for Teheran, the actual importance of this alliance for Iran is a point for future considerations (Sagedhi-Boroujedi, 2017). But in the context of this work, the threat for the Axis does not pose threat to actual existence of regime or territorial integrity of Iran, despite being a massive threat for their geopolitical positions and the whole concept of security and foreign policy in the Middle East. The threat for Teheran thus lies in interrupting its sphere of influence in northern Levant, where it has strong ties to ruling elites, particularly in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and which is one of the main tools against Iran's regional competitors for geopolitical position and power (Lund, 2018).

The reflection of this perspective on actual Iranian behaviour went through development and encompasses wide range of policies and practices. In the beginning, when the protest erupted and the threat was not so straightforward, Iran chose to support Assad's only rhetorically, with extended support, such as open organization and training of multinational Shia militia groups or advising to regime forces, arriving later in 2011 when the protest transformed into civil conflict and direct threat to survival of the Syrian regime. Hence Iran's activity in Syria became multi-dimensional. Apart from political and economic support, in a forms of trade agreements and loans with an aim to sustain Syrian economy during war, Iran also became involved militarily by deployment and of Shia militias, providing their training and battlefield mentoring, sending its experts to Syria, providing weapons and intelligence gatherings or generating transnational religious links to attract more volunteers to participate in the conflict (Wastnidge, 2017).

4.2.3.3. *Role of Iran-related non-state actors*

In these aspects of Iranian military involvement, the role of non-state actors used for balancing, i.e. the factor of asymmetrical balancing, is crucial, Firstly, Iran's strategy in Syria involves empowering sectarian actors and especially local Shia groups and provision of military training, so they can become a helpful force in defence of Syrian regime. In these regards, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has played a huge part. IRGC, as a branch of Iranian armed forces, was sent to country to organise training of fighters, provide command and leadership through IRGC commanders and military experts, and also increase overall numbers via regular ground forces. Additionally, the IRGC serve as a connecting link between Iran and activity of local sectarian Shia groups, whose involvement in the war seems to be key for

success of Iranian strategy and preventing any losses in geopolitical position and or operational abilities (Ahmandian, Mohseni, 2019).

As was already indicated throughout the work, Iran is also using Hezbollah as a balancing tool in Syria and participation of the Lebanese organisation should not be underestimated as a balancing act. Although Hezbollah originally did not take a clear stance about its involvement in the Syrian events and was discussing its options, despite supporting Baath regime from the beginning, Iranian pressure and increasing militarization of the conflict persuaded Hezbollah to stand behind Assad by all means possible. Rhetorically, Hezbollah accepted Iranian perception of the uprising, but continuously denied any military involvement. But it was not only significant pressure from Iranian authorities to decide on a stance, but also individual interest, which draw Hezbollah into Syrian conflict. The ongoing instability on borders could potentially spread and threat the position of Hezbollah in northern areas of the country. Also, toppling the Assad regime could disrupt lines of weapon supplies, weakening of its deterrence capacities and limit access to Israel or, generally, influence regional politics, thus weakening Hezbollah's overall position and reach (Pradhan, 2017, p. 98-99; Mohns, Bank, 2012). Hence Hezbollah has become a crucial force on a side of Baath regime by fighting alongside the regime forces, as was confirmed by Hezbollah Chief Hassan Naralah in 2013, and throughout the years helped with training and presence in key areas, such as Damascus, Aleppo or Deir Ezzor and showed the degree of its commitment (Pradhan, 2017).

Therefore, it is not only durability of bilateral relations between Syria and Assad's regime, what makes Iran react heavily to the threat mainly by practices of mainly hard balancing, despite inclining also to practices of soft balancing, but also the asymmetrical aspect of balancing, which seems to be still the strongest tool of Iranian involvement in the country and the strongest tool for defined aims of foreign policy in Syria.

4.2.3.4. Saudi Arabia's perspective

Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, paradoxically, decided to back the opposition and the uprising against Syrian regime, as their ties with Assad government took a problematic shape throughout last decades. Despite initial Riyadh's support of Assad after 2002, with shared aims of maintaining strengths of their regimes and counter the dominance of Hussein's Iraq mutual ties start to change due to different positions in Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as Saudi Arabia tried to organise a peace talks, which not gained Syrian support (Hokayem, 2015).

As Phillips argues, Riyadh's approach to Syrian conflict was driven by two main concerns, labelled as external developments – to contain possible security consequences of the

Arab Spring and counter Iran (Phillips, 2016). Starting with the latter, Syrian close relationship with Shia Iran and weak Sunni power in the country, the Sunni kingdom inclined to policy aimed at undermining Assad's regime and supporting opposition not only in Syria, but also Lebanon. Even slight restoration of ties at 2009, when during official meeting of the Saudi king and Assad both agreed on a need to bolstering pro-Saudi forces in the region in relation to a need for power sharing in Lebanese government, and even initial support of Assad during the popular uprisings did not restore any closer cooperation. Firstly, Saudis decided to back Baath regime, with fears of devastating consequences for other authoritative and conservative regimes in the region, but after Syrian authorities were not able to stabilise the situation and displeasure with the rising violence and repressions, the Saudi kingdom decided to manoeuvre between sharper criticism and attempts to prevent deterioration of relationship, which in the end led to opposition support (Hokayem, 2015). Saudi Arabia, along with remaining members of the GCC accused Assad regime of using violence against protestors and violating human rights, and demanded regime change (Pradhan, 2017). Generally, Saudi Arabia never enhanced ties with Syria to a level, where any alliance threatening the Axis with Iran and this fact itself decided, that the Iranian geopolitical threat itself and threat of Iranian influence spreading is in itself a decisive factor for taking sides in the conflict (Bertu, Guzansky, 2014).

In this context, the Syrian civil war primarily poses a threat because of multi-dimensional Iranian involvement in the country. Possible Iranian strengthening and their intervention in the conflict, which Saudis perceive as a military occupation, pose a significant strategic and security danger in terms of regional competition, and thus the Saudi kingdom could not just observe, but felt a need and opportunity to balance Iranian efforts, with concerns about overall regional stability. Apart from that, the Syrian civil war also created concerns about rise of prosecution of Sunni population by Alawite authorities and also about possible rise and spread of radical Islam (Hokayem, 2015). But in this case, behaviour related to this conflict seems to be motivated only by efforts to balance Iranian activity and not broader threat for survival.

This perception of the civil war thus influenced the way Saudis decided to be involved. With the initial critical development, Saudis began with political and diplomatic pressure on Syria, supported peace plans and later recognised National Coalition of the Syrian opposition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The approach, whose core was to simply undermine the Baath regime and remove Assad from power and benefit from an opportunity to balance Iranian presence, make Saudis chase a short-term goal, instead of strategic and

structured approach to build a durable and united opposition in the country. The nature of balancing has been mainly indirect, by both soft and hard balancing practices. Initially, Saudi Arabia used a private links to individuals to fund their activity and try to fuel the efforts of opposition. Apart from evident political support, derived from Saudi narrative, and sustained efforts to create an international pressure against Assad regime and Iranian presence in the country, especially in connection to suspected use of chemical weapons, after which the Saudi diplomacy was disappointed with overall reaction it refuses seat on the UN Security Council, the Saudi kingdom also organised national fundraising to be able to provide a humanitarian assistance to Syria, highlighting acts of violence conducted by Syrian government and its allies (Blanga, 2017; Pradhan, 2017).

4.2.3.5. *Role of the opposition supported by Saudi Arabia*

This activity later progressed to broader financial assistance and material support for various opposition groups, which often contained even arms and weapons. But as was already mentioned, the approach to opposition support has been rather short-sighted and was based on limited knowledge about its complexity and nature. After taking a decisive stance, the Saudi kingdom started to fund the Free Syrian Army and other affiliated secular groups, later also provided support to groups such as Army of Islam, Jaish al-Fatah, other smaller secularist and nationalist actors or tribal chiefs. All of these subjects were many times taking advantage of Saudi involvement by pretending its anti-jihadist nature to receive funds and arms, making the situation on the opposition side significantly confusing. But the mentioned lack of strategy caused, that Saudi involvement contributed to further radicalization and fragmentation of the opposition, making practice of hard and asymmetric balancing rather ineffective and contra-productive. (Blanga, 2017; Hokayem, 2015).

From a broader point of view, Saudi activity in the conflict through coordination with various non-state actors also created impact on a regional level and level of interstate relations with other Gulf states, mainly Qatar, which will be used as a primary example. Although both countries have been showing willingness to provide financial and military support to opposition and encourage defections from regime's military and political authorities, their disagreements over preferred allies inside the Syrian opposition and their regional partners caused complications in coordination of shared effort of Gulf states and task of uniting the Syrian opposition. Consequence of these divisions led, for example, to Saudi attempts to weaken some of the groups inside the opposition, that were not in line with their interest and aligned actors, and overall lack of credibility of the whole opposition agenda, and rise of radical elements

inside the opposition, which can potentially directly threaten the Gulf states territories. The contradictory stances on Syrian opposition also started to reflect in Qatar's unwillingness to confront Teheran, which in, in opposite, a main aim of Saudi activity (Phillips, 2017; Hokayem, 2015). The presence of conflict inside the GCC, related to desired unity in stance to Syria, lack of comprehensive strategy in the conflict or long-term goals in the country, can be seen as an evidence, that involvement of Saudi Arabia in Syria is motivated mainly by anti-Assad approach and attempt to decrease Iranian influence in the country and by balancing through opposition improve its own regional power position, and not to achieve specific goals in Syria in general (Phillips, 2016).

4.2.3.6. Context of research questions

Putting the empirical examination in a context of given research questions, this text argues, that the Saudi balancing act is not motivated by threat to survival, but by an intention to counter the Iranian influence in Syria. Labelling Iranian presence as "an occupation" (Blanga, 2017, p. 57) serves as a justification for wide and complex support of opposition groups, but its lack of structure and absence of long-term goals indicates absence of deeper interest in Syrian internal affairs. Saudis thus chosen to provide financial support only through close individual links, and provision of arms and material aid to big number of different groups seems to lack any structured approach or deeper knowledge about their nature, which creates abuse of Saudi support by radical and secular groups and causes further fragmentation of the opposition (Hokayem, 2015). From a theoretical point of view, Saudis are fully engaged in asymmetrical balancing, using non-states aligned with Syrian opposition to counter strong position of its adversary in the conflict with regional dimension, and hard balancing, as their material aid to these actors consists of military equipment and arms. Hence, it is also clear, that this particular case is a matter of Saudi Arabia balancing purely to Iranian influence in the country and not directly to actors aligned to Teheran.

In spite of the fact, that Saudi ties with non-state actors are not based on any type of deeper ties and wide range of shared interest, involved non-state actors are a crucial part of the balancing act and are capable of impacting the regional situational by themselves, because of the importance of the Syrian conflict to the overall regional situation. Both toppling of the Baath regime or defeat of the opposition will significantly change the nature of geopolitics and intensifies the rivalry, with its core of inter-Islamic conflict, and consequently also impact situation in neighbouring countries, in which also the rivalry reflects, such as Lebanon or Iraq. (Phillips, 2016)

Iran, on the other hand, is active in the country because of its ties with Syria and concerns about geopolitical and security situation inside its territory and Syria, thus not being that concerned with specific behaviour of Saudi Arabia (Mohns, Bank, 2012; Goodarzi, 2013). For that reason, non-state actors included in the balancing between two regional powers in connection to the Syrian civil war have no interest, which would could possibly have any impact on thinking of both regional powers, as the support often lands even without deeper understanding of the non-state actors themselves, especially in case of Saudi support.

In case of Iranian activity, related to asymmetrical balancing, empowering non-state actors, especially of its own Shia militias, Syrian Shia groups, or actors close to Assad's regime (Ahmandian, Mohseni, 2019), is not directed against Saudi attempts, but to sustain its own overall power position. Practices of asymmetrical balancing serve to Iranian authorities as a tool for strengthening presence in the conflict by sustaining ideological ties, or ties based on shared perception of the situation by material and military aid, military training or providing troops, i.e. by practices related to hard balancing. These ties did not pose any influential role to general Iranian interests and non-state actors in Syria are, again, only a crucial tool and not a key partner, which would be capable of reflecting its own interests on a side of Iranian strategy.

Exception in this case might be a role of Hezbollah in Syrian conflict. The Lebanese organization did enter conflict and change its original stance in a significant degree because of Iranian pressure, and their partnership, which was already examined in previous Lebanese case study, is of different nature (Pradhan, 2017). Not only Hezbollah's interests and security situation are able to reflect in Iranian interests and policies, but Hezbollah itself entered the Syrian conflict with its own interest, related to its security in areas near borders, and in cooperation with Iran offers another possibility of using practices of hard balancing in Syria.

Overall, the case of Syrian civil war could be considered close to the traditional nature of the theory. Both countries use the Syrian conflict as a proxy space, where they are both present mainly through material or military aid. Although the behaviour is not always directed towards the other regional power and is often close to softer balancing, the military aspect of participation or support is the main tool used to counter the influence of the other regional power, as states remain the central actors of the situation and aim of counter-balancing behaviour.

5. Evaluation of the findings

5.1. Summary of empirical findings

The following part will be focused primarily on summary of findings and arguments from the empirical part of the thesis, before it will be placed in context of research questions and deeper theoretical context to create overall concluding remarks.

The main part of this paper used three case studies, in a form of regional proxy conflicts, to create a picture illustrating reflection of regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in different settings and through practices of hard and soft balancing connected to ties with specific non-state actors, i.e. asymmetrical balancing.

Lebanon, as first case study, represented a conflict over political system and, in perspective of regional competition, balancing through specific and opposing political camps in the country by providing formal political or material aid and support. The former internal conflict created concerns about stability of the county, which is close both to Israel and Syria, and thus potentially harm regional stability in general (Azani, 2012). Iranian long-term presence in the country, through alliance with Hezbollah, is reflected in high stakes for Teheran, who is relying on ties with Lebanese organization, with an aim to sustain control over the political system, and neighbouring aligned Syrian regime as ground stones of its regional reputation and power in general (Bank, Mohns, 2015). Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is trying to build closer ties with the opposition of Hezbollah and through interventions, as in case of governmental resignation in 2017, to lower the role of Hezbollah in the system and, consequently, decrease Iranian influence (Al Jazeera, 2017). In this case, Saudis balance directly against the non-state actor to benefit on the regional scale, but, at the same time, understanding stakes of increased Iranian influence, proximity to Syrian conflict and labelling conflict with Hezbollah as a part of anti-terrorism strategy, to benefit on the regional scale.

Following examination of proxy conflict in the Bahrain, which is similarly not an armed conflict, focused mainly on conflict over political regime, dominated by Sunni authorities influenced by very close ties with neighbouring Saudi Arabia. As the conflict is caused by Shia discontent with Sunni regime, the conflict is also influencing the religious and ideological core of the regional competition, related to power projection and Sunni-Shia rift. Geopolitical significance of the Bahraini case also lies in local oil reserves, Iranian historical territorial demand and geographical proximity to Saudi kingdom, which, along with potential problems with Shia minority in Eastern Province, and Bahraini membership in the GCC, creates high

stakes and threat of survival for Saudi Arabia, which led to military intervention in 2011 (Mabon, 2012). Hence, Iran is trying to exploit such a situation and indirectly support the struggle majority by sustaining ideological links and sustain the pressure in the Gulf by mobilising Shia masses and generated cells to weaken overall Saudi position and power in the area (Knights, Levvit, 2018).

Syrian civil war is the only proper armed proxy conflict this work is focused on. With its high complexity, presence of various types of actors and states from both inside and outside of the region can be observed. Factors as Iranian close ties with Baath regime, who is part of the Axis of Resistance, and Syria being a crucial link for Iran to provide support to Lebanon and Hezbollah thus create very high stakes forcing Iran to be involved in wide aid and presence in the conflict through its own non-state actors, particularly the Shia militia IRGC, with an aim to sustain the links and prevent a decrease of power in regional dimension (Wastnidge, 2017; Ahmandian, Mohseni, 2019). Saudi Arabia, on the other side, is present in the conflict mainly through material and financial support of the opposition to balance against Iranian strong position in the country and exploit possible political benefits. But as this remains the only core aim of the Saudis, their efforts in Syria are considered highly unstructured and ineffective and their support is highly exploited by various groups, often with radical characteristics. Absence of deeper Saudi strategy for Syria also goes against high stakes the conflict has for the kingdom, such as overall regional stability, strengthening of Iranian position in the area, increase and spread of terrorist activity, and struggle related to already mentioned Sunni-Shia rift, as the Sunni majority in Syria is governed and oppressed, as argued by Saudi authorities by Baath regime (Hokayem, 2015).

Empirical examination thus offered cases with different settings, from armed conflict to non-armed conflicts related to struggle over influence in Lebanese political system or strength of Sunni regime in Bahrain, and stakes connected not only to strong position in one country or conflict, but also in regional settings, as importance of all examined proxy conflicts transcends borders of all countries and is able to impact power positions of both powers on international level. Especially non-armed conflicts showed, how both Iran and Saudi Arabia are willing to use more sensitive and complex approach of soft balancing, and, on the other hand, in more serious situations, when the regional stance, long-standing ties connected to regional alliance or even internal stability is threatened, to use more decisive approach, increase its presence or even use military power to balance against each other. The cases also offered balancing through direct involvement, such as in case of Saudi intervention in Bahrain or presence of Iranian

experts and Shia militias in Syria, or only indirect political and material support or ideological leadership. This variety represented in context of each case and behaviour regional powers showed in reaction to different threats offers a wider space to answer following research questions and results in more credible and comprehensive conclusions.

5.2. Research questions

In this segment, the text will be placing summarized empirical findings from case studies into the context of both sets of research questions. These answers will be in next segment used to evaluate their possible impact on theoretical background and applied balance of power theory.

Starting with the first set of research questions, the examination offered only one case, in which one of the regional powers reacted directly to threat of survival – Saudi Arabia in Bahrain, as the spread of Shia protests and suspected Iranian influence could directly threaten Saudi territory and its internal stability (Mabon, 2012). It could also be argued, that Iranian presence in Syrian conflict on a side of Baath regime should decrease the threat of spread of ISIS towards Iranian territory (Wastnidge, 2017), but in this case is not the only reason, why Iran is active in the Syrian civil war and thus the balancing against threat of survival is not obvious as in the previous case. In rest of the case studies, both regional powers balanced only towards less direct threat, related to spread of influence of the other power, which could weaken their own position in the regional competition and in the proxy conflict, against a military presence of the other in the country, threat to both Sunni and Shia communities in Bahrain or Syria, or generally against potential of rising regional instability caused by examined conflicts.

The absence of survival factor in most of the cases is also reflected in complex behaviour and practices both powers chosen to balance against defined threats. It can be claimed, that only the Saudi intervention in Bahrain was a pure hard balancing against possible spread of Shia protests and Iranian possibilities to directly harm the Saudi territory and stability (Mabon, 2012). We can also talk about traditional hard balancing in case of Iranian presence in Syria, where Teheran is present through provision of troops, own militias, military training and material aid in form of arms (Ahmandian, Mohseni, 2019). But as in rest of the cases, these practices of hard balancing are combined with behaviour close to softer approach, such as financial and political support or sustaining ideological links. This complex behaviour was more common throughout the analysis. Solely soft balancing appeared only on Saudi support of Lebanese government or Iranian ideological linkage to Shia majority in Bahrain.

Therefore, this thesis argues, that the nature of balancing in the Middle East inclines to more modern approaches than to its traditional version. With a clear presence of repeating balancing practices in examined proxy conflicts, both regional powers showed more sensible behaviour and reacted mainly against threat, in a sense of unpleasant state or circumstance, which could threaten their ties with allies or overall power position in the region, and not acted only when factor of survival was at stake. These reactions were also closer to more complex approach, which encompassed characteristics of both hard and soft balancing (see Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004), and pure presence of just one approach was rare. In other words, with different types of conflicts, their proxy nature and transcending the local perspective, balancing and overall behaviour of both regional powers in the Middle East did show a deviation from the traditional theory to more complex picture, but without completely abandoning the original definition of the theory.

Also, alliance-making did show us a few characteristics deviating from the original theoretical concept. Despite the theoretical background emphasizing the factor of foreign material aid (see Walt, 1987), in the Middle East, the Sunni-Shia rift being a core of the competition do have influence on strength of pure ideological links in the whole examination, for example close alignments of Sunni regimes or the nature of the Shia crescent. In spite of the ideological nature of the competition, the combination of ideological links and material support is still the most common one.

The second set of research questions was related to role of non-state actors in examined conflicts and in alliances with regional powers in terms of regional competition. Regional powers balanced against non-state actors in case of Saudi balancing act against Hezbollah and Shia majority in Bahrain, despite claiming the action is targeting Iranian presence in the uprising, and in case of Iranian support of the Baath regime in Syria, which is directed against local opposition. In rest of the cases, regional powers balanced against actions of each other or against rising role or influence of the other in the respective countries.

What puts these findings into proper context, are considerations about their actual role and importance in all examined conflicts. In majority of the cases, the non-state actors served only as a powerful tool for balancing the adversary and provided support did not transcend aim and purpose of the cooperation defined by the regional power. The only case, where we can nearly talk about a proper alliance, close to its meaning in state-centric perspective with presence of partnership and importance of both actors for the alliance, is relationship between Hezbollah and Iran. Their ties, sustained through decades, still do not possess the significance

of particularly influencing shape of Iranian security policy, but it can be argued, that threatening the role of Hezbollah in Lebanon is able to alert the Iranian authorities and approve steps to increase the support or its presence in neighbouring countries to be able to influence the situation in its own benefit, such as in Syrian civil war, which do have the potential of disrupting key trade lines to Lebanon (see Azani, 2012; Azani, 2013). Still, the Hezbollah is not able to fully influence the shape of Iranian security policy and is fully loyal to Iran. Again, in case of Syrian civil war, Hezbollah firstly did not take a decisive stance, but was later influenced to stand aside the Baath regime, participate in the conflict and fight against the opposition (Mohns, Bank, 2012). Even here, the influence thus remains only one-way.

From these findings, we can conclude, that balancing of the regional powers against non-state actors was not that common, so it could interrupt the core state-centric nature of balancing in terms of the regional rivalry in the Middle East. Balancing of regional powers against each other or influence of each other is considered to be still prevalent. But in two cases we saw that state felt a need to balance against a threat posed solely by non-state actor threatening its power position, particularly Saudis action against rising role of Hezbollah in Lebanon, or even security and internal stability, such as in case of Shia uprising in Bahrain and later Saudi intervention. Although these cases were in significant minority, there are still a prove that non-state actors are able to play a crucial role in the regional competition, pose a significant threat to more powerful states and provoke a decisive reaction with an aim to sustain a powerful position on the regional level.

The non-state actors were thus present through phenomena of asymmetrical balancing in majority of the examined cases, in a sense of balancing via cooperation and alliances with non-state actors or against them. Aim remained to decrease influence and role of the adversary in the particular conflict and sustain or increase its own power position in the conflict and on the regional level. In this context, non-state actors played mainly a role of a balancing tool more than a worthy partner and the links with regional powers were usually not of a significant importance, probably with exception of ties between Iran and Hezbollah.

Hence, non-state actors can play a crucial role in the regional competition, pose a threat by themselves and provoke a reaction from regional powers, but they mostly remain only a balancing tool and the interruption of the state-centric nature of the theory is not significant, but still present in a small degree, which gives them an important place in the realist theory and in the balance of theory in general on which the next segment will elaborate.

5.3. Impact on the balance of power theory

The answers to research question also provide an opportunity to put nature of balancing in examined strategic environment into a broader theoretical background of the thesis to both argue about its relevance and impact of the analysis and research questions on balance of power theory.

As was stated in the theoretical part, Waltz's definition of the theory, considered to be the traditional picture of the balance of power, expects presence of two characteristics: anarchical environment and factor of threat of survival (Waltz, 1979). As the examination work with the Middle East as a separate unit, absence of any regional organization did generate an environment close to anarchy, in which regional powers are not limited in their actions or responsible to any other international organization or structure.

Regarding survival factor, the analysis of the Middle Eastern strategic settings showed, that balancing behaviour is not merely dependent on this condition, as the settings are very complex and fragile. Hence the start of balancing process and following mutual reaction to threat posed by one another or suspected influence of the other was not dependent on threat of survival, but a simple threat for position in particular conflicts or in aligned countries seemed enough for regional powers to invest into decisive measures. Only exception, which was close to the traditional perspective, was a Saudi intervention into Bahrain, which was a balancing practice against uprisings of Shia majority in the country, related to suspicion that Iran is in control over the protests and targets threatening Saudi territory and internal stability (DW, 2011), i.e. posing a threat to survival of the country and significantly weaken Saudi Arabia on regional level.

The post-Cold war environment thus seems to be more sensible to threats, and actors are thus willing to balance against threats which are not direct to their independence or survival, but position in specific conflicts, related to possible benefits from preferred scenario, or stronger position against adversary in the area or region in general. What examination of proxy conflicts in the Middle East brings to the theoretical aspect, is weakening the condition of survival in favour of looser understanding of threat. Still, the Walt's balance of threat (see Walt, 1987) does also not seem relevant, as the balancing acts were not only a matter of the present threat, but overall regional power position. In context of the traditional theory (see Waltz, 1979), in spite of presence of threat instead of survival factor in most of examined cases, the factors of uncertainty or effort to maximize its own power and benefits, which are part of broader structural realist background, were also very strong. In case of offensive capabilities, that can

be connected with hard balancing, were also a part of majority of the cases, despite answers of research questions inclined to more complex combination with soft balancing. But all measures and steps taken by regional powers were without a doubt meant as an offensive behaviour, even if took shape of only economic, ideological or political support, which makes presence of this realist characteristic also very strong.

5.4. Role of non-state actors in the theory

As was already stated through the research questions, the asymmetrical balancing played a huge part in all three cases and was a preferred and influential way of handling the conflict for sakes of benefits on regional level in the Middle East. Although non-state actors were used in alliances or loose ties mainly as a tool for interests of both regional powers, the significance of the asymmetrical balancing cannot be overseen, especially in the last decades with rising number of proxy conflicts and their nature, which transcends the nation-state borders. Events in the Middle East proved to be a perfect example.

All three case studies clearly showed, that role of non-state actors, despite being only a tool and not an equal partner in alliances, gains significance for regional powers and for the whole balance of power phenomenon. Non-state actors served as a middle-link for Iran and Saudi Arabia to extend their abilities and overall influence, reflect intention and interest of both regional powers, their specific aims in the conflict, and, which is considered to be crucial for the perception of the non-state actors for the whole theory, be a symbol of strategy applied throughout the region. In the Middle East, this was reflected in alliance-making according to ideological lines, where, Hezbollah, for example, is a part of the Axis of Resistance led by Iran, or Bahraini Shia majority, considered to be a part of ideological movement Shia crescent, used by Iran to mobilize Shia masses throughout the region (see Barzegar, 2008; El Husseini, 2010). Additionally, more important role of non-state actors in the regional competition and balancing was also reflected in reactions, they were able to provoke on a side of regional powers to sustain their power position, such as military intervention in Bahrain, or forcing a fall of Lebanese government with strong role of Hezbollah.

From a perspective of alliance-making, the examination of role of non-state actors in the Middle East highlighted other interesting findings. Mainly, all of the ties between regional powers and non-state actors were based on strong ideological aspect, related to Sunni-Shia core of the competition, and shared identity can be considered as the key building stone of mutual ties. In these regards, even with presence of material aid, the political or ideological support seemed to be the primary decisive factor for durability and strength of alliances and ties. This

fact thus goes against the theoretical assumption, that it is not shared ideology, but primarily the material foreign aid, which makes alliances to live longer and durable (see Walt, 1987). Still, the role of foreign aid is crucial for non-state actors and its influence on durability and strength of these ties is definitely not underestimated, and the overall complexity of alliance-making in the Middle East in case of non-state actors are another argument in favour of high reach to theoretical background. Overall, presence of both aspects was the most effective way of strengthening and sustaining formed alliances.

Therefore, the role of non-state actors in chosen theoretical framework definitely indicates their rising importance in modern conflict and overall strategic environment. The asymmetrical balancing serves as the main symbol of this tendency in international security, with a clear addition of a new dimension into regional competition and regional conflicts, which adds a transnational layer to their dynamics. The examination and this work in general thus showed, that non-state actors are able to play a decisive role in the state-centric theoretical settings, despite not being able to completely interrupt this aspect of the theory.

5.5. Continuing relevance of the theory

One of the main aims of the thesis was also to prove continuing relevance of realist principles and balance of power theory in the changing strategic post-Cold war environment. In short, based on nature of the analysis and its result, mainly in form of answered research questions, arguments on sides of both possible answers can be made.

Relevance of the theoretical background was proven mainly by influence of the regional power's politics in chosen conflicts and presence of factors, such as threat of survival, uncertainty about intentions or aim to maximize own benefits, with their clear impact on decision making of Saudi or Iranian authorities. Also, with absence of limitations related to any higher international body in the regional dimension and fragmented and tensed situation did create a space close to anarchy, which paved a way for using any needed measures and tools around the region to establish a stronger role and influence. In this sense, Walt's approach of focusing on sub-units of international system as separate cases did prove the continuing effective applicability of the realist theory and the Middle East appeared to be a perfect case for reflecting usability of such an approach (see Walt, 1987). Absence of regional organization and less structured and organized settings of the region help in rise of power politics and actual competition for primacy and thus makes realism and balance of power theory the most appropriate to apply in cases of local proxy conflicts.

What the examination also showed is how originally strictly state-centric theory is able to adapt to changing environment with phenomena such as alliances with non-state actors or balancing through or against them to improve its power status by extending validity of the asymmetrical balancing (see Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004). Adding non-state actors into wider theoretical considerations allowed to perceive their rising importance and role in regional politics, perceive a more complex behaviour by regional powers in connection to balancing and activity of non-state actors or strength of ideological links, which can in some cases even surpass foreign aid and go against the traditional theoretical assumptions. What must be added, that these facts do not mean a complete interruption of the state-centrism and unequal ties and relationship still needs to be in consideration, but clear influence and importance of non-state actors in balancing process signifies a change and space for theoretical development.

Taking the opposite side, it can be argued, that the relevance was proven only in settings of the Middle East and applicability of realist theory and balance of theory would be harder in other regions or on global scale, where we do not perceive so many non-states actors with such influence and strong ties to foreign governments, or not so many proxy conflicts. Other regions would also offer different space for rivalry, where the security space is not so fragmented and presence of regional or international organization is much more significant a powerful in relations with member states or influential regional actors. Additionally, with many regional and international organizations being present and active, the balance of power theory would be harder to apply in an environment, which lacks characteristics of anarchy and complete uncertainty. Also, rationale of states and actors vary from conflict to conflict and simple power politics would also be harder apply in other cases and on other actors (see Walt, 1979; Fritz, Sweeney, 2004).

5.6. Contribution of the examination to the discipline

The examination also tried to show an effort to extend the applicability of the theory and indicate, that different approaches do not have to be strictly against each other. The main example of this is making balance of power based on threat of survival and to independence (see Waltz) with more simple and loose balance of threat, in a sense of reacting to less direct security threat or threat to overall power position (see Walt, 1987). This work used an approach of combining these positions to extend possible causes of balancing behaviour, in which even less significant threat to regional position, losing important ties or perceiving position of ally as concerning for the interests and objectives of foreign policy of regional power, can ignite a reaction to improve the power position through balancing act. Threat to survival is thus seen as

a more serious threat and threat of imminent nature with possible consequences not only hurting the power position, but actual security and stability of a state or regime. This threat, as was shown in the examination of Bahraini case study, generates more intense and direct balancing response closer to the traditional definition of the theory. In the former case, the presence of weaker threat, the reaction is far more complex and closer to approach of soft balancing or combination of both.

The other contribution, closely related to the first point, is emphasizing presence of more complex behaviour, going against traditional definition highlighting offensive capabilities and hard balancing (see Waltz, 1979), or latter separation of hard and soft balancing (see Nexon, 2009; Paul, Wirtz, Fortmann, 2004). These dynamics are not always well theoretically covered, or their examination does not have proper conceptual background, on which this work tried to build with its own approach, which could be able to deal with such dynamic and complex environment for application of balance of power theory.

Where the text managed to make the most important contribution, according to author's opinion, was in relation to a role of non-state actors in realist theory and challenging its strict state-centric nature. The text did not offer a complete dismissal of the state-centric core of realist theory, as non-state actors played mainly role of a balancing tool, even as in case of Hezbollah or Shia majority in Bahrain. On the other hand, regional powers were willing to balance against non-state actor to sustain its power position in the region, which made these actors an actual part of the balancing process and part of mutual reaction chain. Hence, this text portrayed non-state actors as an important part of the theory – not only they are a tool regional powers can use to balance against each other, but also non-state actors can be a target of balancing and became regular actors of the whole regional competition.

If role of non-state actors in alliance making throughout the region and importance of these ties to both sides is added to the summary, as regional powers are willing to protect their alliances with non-state actors, such as the Axis or Shia Crescent, or balance against them, it can be concluded, that the examination managed to challenge the strict state-centrism and proved, that non-state actors can be a solid and important part of the realist theory, even in settings of regional competition and balance of power context.

Conclusion

Dynamic and fragile post-2011 security environment in the Middle East, which, in form of proxy conflicts, serves as a space for intensifying regional competition, proved to be an appropriate empirical case for testing the relevance of principles of structural realism and assumptions of balance of power theory, both in its traditional definition and evolving nature in changing post-Cold war strategic environment. Also, it serves as a way to challenge theory's state-centric core by including examination of role of non-state actors in balancing practices. Different settings of Syrian civil war and non-armed proxy conflicts in Bahrain and Lebanon offered opportunities for power reflection and realization of regional competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

All cases thus showed various ways, how regional powers are able to use aligned non-state actors for purposes of balancing against perceived threat and influence of the adversary. Their importance was demonstrated by presence of asymmetrical balancing, which proved to be a core theoretical concept for analysing role of non-state actors in the conflicts. Non-state actors served as a balancing tool for purposes of power projection or switching the balance, extension of regional power's capabilities in distant proxy conflicts and a way of empowering geopolitical position by forming alliances and durable ties all over the region, which is visible mainly on a case of Iranian ties to Hezbollah. Despite the fact, that the threats were usually of less direct nature, when comparing to the traditional threat for survival, i.e. in form threat for power position, with exception of Saudi case in Bahrain, established alliances were still able to generate intensified responses to events and balancing behaviour against or through active non-state actors.

The examination also highlighted other evolving features and possible ways of extending the applicability of balance of power theory in contemporary settings. Apart from already less direct nature of threats and rare presence of threat of survival in initiating balancing behaviour, the cases also demonstrated using complex practices by regional powers, combining both hard and soft balancing. In all cases, both regional powers did not incline strictly to either military-oriented aid or economic, political and ideological support, and selected policies often combined both ways, i.e. provision economic or political support along with military aid or even provision of training, troops or presence. This phenomenon could be caused primarily by huge complexity of all conflicts, bigger number interested actors and different approaches and labelled importance from different sides of conflicts. Additionally, the separation of the Middle

East as its own unit and absence of regional organization helped the examination to get closet to anarchical settings and presence of other key characteristics of structural realism – attempts to maximize benefits, uncertainty, and offensive intents. The nature of the topic of regional competition was able to focus on region as its own unit and exclude factor of interference of external actors, and thus fully focused on core of unit's dynamics, which, in case of the Middle East, lies, for example, in power politics, rising number of proxy conflicts, fragility of security, deterrence, or policies of containment. As is argued in literature (see Ethesami, 2014; Eksi, 2017; Ryan, 2019), these dynamics make possible, that the discipline can work with separate presence of balance in the Middle East.

Relevance of balance of power theory is thus considered to be still strong, especially in the Middle Eastern settings, and indicated attempt to include modern approaches and trust an evolution of the theory in last decades proved to extend its applicability and adaptation in more complex settings of conflicts with transnational layer and presence of non-state actors. Contribution of this work thus lies mainly in extended adaptability of the theory and its applicability to contemporary phenomena, not only with its assumptions, but also concepts related to balancing behaviour and presence and importance of non-state actors in the balancing acts.

But with limited scope of thesis's application and significant specificity of the Middle Eastern security situation, there is still significant space for improvement and further examination in the matter. For confirming continuing relevance of the theory, its evolution and structural realism in general, more examination in different sub-units of the international system and with different non-state actors is needed to test mentioned theoretical phenomena and adjustments in various settings and security environment, which vary from region to region.

Summary

This diploma thesis concentrated on application of the balance of power theory and structural realistic framework on case of regional rivalry in the Middle East between Iran and Saudi Arabia, particularly on its reflection in three specific countries and conflicts – Syrian civil war, Lebanese political conflict and struggle over stability of regime in Bahrain. The work did not base its examination purely on the traditional theory but emphasized its evolution in last decades and included some characteristic of the development in changing strategic environment into the application with intention to broaden the applicability of the originally strictly state-centric theory to cases with significant role of various non-state actors.

The nature of chosen case studies offered variety in contexts, core of conflicts and generated findings. Lebanon represented a conflict over political system, where Iran is present thanks to its wider geopolitical interests, in a form of the Axis alliance and long-term ties to Hezbollah, which has become a strong actor in the system and helps Teheran to remain in control in the country for its benefits, while Saudi Arabia intends to balance the Teheran's influence by strengthening ties with Lebanese authorities and undermine overall position of Hezbollah. Bahrain, also in its core mainly non-armed proxy conflict, represented a case of threatened aligned and neighbouring regime to Saudi Arabia. Conflict in Bahrain, originally fuelled by popular protests, is argued to be led mainly by Shia majority connected to Iran. Possible weakening of the regime and rise of Iranian influence in the country posed a survival threat for Saudi Arabia, due to fear of spread of Shia discontent to its own territory and generating an internal instability and thus led the Saudi kingdom to execute a military intervention to oppose possible Iranian ideological and military pressure, materialized through various cells. Syria was the only example of armed proxy conflict and the most significant conflict for both regional powers, due to its possible geopolitical benefits and consequences it has on regional stability. Iran, supporting the Baath regime, disturbed by possible fall of Bashar Assad and weakening its geopolitical position, provides variety of aid, including military training and mobilising Shia militias and its activity is the strongest and most complex of all cases, while Saudi Arabia supports variety of different opposition groups with an attempt to balance disturbing Iranian position by threatening and undermining the Baath regime. The conflict with its complex and fragmented nature also creates threat of spread of terrorism, which could directly endanger both of regional powers.

The thesis thus aimed not only to test a relevance of the theory in the modern security environment, but also analyse the role of non-state actors both in empirical cases and in the theoretical framework. Significant presence of asymmetrical balancing proved, that non-state actors can play a crucial role in the balancing process and regional rivalry in general not only as an influential tool for regional powers, but also as a worthy partner and balancing actor on its own. With identifying more complex behaviour, combining military, economic, political or ideological support and aim, and concentration on the Middle East as a separate and isolated unit, the relevance of balance of power theory and structural realism background proved to be still relevant and able to adapt. The text thus showed possible ways forward, being aware of possible obstacles.

List of references

AHMADIAN, Hassan, MOHSENI, Payam. *Iran's Syria strategy: the evolution of deterrence*.

In: *International Affairs* [online]. 2019, vol. 95, no. 6, pp. 341-346. Available at:

<https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/95/2/341/5306386>

Al Jazeera. 2017-11-08. *Is Lebanon caught in a Saudi-Iran regional power play?* [cit. 2019-

05-03]. Available at: [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/lebanon-caught-saudi-iran-](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/lebanon-caught-saudi-iran-regional-power-play-171107075704436.html)

[regional-power-play-171107075704436.html](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/lebanon-caught-saudi-iran-regional-power-play-171107075704436.html)

AZANI, Eitan. *Hezbollah's Strategy of "Walking on the Edge": Between Political Game and*

Political Violence. In: *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* [online]. 2012, vol. 35, no. 11, p. 741-

759. Available at:

[http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006)

[5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006)

AZANI, Eitan. *The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study*. In: *Studies in*

Conflict & Terrorism [online]. 2013, vol. 36, no. 11, pp. 899-916. Available at:

[http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006)

[5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006)

BAHGAT, Gawdat, EHTESHAMI, Anoushiravan, QUILLIAM, Neil. *Security and Bilateral*

Issues between Iran and its Arab neighbours. Washington: National Defense University,

2017, 245 p. ISBN 978-3-319-43289-2.

BAHRY, Louay. *The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf?* In: *Middle East*

Policy [online]. 1997, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 42-57. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1475-4967.1997.tb00263.x>

BANK, André, MOHNS, Erik. *Syrian Revolt Fallout: End of Resistance Axis?* In: *Middle*

East Policy Council [online]. 2015, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 1-4. Available at:

[http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006)

[5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006](http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006)

BBC. *Why is there a war in Syria?* 2019-02-25. [cit. 2019-05-20]. Available at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

BARZEGAR, Kayhan. *Iran and the Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities*. In: *Brown Journal*

of World Affairs [online]. 2008, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 87-99. Available at:

<https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/BRZ.BJWA.2008.pdf>

BERTI, Benedetta, GUZANSKY, Yoel. *Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy on Iran and the Proxy War in Syria: Toward a New Chapter?* In: *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* [online]. 2014, vol 8, no. 3, pp. 25-34. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23739770.2014.11446600>

BLANGA, Yehuda U. *Saudi Arabia's Motives in the Syrian Civil War*. In: *Middle East Policy* [online]. 2017, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 45-62. Available at:

<https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=3bf7afcd-1e13-4374-aca3-2559f9b50a0c%40sessionmgr102>

BOSCO, Robert M. *The Assassination of Rafik Hariri: Foreign Policy Perspectives*. In: *International Political Science Review* [online]. 2009, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 349-361. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0192512109342521>

CORDESMAN, Anthony H. *Iran's Support of the Hezbollah in Lebanon*. In: *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* [online]. 2015, pp. 2-10. Available at:

https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/redirect/145646_en_060715_hezbollah.pdf

DUNNE, Tim, KURKI, Milja, SMITH, Steve. *Structural Realism*. In: *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 3. ed. ISBN 978-0-19-969601-7.

DURAN, Burhanettin, YILMAZ, Nuh. *Islam, Models and the Middle East: The New Balance of Power following the Arab Spring*. In: *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* [online]. 2013, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 139-170. Available at: http://www.sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Winter_2013.pdf#page=143

DW News. *Iran's support for Bahrain protesters fuels regional tensions*. 2011-04-15 [cit. 2019-06-05]. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/irans-support-for-bahrain-protesters-fuels-regional-tensions/a-6504403>

DW News. *Saudi Intervention in Bahrain increases Gulf instability*. 2011-03-16 [cit. 2019-06-05]. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/saudi-intervention-in-bahrain-increases-gulf-instability/a-14912216>

EHTESHAMI, Anoushiravan. *Middle East Middle Powers: Regional Role, International Impact*. In: *International Relations* [online]. 2014, vol. 11, no. 42, pp. 29-49. Available at: http://www.uidergisi.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/42_1.pdf

EKSI, Muharrem. *Regional Hegemony Quests in the Middle East from the Balance of Power System to the Balance of Proxy Wars: Turkey as a Balancing Power for the Iran-Saudi Rivalry*. In: Gazi Akademik Bakis [online]. 2017, vol. 11, no. 21, pp. 133-156. Available at: https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/55316420/gazi_makalem.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DRegional_Hegemony_Quests_in_the_Middle_E.pdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A%2F20190616%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20190616T064231Z&X-Amz-Expires=3600&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=c65379272a016d5c8bd0645fd1a1df56880a7782ddf8b8bf2fcb1f3f8b580533

EL HUSSEINI, Rola. *Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria*. In: Third World Quarterly [online]. 2010, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 803-815. Available at: <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=13&sid=49b5646a-034e-4df0-9fa4-5040a6a91297%40sessionmgr4006>

ERSOY, Eyüp. *Saudi Arabia and Iran in the New Middle East*. In: Middle Eastern Analysis [online]. 2013, vol. 5, no. 51, pp. 47-53. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/36093641/Saudi_Arabia_and_Iran_in_the_New_Middle_East

FRIEDMAN, Brandon. *Battle for Bahrain: What One Uprising Meant for the Gulf States and Iran*. In: World Affairs [online]. 2012, vol. 174, no. 6, pp.74-84. Available at: <https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=65574f6d-e8c0-4cb8-9ceb-a80a52bbeff5%40sessionmgr4006>

FRITZ, Paul, SWEENEY, Kevin. *The (de)Limitations of balance of Power Theory*. In: International Interactions [online]. 2004, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 285-308. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03050620490883976>

GAUSE, F. Gregory. *Ideologies, Alignments and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War*. In: Political Science and Politics. 2017, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 672-675. Available at: https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/POMEPS_Studies_16_IR_Web1.pdf#page=17

GOODARZI, Jubin M. *Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment*. In: Ortadogu Etutleri [online]. 2013, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 31-54. Available at:

<https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=39befcf3-4e0c-4375-9b64-17e2c074f897%40sessionmgr4008>

GUZANSKY, Yoel. *The Arab Gulf States and Reform in the Middle East: Between Iran and the "Arab Spring"*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2015, 147 p. ISBN 978-1-137-46783-6.

HAMEED, Usjid U. *The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry: A Foreign Policy Approach*. In: Towson University Journal of International Affairs [online]. 2017, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 16-34. Available at: <https://cpb-us-west-2-juc1ugur1qwqqo4.stackpathdns.com/wp.towson.edu/dist/b/55/files/2017/12/SPRING-2017-ISSUE-updated-12-18-13w9n3b-249dlrt.pdf#page=22>

HOKAYEM, Emile. *Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War*. In: Survival [online]. 2015, vol. 56, no. 6, pp. 341-364. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00396338.2014.985438?needAccess=true>

Human Rights Watch. 2018. Syria: Events of 2018 [cit. 2019-05-22]. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/syria>

IZADY, Michael. *Syria: Ethnic Shift, 2010-mid 2018*. Available at: http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Syria_Ethnic_Shift_2010-2018_lg.png

KARLAS, Jan. Komparativní případová studie. In: DRULÁK, Petr. *Jak zkoumat politiku: kvalitativní metodologie v politologii a mezinárodních vztazích*. Vyd. 1. Praha: Portál, 2008, 255 s. ISBN 978-80-7367-385-7.

KAUSCH, Kristina. *Competitive Multipolarity in the Middle East*. In: The International Spectator [online]. 2015, vol. 50, no. 3, p. 1-15. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03932729.2015.1055927>

KINNINMONT, Jane. *Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse*. In: The Royal Institute for International Affairs [online]. 2012, 32 p. Available at: https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/34479354/BahrainCH0612kinninmont.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DBahrain_Beyond_the_Impasse.pdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A%2F20190614%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20190614T134009Z&X-Amz-Expires=3600&X-

Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-

Signature=ef39809983d289d858361b8e858a1f9fa446a3a80803f0c5c8aaa6298d2a100e

KNIGHTS, Michael, LEVITT, Matthew. *The Evolution of Shia Insurgency in Bahrain*. In: CTC Sentinel [online]. 2018, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 18-25. Available at:

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/KnightsLevitt20180124-CTCSentinel.pdf>

LEGRENZI, Matteo, LAWSON, Fred H. *Saudi Arabia calls out Hezbollah: Why Now?* In: Middle East Policy [online]. 2016, vol. 23, no. 2. Available at:

[https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=ddeb5b15-281b-4c0d-8b4c-](https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=ddeb5b15-281b-4c0d-8b4c-a70c66563deb%40pdc-v-)

[a70c66563deb%40pdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwLHNNoaWlmbGFuZz1jcyZzaXRIPWVkcylsaXZlJnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#AN=116037140&db=poh](https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=ddeb5b15-281b-4c0d-8b4c-a70c66563deb%40pdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwLHNNoaWlmbGFuZz1jcyZzaXRIPWVkcylsaXZlJnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#AN=116037140&db=poh)

LUND, Aron. *The Non-State Militant Landscape in Syria*. In: Combating Terrorism Center [online]. 2013, vol. 6, no. 8, pp. 23-27. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-non-state-militant-landscape-in-syria/>

LUND, Aron. *Syria's Civil War: Government Victory of Frozen Conflict?* Stockholm: Ministry of Defence, 2018, 79 p. ISSN 1650-1942.

MABON, Simon. *The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry*. In: Middle East Policy [online]. 2012, vol 19, no. 2., pp. 84-97. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2012.00537.x>

MOHNS, Erik, BANK, André. *Syrian Revolt Fallout: End of the Resistance Axis?* In: Middle East Policy [online]. 2012, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 25-35. Available at: <https://tonyrivera.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Syrian-Revolt-Fallout.pdf>

New York Times. *Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest*. 2011-03-14 [cit. 2019-06-05]. Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html>

NEXON, Daniel H. *The Balance of Power in the Balance*. In: World Politics [online]. 2009, vol 61, no. 2, pp. 330-359. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231874798_The_Balance_of_Power_in_the_Balanc

e

PAUL, T.V., WIRTZ, James J, FORTMANN, Michel. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, 384 p. ISBN 0-8047-5017-3.

PHILLIPS, Christopher. *Eyes Bigger Than Stomachs: Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in Syria*. In: Middle East Policy [online]. 2017, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 36-47. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/mepo.12250>

PHILLIPS, Christopher. *The Battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new Middle East*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2016, 303 p. ISBN 978080300217179.

PRADHAN, Prasanta Kumar. *Arab Spring and Sectarian Faultlines in West Asia: Bahrain, Yemen and Syria*. New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2017, 157 p. 978-93-86618-05-4.

RYAN, Curtis R. *Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East*. In: POEMPS Studies 34: Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East [online]. 2019, vol. 34, p. 7-13. Available at: https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/POMEPS_Studies_34_Web.pdf

SADEGHI-BOROJERDI, Eskandar. *Strategic Depth, Counterinsurgency and the Logic of Sectarianization: The Islamic Republic of Iran's Security Doctrine and Its Regional Implications*. In: Nader H., Danny P., ed. *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*. Hurst Publishers, 2017.

SALEM, Paul. *Working toward a Stable Regional Order*. In: Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science [online]. 2016, vol. 668, no. 1, p. 36-55. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002716216666263>

SHEEHAN, Michael. *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*. London: Routledge, 1996, 229 p. ISBN 0-203-34461-8.

SNYDER, Glenn H. *Alliances, balance and stability*. In: International Organization [online]. 1991, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 121-142. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2706698.pdf>

TZEMPRIN, Athina, JOZIĆ, Jugoslav, LAMBARÉ, Henry. *The Middle East Cold War: Iran-Saudi Arabia and the Way Ahead*. In: Croatian Political Science Review [online]. 2015, vol. 52, no. 4-5, pp. 180-202. Available at: <https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=8c16435b-aaaa-4ecb-9a21-153d8a8376f2%40sessionmgr4006>

TYLER, Mackenzie, BOONE, Anthony M., ed. *Rivalry in the Middle East*. New York: Nova Publishers, 2012, 89 p. ISBN 978-1-62081-279-2.

The Arab American News. 2017-01-20. *Aoun: Ties with Saudi Arabia recovering*. [cit. 2019-05-03]. Available at:

<https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=f531b7bc-bf73-4a1e-b61d-6925d6791a79%40sdc-v-sessmgr05>

WALT, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. Cornell University: Cornell University Press, 1987, 321 p. ISBN 978-0-8014-9418-5.

WALTZ, K. *Theory of international politics*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1979, 251 p. ISBN 0-201-08349-3.

WASTNIDGE, Edward. *Iran and Syria: An Enduring Axis*. In: Middle East Policy [online]. 2017, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 148-159. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/mepo.12275>

Institute of Political Studies

Master's thesis project

Reasons for choosing the topic

There are various numbers of reasons why I decided to focus on Saudi-Iranian rivalry from a perspective of allying with non-state actors. Firstly, this specific case is in my opinion worth further studies. The post Arab spring era is characteristic in many ways and brought new phenomena into the Middle East. The regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia thus contains many specifics in the tools, which are used, with its indirect nature of the confrontation seen as another key component. Weakening the other through participating in several conflicts through proxies or gaining influence in other countries by using other types of non-state actors is interesting topic by itself and is changing the perception of the possibilities in future scenarios. The regional competition by interpretation through balance of power and proxy wars are separately well examined, but the combination is still not framed and conceptualized.

Balance of power theory is one of the most traditional theories, but the changing environment in IR is not reflected in its development and instead is often criticised for being obsolete anymore, especially after the end of Cold War. This is where I see the gap that needs to be filled. By incorporating new layers and levels of balancing, challenging the perception of state centrism or separation of hard and soft balancing the theory can be put into modern light. Therefore, examination of the role of non-state actors in the theory can make it more attuned to new realities.

Additionally, it is my personal interest in the topic of the Middle East dynamics, especially in the contemporary situation, which stands behind the choice of the thesis's focus. I have already written a few works related to this topic, for instance, about the Iranian bonds to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Also, I have been part of a simulation with the background of Yemeni civil war, which only widen my knowledge strengthen my desire to focus on the region itself even in bigger detail.

Goals of the thesis

For the purpose of the project and the thesis itself, I will approach defining goals of the work from two basic perspectives - of the theory and from an empirical point of view.

Firstly, the work will aim to examine if realist theories in general, particularly the balance of power theory, can still effectively react and explain changes of security situation

throughout the region. The original theory will be compared with the results of the examination if non-state actors can be considered as another key component of balance of power theory. Also, state centric approach or separation of hard and soft balancing will be challenged. The ultimate goal will be to make new contributions to the theoretical field by broadening the theory by adding a new layer of alliance-making and competition itself into balancing, as it goes beyond traditional understanding of the phenomena.

Furthermore, the thesis will seek to examine how state interests are shaped through using non-state actors and their activity in post Arab Spring era and how it helps to regional powers in gaining influential position. Focus will be placed on the interaction and how priorities of these actors affect each other and answering a question, if interest of the regional powers are shaped more by its foreign policies or proxies themselves. Also, the work will focus on a role of identity and ideology to see how the interaction between different actors is shaping and influencing the regional dynamics and competition.

Literature review

The topic related to the thesis is often approached from many different perspectives and offers various types of academic sources. From a theoretical point of view, a literature summarizing and operationalizing basic principles of structural realism and balance of power theory contains many classical texts. One of the best known is *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz, in which he argues, that structure of the system and international hierarchies, along with balancing, are key components of international system. Also, Stephen Walt's book *The Origins of Alliances* is considered valuable as the author emphasizes the importance of presence of threat for the act of balancing. The traditional theory is thus well examined and compiled, which is reflected in inclusion of these texts in works summarizing theoretical knowledge, including structural realism, such as *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* by Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith.

With changing security environment, there are also sources challenging these original definitions and approaches. Book *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* provides an argument, that although balancing was weakened by globalization, as structural realism claims, it is still present among minor powers or other layers of international system, which is not receiving much attention. Additionally, the article *The Balance of Power in the Balance* by Daniel H. Nexon examines the separated use of soft and hard balancing and claims, that tendencies to study their overlap need to be further developed.

More particularly, there is a lot of literature focusing on the case of Saudi-Iranian rivalry from a perspective of balance of power, for example Duran's and Yilmaz's article *Islam, Models and the Middle East: The New Balance of Power* focusing on specific power models in the region, or article by F. G. Gause *Ideologies, Alignments and Underbalancing* analysing regional balance of power through identity. Also, purely empirical literature studying context and general or highly detailed characteristics of the rivalry contains large variety of titles, for example books *The Syria-Iran Axis: Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations in Middle East*, *Rivalry in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and Iran: Politics and Economics of Middle East* or article *The Middle East Cold War: Iran-Saudi Arabia and the Way Ahead*.

Despite this variety of literature, the discipline still lacks work, which would reflect new tendencies challenging the classic theory, mainly its original state-centric approach. Particularly, not enough attention has been given to connection of empirical facts and knowledge with changing theoretical approaches, which are focused on balancing at lower levels of the international system, usage of more complex tools or inclusion of various types of actors. In consequence, claims, that realist theories are not adjusting to the contemporary world and their influence is thus weaker, are becoming far more frequent than before.

Introduction of the topic

In connection with complex dynamics and tensions throughout the Middle East, there have been many studies focusing on consequences of declining role of the US, rise of China and offshore balancing alongside with evident examinations related to nature of regional competitions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This rivalry has been gaining massive attention and is strengthened over time by long-lasting conflicts in the region and especially fragmentation of states, which gives space to rising influence of non-state actors. This thesis will offer broader picture of the regional competition by including a role of non-state actors and how are they involved in these

Although this case is seen as an example of balance of power theory, particularly balancing, in action, at the same time the specific components of this phenomena questions its basic realist assumptions about the international space, such as state-centric approach etc. Generally, the relevance of balance of power theory is argued to be on a decline after the end of Cold war and realist principles are perceived as less applicable to temporary global situation in international relations.

This work will thus offer a broader picture of the regional competition by including a role of non-state actors and examining how are they involved in the balancing itself. With that I will argue, that the theory has not lost its significance, but it needs to be accommodated to modern circumstances and new emerging phenomena, especially in the lower layers of international system. This opinion is supported by claims, that although balancing is not present on a global scale, it still exists on lower instances and among different actors, such as mentioned non-state actors.

In the Middle East, balancing as a process is perceived to be developing after the Arab spring with many uprisings and conflicts both regional powers can take advantage of now arose fresh opportunities. But the alliance-making to exploit these regional dynamics took different shape than the theory expected. The nation state ties disappeared and are challenged with shift to proxy wars. In these circumstances, the competition depends on ties with non-state actors, not with states themselves, and thus is affected by identity and ideological multipolarity in the region. Also, the support of these non-state actors contains both tools of hard and soft balancing, which is another key theoretical point for reconsideration.

These basic points will be a core of examination of the mentioned case of regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It will not only provide a space to analyse a role of non-state actors not only in regional dynamics, but also in forming foreign policy of the power they are supported by. Particularly, the thesis will aim to confirm the rise of importance of non-state actors in specific conflicts or clashes of interests in Syria, Lebanon and Bahrain. These cases represents spectrum of included different backgrounds of the regional competition and balancing, i.e. armed conflict, political conflict of fractions and conflict over control over particular regime, thus should be able to cover various types of behaviour of the theory and answer questions regarding role of non-state actors, how interaction with regional powers influence each other and, finally, the work will challenge classic definition of balance of power theory and will try to implement new phenomena of balancing and alliance-making into the existing theoretical framework.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Theoretical background of the thesis will build on basic arguments of structural realism, mainly through balance of power theory as a main framework for analysis. The main principle is that balance of power is comes into play with a threat of external domination by another state or group of states or when actors are convinced, that their independence is in danger, and

therefore they seek survival in anarchical and rational international system with relying on self-help, as they are uncertain about intention of other actors inside the system.

In the classic structural realist notion, balance of power is seen as a predominate outcome in international politics and precludes the creation of international hierarchies and alliances. Units in anarchic system have an interest in maximizing chances of their survival and seek to compensate adversaries mainly by balancing, either internal, defined as building own capabilities, or external, as aggregating capabilities with other actors and units in alliances. (DUNNE, KURKI, 2013; WALTZ, 1979). The work will thus put emphasis on factor of threat, terms such as hard, soft or asymmetric balancing and overcoming limits of using only military related instruments in an environment with increasing complexity of used tools.

Methodology

The thesis, defined as disciplined case study of three selected conflicts (Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain), will build on further operationalization terms of balancing, alliance-making or non-state actors in context of proxy wars and regional conflicts and their application to activity of Iran and Saudi Arabia throughout the Middle East.

The analysis as a core of the work will use data connected to foreign policies and used practices of particular actors, mainly from secondary sources, or discourse of key policy makers or leaders. The outcomes will be result of an examination of three picked case studies representing the influential ties of both regional powers to non-state actors from different parts of the region and different conflicting situations. The analysis will be derived from a theoretical background of balance of power theory, i.e. perception of threat, alliance-making strategies for both powers, and ties forming particular interests. Results of analysis and most significant findings will then be summarized to form a coherent picture about the nature of balancing and set up with a classic structural realist theory in a context of defined research questions:

RQ1: Is nature of balancing and alliance making in the Middle East different from how realist theory defines it?

RQ2: Are interests of regional powers (Saudi Arabia, Iran) shaped by their alliances with non-state actors or through their activity?

RQ3: Can we perceive a non-state actor as the key component of the balance of power theory, along with states?

Expected structure of the thesis

- Introduction
- Theoretical part
 - o Balance of power as structural realist theory
 - o Critical reflection of balance of power theory
 - o Non-state actors in contemporary theoretical conception
- Methodology
- Core and development of Saudi-Iranian rivalry and competition in the Middle East
- Saudi-Iranian regional balancing through non-state actors: case studies
 - o Syrian civil war
 - o Sectarian conflict in Lebanon
 - o Bahrain political regime
 - o Evaluation of the findings from the empirical and theoretical perspective
- Summary
- Conclusion

Key literature

BOONE, Anthony M., MACKENZIE, Tyler. *Rivalry in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and Iran: Politics and Economics of the Middle East*. Hauppague: Nova Science Publishers, 2012.

DUNNE, Tim, KURKI, Milja, SMITH, Steve. Structural Realism. In: *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 3. ed.

DURAN, Burhanettin, YILMAZ, Nuh. *Islam, Models and the Middle East: The New Balance of Power following the Arab Spring*. In: *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* [online]. 2013, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 139-170.

GAUSE, F. Gregory. *Ideologies, Alignments and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War*. In: *Political Science and Politics*. 2017, vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 672-675.

NEXON, Daniel H. *The Balance of Power in the Balance*. In: *World Politics* [online]. 2009, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 330-359.

PAUL, T.V., WIRTZ, James J, FORTMANN, Michel. *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

TZEMPRIN, Athina, JOZIČ, Jugoslav, LAMBARÉ, Henry. *The Middle East Cold War: Iran-Saudi Arabia and the Way Ahead*. In: *Politicka Misao: Croatian Political Science Review* [online]. 2015, vol. 52, no. 4/5, pp. 187-202.

VON MALTZAHN, Nadia. *The Syria-Iran Axis: Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations in the Middle East*. New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013.

WALT, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. Cornell University: Cornell University Press, 1987.

WALTZ, K. *Theory of international politics*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1979.