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**Foreign Aid as a Variable in the Equation of the War in
Yemen**

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
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In Prague on

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQAP – al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

EEAS – European External Action Service

EU – the European Union

EUR - Euro

FAO – Food and Agricultural Organization

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

IOM – International Organization for Migration

ISIS/ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

SAR – Saudi Riyal

SPA – Saudi Press Agency

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

US – United States of America

USD – United States Dollar

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republic

WHO – World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The war in Yemen has been raging throughout the country for almost five years, with no prospects of an absolute resolution anytime soon. The consequences of the fighting and violence will haunt the Yemeni reality for many years to come. Yemen has been struggling for most of its contemporary existence, if not with violence then with economic hardship, which is closely linked to all other aspects of the public functioning of the country, being one of the poorest and least developed in the world. Its strategic position, bordering oil-rich countries in the Arabian Peninsula, at the shore of the Red Sea and having the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb in its seas, should have brought many benefits to the geopolitical status of Yemen and its economy. Rather, it put Yemen at the heart of the power struggle between regional powers like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. Yemen also became closely tied with the security of the Red Sea and the marine trade that passed through Bab al-Mandeb as many countries in Asia, Africa and Europe secure oil and other shipments via this route. Furthermore, security threats, emanating from AQAP and more recently from ISIS affiliates, are also ever-present.

The war in Yemen is a combination of a civil war, a foreign military intervention, a UN sanctions regime and a humanitarian crisis. The conflict has roots in the history of Yemen and is not only a religious struggle as it may seem at first look as a Sunni-Shia war, but it stems primarily from economic and political problems. Yemen is now divided internally between the Houthi movement and the internationally recognized government and their respective supporters and allies, as well as the separatists in the south of the country. In 2011, Yemen's former president Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to resign and handover the presidency to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, a deal brokered by the GCC following pro-democracy protests of the Yemeni people as a wave of the Arab Spring that started in other Arab countries. This was a welcomed move seen as a step towards democratization and liberalization of the country. At this stage of the Yemeni Revolution, the Houthis were on the side of the opposition to Saleh's rule. They also had a seat at the table of the so-called National Dialogue, mediated by the GCC and the UN, which was supposed to ensure a peaceful transition of power from Saleh to Hadi. In 2015, the Houthis took over Sanaa, seized the presidential palace and declared the formation of a new government, which launched the civil war in the country.

It is obvious that the issue in Yemen is multi-layered and complicated as it is hard to grasp the full context of the interests and involvement of local as well as foreign actors. For that matter, this thesis chose to address the narratives of those actors towards Yemen, that reflect their identities and could lead to understanding their direct and hidden interests in the country. The thesis will have a special focus on the humanitarian situation in Yemen as it became crucial for the living conditions of the population and as a point of interest in the narratives of all actors.

This research will attempt to answer the question: how do different actors construct the war in Yemen and the humanitarian crisis in their discourses and narratives? In order to do so, it will base its theoretical background on the constructivist understanding of identity. This will aim to define identity as a social construct, shaped by collective components of knowledge, symbols, language and norms. Hence, the need to understand how identities are formulated, how they operate and affect actions. That part will draw from the abundant literature available on constructivism like the works of Alexander Wendt, as one of the main proponents of constructivism, such as his most significant publications *Social theory of International Politics*; *Collective identity formation of the international state* and *Anarchy is what states make of it*.

National interest that stems from the identity of an actor should help explaining the significance of Yemen to the chosen actors in this thesis. The explanation of that concept will use also the works of authors such as Hopf and Weldes. Furthermore, narratives are the medium, through which each actor will try to justify, explain and/or legitimize certain behaviour and actions. For that matter, actors tend to refer to certain norms, international standards or any standard of appropriateness. Ergo, there is a necessity to communicate among actors, alluding to language and discourse. Norms are best explained by Finnemore and Sikkink, while the understanding of strategic narrative will be based on the publication *Strategic narratives: communication power and the new world order* by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle. Finally, the publication of Lene Hansen, *Security as practice discourse analysis and the Bosnian War*, offers a deep insight into the poststructuralist theory, which understands foreign policy as a discursive practice.

Having focused on the notion, listed above, from a theoretical point of view, the empirical part of this thesis will apply them in analysing the narratives of the Houthis, Saudi Arabia and the EU towards the war in Yemen and the humanitarian situation in it. The constructivist

theory is rather state-centric, but the identity principles can be applied to state as well as non-state actors. Hence, the empirical part will apply that theory to three different types of actors: the Houthis as a sub-state actor, Saudi Arabia as a state and the EU as a supra-state institution.

Despite the variety of literature on the topic of Yemen, the discipline lacks a constructivist approach to the narratives of those three actors towards Yemen. This thesis will thus try to fill that gap by providing an analytical review of the discussed question. Thus, chapter 6 of this thesis has the aim to outline the main narratives from official statements and sources and provide an analysis for each actor.

Discourse and narrative analyses will be based on primary sources in their original languages – Arabic for Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, and English for the EU. This will represent another value of this thesis, especially in Western research, as the author is a native Arabic speaker and has the cultural competence to properly identify notions. At this point, it is important to stress that this work is not concerned with the factual credibility of the used sources and is also aware of a certain degree of direct or indirect censorship in the case of Saudi Arabia. However, this will not limit the analysis as it will not be focusing on secondary sources nor on media presentation of the conflict and the academic research on it. The EU will be considered here as an institution with no regard to the narratives presented by its member states individually. Finally, a comparative conclusion will be presented at the end of this thesis.

1. CONSTRUCTIVISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Constructivism defends the importance of international norms in their view of international politics as a society rather than a system. It focuses on identity, norms and culture and how they shape patterns of war and peace. In this sense, understanding state and non-state actors' behaviour requires the inclusion of norms and ideas, which also reflect how they see the world and themselves. The end of the Cold War brought the debate of national interest and how it related to national identity. This is the period when constructivism gained momentum over traditional theories that could not explain the end of the Cold War. Idealism and holism are at the core of constructivism – the importance of ideas in world politics (idealism) and the recognition that actors have some autonomy to construct, reproduce or transform structures through interactions (holism or structuralism). Hence, ideas are social as they are shaped by collective components of knowledge, symbols, language and rules.¹

The main idea that constructivists put forward revolves around reality being socially constructed, meaning that actors are produced by their cultural environment and that interests are socially constructed from identity. In other words, “*reality does not exist out there waiting to be discovered, instead, historically produced and culturally bound knowledge enables individuals to construct and give meaning to reality*”². Constructivism divides the reality into brute and social facts: the brute facts, whose existence does not depend on human agreement such as material factors, and the social facts that are dependent on it, like terrorism and human rights.³ Constructivism does not necessarily disregard material factors, but they argue that international politics are structured on a social rather than on a material basis, which shapes identities and interests, not just behaviour. Thus, constructivism recognizes that shared knowledge, material resources and practices constitute social structures. For example, shared knowledge is what differentiates between trust and distrust that respectively defines a security community and a security dilemma.⁴ Furthermore, it is this structure of shared knowledge, in which material factors embedded in, that gives them a meaning.⁵

¹ Barnett, “Social Constructivism.”

² Ibid., 158.

³ Barnett, “Social Constructivism.”

⁴ Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” 72–73.

⁵ Ibid., 73.

Social structures manifest in practices as they exist only in process – “*not in the actor’s heads nor in material capabilities.*”⁶

1.1.CONSTRUCTIVISM AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Wendt argues that collective meanings form the structures, in which actors acquire relatively stable identities, role-specific understandings and expectations about themselves.⁷ Constructivism is concerned with the meaning the actors give to their behaviour and action⁸ - people act towards other actors based on the meanings that those actors represent to them. For instance, states perceive differently friends and enemies, and thus act in different ways towards them.⁹ As identity lays at the basis of interests, actors formulate their interests depending on the social context. It means that actors do not have an independent set of interests, but they identify their interests in the process of defining situations.¹⁰ In other words, states assume certain identities, which influence their interests and behaviour.

Furthermore, constructivism identifies two different types of identities – the corporate and the social. The corporate identity describes the internal and individual constitution of an actor by self-organizing qualities. This identity emerges internally and entirely depends on the actor regardless of the surrounding environment and other actors. For instance, a person’s corporate identity would be the body and the consciousness, while an organization’s corporate identity is its individuals, material resources, beliefs and institutions that form the framework, in which the individuals function as a “we”.¹¹ The interests that stem from this corporate identity revolve around the actor’s security including physical security and thus be recognized as an actor by others, ontological security and the predictability in relationships with the world (the desire for stable social identities), and development which should meet the human’s aspiration for a better life.¹² Ontological security is an important interest for the context of this thesis as it represents the security of the self, not of the body, and of the subjective sense that enables and motivates action and choice. Nevertheless, the need for this ontological security require a relatively stable understanding of the self. It does not necessarily mean that the understanding must be unchanging but on the contrary change

⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁷ Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” 397.

⁸ Barnett, “Social Constructivism.”

⁹ Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” 396–97.

¹⁰ Ibid., 398.

¹¹ Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State,” 385.

¹² Ibid.

is an important component of learning and development. Actions must be able to sustain the stability as their consequences will either reproduce or contradict identities. Hence, identity influences and determines actions, which in turn sustains that identity, making it a dynamic process.¹³

The social identity represents the sets of meanings that an actor ascribes to itself considering the perspective of others, making that actor a social object. Those meanings form the essential link through which the actors define who they are externally in relation to a situation. Hence, an actor might have multiple social identities, compared to the corporate identity that is unique and singular for each actor.¹⁴ Social identities are a relational, intersubjective and contextual concept as they involve other actors and depend on the context they are being set in. For example, a state can have various identities as sovereign, democratic, European, developed, and so on. In other words, “*identity is an inherently social definition of the actor grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another and which constitute the structure of the social world*”.¹⁵ Relatively stable intersubjective identities create durable expectations between states as they offer predictable pattern of behaviour.¹⁶

Social identity allows actors to perceive certain situations as requiring taking actions, which in turn leads to the definition of their interests in certain ways. Thus, social identity is essential in defining the means through which an actor is going to fulfil the needs and interests that derive from its corporate identity.¹⁷ Seen their characteristics, social identity and interests are stable in specific contexts and subject to change when in the process of social interactions. However, actors tend to aim at representing themselves in certain ways, alluding to stability which is not a given fact.¹⁸

Social identities are developed through two causal selections – through natural and cultural selection, the former referring to the materialist and the latter to the idealist approaches to the process of identity formation.¹⁹ Natural selection is about the reproductive success of the subject. It occurs in an environment where it is relatively difficult to survive and reproduce.

¹³ Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics,” 344.

¹⁴ Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State,” 385.

¹⁵ Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” 398.

¹⁶ Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” 174.

¹⁷ Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State,” 385.

¹⁸ Ibid., 386.

¹⁹ Wendt, “Process and Structural Change,” 320.

In those conditions, adapting becomes closely tied to the survival and preservation of the subject: the difficulty of the situation makes the reproductive success highly sensible to the changes in the environment as the fate (replacement or reproduction) of the subject is better determined when survival is difficult not when it is easy. This means that natural selection takes place when an organism poorly adapts in a given environment of scarce resources, fail to reproduce and is consequently replaced by the better adapted.²⁰ Therefore, in international political terms, natural selection became less relevant in explaining contemporary events and actors' identities as the survival conditions of states, the main actor according to constructivism, got easier with the Westphalian system of 1648.²¹

On the other hand, cultural selection represents the evolutionary mechanism that ensures *“the transmission of the determinants of behaviour from individual to individual, and thus from generation to generation, by social learning, imitation or some other similar process.”*²² It does not consider the reproductive failure of actors but examines their cognitive, rational and intentional capacities. For constructivism, cultural selection formulates through the two mechanism of imitation and social learning that, in turn, explain identities and interests.²³

Actors tend to imitate the self-understanding of other actors that they perceive as successful. Although there is no one practical definition to success, it can be categorized into material success, represented by power and wealth, and status success related to prestige. The measurement of that success requires some standards, that are formed by various shared understandings in different cultural contexts at a given place and time. While conquering other states was once considered as a great state success, it is rather seen today as a behaviour of a rogue actor. Compared to natural selection, imitation manifests faster effects on groups of people even within a generation – as quickly as it takes for an idea to show success.²⁴ However, in some cases, it is interesting to observe, as the empirical part will prove, that states adapt their narratives to suit the international standards and give justifications that fulfil the level of international acceptance, but their behaviour do not fully reflect that.

²⁰ Ibid., 321.

²¹ Ibid., 323.

²² Boyd and Richerson, “Sociobiology, Culture and Economic Theory,” 102.

²³ Wendt, “Process and Structural Change,” 324–25.

²⁴ Ibid., 325–26.

Social learning can be explained as the process through which identities and their corresponding interests are learned and then reinforced in response to how actors are treated by other significant actors. Thus, actors process the views that other actors have of them and internalize them into their own identity and interests, noting that the other actors have to be significant (through power or dependency) to the initial self.²⁵ If an actor is treated as an enemy, it is likely that it will incorporate that hostility into its own view of itself in regard to others. Usually, actors bring to their encounter, their own preconceived ideas about who they are, which assigns them with tentative roles as a starting point to the interaction. These preconceived ideas are considered as exogenous here, although they were probably also formed through previous social interactions. This leads to role-taking and alter-casting. Role-taking means that the actor chooses a self-representation regarding the interaction and consequently chooses what are the interests to pursue. Theoretically, actors can freely choose the representation/role they want to embody while in real life situations, that choice is somehow conditioned by pre-existing shared understandings. Nevertheless, role-taking is a concept of choice despite how reflective or unreflective that choice might be in practice. When a person enters a classroom, it is expected that person will assume the role of a teacher or student, but there is still the option of the choice to enter as an opera singer.²⁶

Moreover, role-taking is accompanied with alter-casting: in the process of choosing a role, an actor also “casts” the other actor of the interaction with a counter-role that would make the chosen identity meaningful. Most of the time, both interacting parties have a shared understanding, meaning that they will assess the situation similarly and thus assume corresponding roles that will make the interaction go smoothly.²⁷ In the example of the classroom, the person entering as a teacher can move on with the class, since the other people in the room are viewed by the teacher and by themselves as students. In other words, actors coming to an interaction construct a definition of the situation. This leads back to the initial constructivist claim that actors act toward other subjects on the basis of the meaning those have for them, that in turn originates from the understanding of a certain situation.²⁸ Different concepts and situations have different meanings for various actors and sometimes the meanings can diverge making the actors fight to try to enforce their favoured meaning

²⁵ Ibid., 327.

²⁶ Ibid., 328–29.

²⁷ Ibid., 329.

²⁸ Ibid.

as collectively accepted. Seen that those meanings condition politics that in turn shape and affect the lives of individuals, leads to another understanding of power.²⁹

1.2.COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The question that arises here is whether the actors' social identity produce self or collective interests. In other words, self and collective interests form the spectrum of the extent and the manner "*in which social identities involve an identification with the fate of the other*"³⁰. This spectrum goes from positive to negative according to whether the actor sees the other as an attraction or a repulsion to the self on a specific issue (whether the other actor is perceived as a cognitive extension of the self or as independent). When the identification with the other is negative, the formulation of interests take place without regard to the other and vice versa. For example, it is in this identification that lays the difference between alliance and collective security – while self-interested actors rally around an alliance as an instrumental tool against a specific threat, collective security is based on multilateral commitments against nonspecific threats. Similarly, collective identity is built on more generalized principles of conduct, such as reciprocity.³¹ Hence, identities and interests are not exogenous to a situation nor unchangeable but are rather endogenous and by consequence a dependent variable that is in process.³²

Although collective identity can explain many phenomena, it also has some limitations. First, collective identity is relationship specific – when actor A identifies with actor B, this says nothing about A's stance to a third actor. Second, collective identity is closely related to the encounter/incident and hence the behaviour it generates is issue or threat specific. Third, collective identity often clashes with egoistic identities, even in situations covering the relationship and issue premises. As a result, cases where collective identity takes the form of a complete identification are scarce.³³

Moreover, there are some variables that reduce the egoistic identities in favour of the collective. Interdependence, common fate and homogeneity are efficient causes of collective identity while self-restraint is a permissive cause. Those factors, or what Wendt calls as master variables, are in direct correlation with collective identity formation. Nevertheless,

²⁹ Barnett, "Social Constructivism."

³⁰ Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," 386.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wendt, "Process and Structural Change," 336.

³³ Ibid., 337.

self-restrain is a key variable that conditions the occurrence of that formation, as it is the variable that allows actors to overcome the fundamental problem of collective identity formation and that is the fear of one's identity being absorbed by the other's.³⁴

Interdependence indicates to which extent an outcome of an interaction for each party depends on the choices of the others.³⁵ However, interdependency is restrained by the fear of exploitation because increasing interdependence enhances vulnerability, which in turn gives ground to objective insecurity.³⁶ Common fate alludes to the dependence of individual survival or welfare of an actor on the fate of the group.³⁷ In this context, it is usually identified in regard to an external threat to the group. On the other hand, common fate does not imply the need for interaction like interdependence, since it requires a third party, to whom a group may have a common fate even without their interaction.³⁸ It does not necessarily lead to collective identity, as in some cases distrust prevents actors from working together against a common threat.³⁹ In addition, homogeneity or likeness of the corporate (institutional form, function, causal powers) or the type (e.g. states' regime type) of identities contribute to the formation of the collective identity, when actors see themselves as being alike along the dimensions of the definition of the group. It suggests that easing internal differences, which may lead to external conflict, will increase the probability of the parties' interests to meet.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, distinct groups of actors exist on the premises that there is a cognitive boundary that differentiates them from each other. Homogeneity threatens this boundary and thus challenges the group's *raison d'être*.⁴¹ That being said, to trigger collective identity, interdependence, common fate and homogeneity must fulfil the objectivity criterion – subjectivity or “being in the same boat” is constitutive and not casual to collective identity.⁴²

Furthermore, the challenges of collective identity formation, mentioned above, can be solved through the actors' belief that the others will constrain themselves and do not have the desire to swallow them up. When an actor contains itself, it is easier for other actors to step forward

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 343.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 344.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 353–54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁴² Wendt, “Process and Structural Change.”

and identify with that actor, who in turn identify with the other actors. Self-restrain also needs some positive incentives to generate collective identity, otherwise it would just lead to indifference. In other words, self-restrain is the variable that enables the other three master variables to be realized, making it the ultimate basis for collective identity.⁴³

1.3.NORMS AND RULES

By definition, a norm is a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity.⁴⁴ The conceptualization of norms faces a challenge as it is sometimes interchanged with the language of institutions. However, norms and institutions differ in aggregation – a norm delimits a single standard of behaviour while an institution represents a group of practices, rules and the way they function together.⁴⁵ Constructivism categorizes them into regulative and constitutive rules. Regulative rules regulate already existing behaviour activities like WTO's trade regulations, while constitutive rules create the possibility for these activities to happen, like sovereignty. Rules and norms are not unvarying, but they develop with practice, reflection and arguments. The evolution of the norms consecutively affects state identities and interests. This poses the differentiation between the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. The former points to the fact that certain action is taken by measuring the costs and benefits while the latter attributes actions based on the principle of legitimacy. In fact, these two logics are not excluding one another, and sometimes can mean that the more an activity appears illegitimate, the higher its potential cost.⁴⁶ There is also a less-known third category of norms and that is of the evaluative or prescriptive norms. It sets the rightness of behaviour, which is what discerns norms from other kinds of rules. Thus, norms give a sense of appropriate behaviour that requires inter-subjectivity and evaluation – behaviour is qualified according to the shared moral assessment and the judgments of a certain group. Consequently, actors promoting certain norms would rarely judge them as bad, such as racial superiority at some point in time.⁴⁷

Moreover, norms evoke a need for justification of actions as they embody that notion of right and appropriate behaviour, which in turn leads to communication among actors. An actor

⁴³ Ibid., 359–60.

⁴⁴ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," 891.

⁴⁵ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change."

⁴⁶ Barnett, "Social Constructivism."

⁴⁷ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," 891–92.

feels the need to justify and explain its actions only when there is a recognized norm that goes against its behaviour.⁴⁸

Generally, the behaviour of state or international actor is judged according to international norms that are closely related to the domestic ones. In fact, many international norms started as domestic and were pushed to the international context by various advocates. The relationship between international and domestic norms goes both ways, as the international also influences the domestic, especially when domestic actors use international norms to support their positions.⁴⁹ Norms are also related to international stability as the international distribution of ideas determines the international structure. “*Shared ideas, expectations, and beliefs about appropriate behaviour are what give the world structure, order and stability*”⁵⁰.

1.4.NATIONAL INTEREST AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF POWER

Unlike neorealism that emphasizes anarchy as a condition permitting wars to occur, Wendt claims that “anarchy is what states make of it” – for neorealists, the states are self-interested and security-oriented because of the systemic environment of anarchy while constructivists see anarchy as state-made.⁵¹ Anarchy is what states make of it because identities and interests rely not only on the structure of the system but also on the collective meanings given to the structure organizing state action.⁵² Weldes builds up on that by defining national interests as social constructions created out of the intersubjective and culturally established meanings, with which the international system and the state’s position in it is given meaning.⁵³

The notion of national interest has been considered in explaining state action, and thus in interpreting international politics. National interest is the language of state action in regard to the making of foreign policy. Policymakers set the tone of their state’s foreign policy and the goals to be pursued in it through the lens of national interest. In turn, national interest represents the scale through which state action gains legitimacy and political support. Constructivism understands national interest as a social construction.⁵⁴ The identity of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 892.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 893.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 894.

⁵¹ Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It.”

⁵² Weldes, “Constructing National Interests,” 279.

⁵³ Ibid., 280.

⁵⁴ Weldes, “Constructing National Interests.”

actor dictates its preferences and consequently its behaviour/actions – interests are the product of identities. For instance, a state that identifies itself as a great power will behave differently than a state with the identity of an EU member.⁵⁵ Many steps precede acting, as state officials need to first interpret the situation the state is facing and the adequate response to it. This interpretation assumes that the officials deciding the state's action and the audience that should perceive this action as legitimate, share a language. Hence, national interest is constructed through shared meanings and understanding of the international system and the place of the state in it.⁵⁶

The power of the actor lays in its ability to get the other actor to see the things and understand the situation its way. In fact, each party involved in the encounter rewards the support of their definition of the situation and punishes behaviour that do not support that definition. However, the components and factors of power depend on the given situation, as nuclear weapons will be of little significance in a trade encounter.⁵⁷ Constructivists believe in the power of discourse, beside material power, and as a result, enhances the importance of knowledge, ideas, culture, ideology and language.⁵⁸

2. STRATEGIC NARRATIVES

The turn of the century has brought many changes to the arena of international politics as new media systems were becoming more involved in that field – it affected the range of actors in international relations and the way politics are conducted. Hence, narratives, the formation and projection in a communication environment, help explain contemporary international affairs.⁵⁹ The book “Strategic Narratives” argues that the end of the Cold War, similarly to the end of any major international incidents like the two world wars, was a turning point for the international order. The changing communication environment is making it more difficult for leading powers to justify their strategic narratives that they use to define that international system.⁶⁰

Narratives are in some cases interchangeable with the word story – the story that an actor presents with the goal of making others understand it and identify themselves with it.⁶¹ This

⁵⁵ Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory.”

⁵⁶ Weldes, “Constructing National Interests.”

⁵⁷ Wendt, “Process and Structural Change,” 331.

⁵⁸ Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” 177.

⁵⁹ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, “Introduction,” 1.

⁶⁰ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, “Introduction.”

⁶¹ Slaughter, “Preface,” 4.

falls in line with Nye's concept of soft power that recognizes the power of attraction along with the power of coercion and the material factors of power. For instance, the EU has a growing international standing without having any formal structure of hard/material power capabilities.⁶² The concept of narratives is a framework, in which people connect actions and events in a causal manner and give them a sense. This process aims to give a meaning to all parts of the whole. Thus, narratives offer a structure through which a meaning is established and includes the actors, events, plot and time, setting and space.⁶³ Explained differently, narratives of events are templates through which new events are given a meaning and are expected to unfold. For instance, the anti-communist revolutions in Eastern Europe as template to the 2011 Arab Spring, demanding regime change.⁶⁴

Furthermore, communication and history are an essential source of power because, as Castells puts it, "*the fundamental battle being fought in society is the battle over the minds of the people*"⁶⁵. Thus, it is the way people think that decide norms and rules that societies live by. Shaping minds holds such an importance because it is a sustainable method for upholding institutional systems, seen that it is more effective than torturing bodies and repression. It is also through the collective thinking that change takes place – the system will ultimately change when the majority's thinking starts contradicting the institutionalized norms and values. Seen that the public socialized communication is at the heart of the social production of meaning, power relationships, that are the basis of every society, work through communication. Consequently, the digital age extended the reach of communication to all aspects of social life and revolutionized that concept as it allowed the masses to broadcast and narrate to many, an ability that was exclusive to elites.⁶⁶ This closely relates with public diplomacy and its new practices. In fact, public diplomacy is now offering the public a medium to interact with politicians and information sources, as well as each other, especially through social media platforms. It allows leaders to engage publics not only at home but abroad to the extent when public diplomacy is used to fulfil some key goals like influencing foreign publics, so they put pressure on their own governments, to implement certain policies.⁶⁷

⁶² Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, "Introduction," 3–4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁵ Castells, "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society," 238.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 238–39.

⁶⁷ Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, "Introduction," 5.

Moreover, various actors use narratives as means to strategic goals. It is a way to influence and manage expectations, and construct the shared meaning of the past, present and future, which in turn shapes the behaviour of actors on a domestic as well as international level. Ultimately, accepting certain strategic narrative leads to the definition of interests, identity and understanding.⁶⁸ Goals (such as diverting attention or agenda setting) and types of communication (such as persuasion or argument) are essential to comprehend the formation of strategic narratives, which can have a short or long term aspects. Political actors need the public opinion to perceive that a certain policy is legitimate and hence acquire policy legitimacy.⁶⁹

Finally, the media ecology, that the communication is embedded in, is crucial to the process of narrative formation. As the media environment has become so diverse in the twenty-first century, the speed of the dissemination of information have exceeded the speed of the leadership's ability to control it. Hence, it empowers non-state actors and gives them space to have a say in domestic as well as foreign policies. It also gives them the opportunity to communicate their own narratives and challenge others.⁷⁰ Nowadays, the political system and citizens communicate with each other through media outlets. Ergo, politics are mainly media politics – political actors present their actions to the media with the aim to gain support or at least avoid hostility from the citizens, who are the consumers of the political market.⁷¹

3. DISCOURSE PRACTICE

Discourses are the basis of communications (bodies of knowledge about science, law, history, etc.) and hence is used by actors to form narratives. The difference between discourse and narrative is the structure discourse gives to the narrative and the causal transformation that narrative gives to events.⁷² Actors make sense of their sensory impressions through categories/models/principles, meaning that they use language, as a social system with its own relational logic, to mediate these sense data and produce reality. The meanings and perceptions are hence socially constructed – discourse analysis labels

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11–12.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 14–16.

⁷¹ Castells, “Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society,” 240.

⁷² Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, “Introduction,” 9–10.

them as “representations”. For instance, a person asked to draw a cup will draw it with a handle because cups, by definition, are supposed to have handles.⁷³

Consequently, the recurrence of certain representations turns into statements and practices through which language is institutionalized over time. Thus, a representation takes up a position in the discourse, which similarly to representations may be dominant or marginalized to different extent. The discourse analysis demonstrates for example why an actor is considered as an enemy by another, how it decided to go through with a certain option and how other options were casted aside. Furthermore, a discourse follows regularity in social relations and results in some preconditions for action, but it cannot completely determine behaviour – it only offers a range of possible outcomes.⁷⁴ *“It constrains what is thought of at all, what is thought of as possible, and what is thought of as the natural thing to do in a given situation”*⁷⁵.

Moreover, discursive practice is key in understanding foreign policy. From a poststructuralist point of view, foreign policy draws upon representations of identity and vice versa, as identities are also produced and reproduced through the formation of foreign policies. Poststructuralism deviates from constructivism in its claim that identities are not something that actors have independently of the discursive practices put in action while presenting and implementing foreign policy. Hence, foreign policy is a discursive practice closely linking ideas with material factors. It is also a social phenomenon because actors must address the opposition and the public in order to institutionalize their understanding of identities and the resulting policy options.⁷⁶

Poststructuralism assumes that policies rely on the representations of the threat, country, security problem or crisis they aim to address. Therefore, foreign policies require the understanding of the meaning assigned to a certain situation and the construction of the objects within it. For this to take place, an actor needs to refer to the identities of other states, regions, peoples and institutions, all while touching on its own national, regional and institutional identities.⁷⁷ As a result, identities are usually constructed in reference to

⁷³ Iver B., “Discourse Analysis,” 61.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 61–62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁶ Hansen, “Introduction,” 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

something it is not. To say a country is barbaric means that another identity of a civilized country is constituted.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the discursive ontology is closely connected to the understanding of language as essential to what is brought into being - "*language is social and political, and inherently unstable system of signs that generate meaning through a simultaneous construction of identity and difference*"⁷⁹. The construction of language is what gives things (objects, subjects, states, people and material structures) meaning and relate them to a specific identity. It is not only a transparent tool used to transmit information and data, but a social and political process.⁸⁰

Finally, the ultimate goal of foreign policymakers is to construct a link between the policy and identity that is acceptable to the relevant audience. For instance, president Bush constructed the Iraq question of 2003 in terms of the "oppressed Iraqi population" that was suffering at the hands of the "dictator" and in need of the "freedom and liberty" provided by the US intervention.⁸¹ In security terms, a problem, event, issue or fact to become a question of security needs to be successfully constructed within the political discourse as such.⁸²

4. METHODOLOGY

The research objective of this thesis is to compare the construction of one crisis by several actors. A special focus will be given to the interests and the involvement of those actors in regard to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Thus, the following empirical part will aim to answer the research question: **how do different actors construct the war in Yemen and the humanitarian crisis in their discourses and narratives?**

The empirical part of this thesis will draw on different concepts presented in the theory. The notion of national interest will guide the author in determining the reasons why the war in Yemen is important and should be studied in the first place, and why should different actors care about the crisis. Since national interest is constructed through shared meanings and understanding of the international system and the place of the state in it, language and discourse play an important role. As the theory showed, there is a close tie between an actor's

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁹ Hansen, "Discours Analysis, Identity, and Foreign Policy," 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁸¹ Ibid., 25.

⁸² Ibid., 30.

identity, its understanding of a certain situation and the behaviour it decides to demonstrate. Identities are socially constructed as they are shaped by collective components of knowledge, symbols, language and norms.

Constructivism is concerned with the meaning the actors give to their behaviour and action. The actors in the international system do not have a universal identity of maximizing power, but they construct their interests based on their identities, which are constantly evolving and changing. Thus, we need to first understand identity, that is reflected in the narrative an actor presents towards a given situation, and then we can comprehend the behaviour of that actor. One way of understanding identity is through discourse analysis and the identifying of strategic narratives.

This thesis will focus on different narratives, in which each actor will try to justify, explain and/or legitimize certain behaviour and actions. For that matter, actors tend to refer to certain norms, international standards or any standard of appropriateness. Actors also tend to justify and explain actions, when there is a recognized norm that goes against that behaviour. Ergo, justifying and explaining hold a necessity to communicate among actors, alluding again to language, discourse and narrative. The importance of that verbal communication lays in the fact that political actors are verbal entities that widely communicate with the domestic and foreign public, leaving very little of their foreign policies to non-verbal communication.⁸³

This thesis will present the specific case of the war in Yemen. Therefore, it will first provide a brief overview of the war in Yemen – the dynamics of the conflict, the actors involved in it and its importance as a subject of research in this work. The dynamics lay out a timeline, according to which the key event for the analysis will be identified. In fact, this thesis will consider March 2015 as the starting point for the timeframe of the analysis. It is the date when the Saudi-led coalition launched its intervention against the Houthis in Yemen. As the conflict is still ongoing, the research will be temporally reaching until the end of the year 2019. This also determines the actors that are worth being looked at in the Yemeni war. The choice of actors includes the Houthis, Saudi Arabia and the EU.

The constructivist theory is rather state-centric, but the identity principles can be applied to state as well as non-state actors. Hence, the empirical part will apply that theory to three

⁸³ Ibid., 21.

different types of actors: the Houthis as a sub-state actor, Saudi Arabia as a state and the EU as a supra-state institution.

Moreover, discourse analysis requires a certain cultural competence along with language skills and historical knowledge. The author is a native Arabic speaker, giving her the linguistic skills to read and work with material related to the Saudi as well as the Houthi narratives, in its original language. The author is also familiar with Arab Muslim culture, local and regional politics as well as the regional dynamics between different actors. This will allow her to grasp different notions and hence properly identify the narratives. Furthermore, this thesis acknowledges that a certain level of censorship prevails in Saudi Arabia and that the war situation in Yemen allows the manipulation of facts by the Houthis. However, the empirical part will look into the official narratives presented in primary sources, not looking at secondary sources where the censorship and factual credibility might have a bigger impact. Additionally, this thesis will consider the primary sources of the EU as an institution, away from the individual narratives of its Member States and the secondary sources that also operate in the public opinion sphere within the EU spheres. The case studies of Saudi Arabia and the EU will also show their engagement in Yemen, as they are outside actors. In other words, since Saudi Arabia and the EU are outside actors, their engagement and behaviour in regard to Yemen also reflect the narratives and their construction of the crisis.

First, the Yemen case study will be based on an analysis of a selection of statements, videos and social media posts from the side of the Houthis. The statements and videos will be drawn from the website of al-Masirah network, and the social media posts from its twitter page. Al-Masirah is a Houthi-run TV and media outlet. Second, the Saudi case study will be based on official statements and official sources such as the website and twitter posts of the Saudi Press Agency. Finally, the EU case study will be based on press releases and statements from the European Council as well as Twitter posts of its Delegation to Yemen. The author will aim in those case studies to identify the dominant narrative of each actor and how their identities and the subjects are constructed (their narrative of themselves as well as of the other actor).

5. CONFLICT ANALYSIS OF THE WAR IN YEMEN

Yemen has been facing internal tensions since the unification of the US and Saudi-backed north and the USSR-backed south in 1990. Ali Abdallah Saleh ruler of the North (in power since 1978) assumed the post of the president of the new country. Since the central government's control was not absolute over the whole territory, Saleh exercised a rule based on patronage, fuelling division among the Yemenis. Saleh succumbed to the protests in 2011 in exchange of immunity from prosecution, in favour of his vice-president, Abedrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The latter was supposed to launch a transition period, negotiated by the GCC, that should lead to the formulation of a new inclusive constitution for all the population by the so-called National Dialogue Conference (NDC).⁸⁴ The NDC was signed in Riyadh as a platform to solve Yemen's political problems. For instance, the issue of the southern separatist tendencies and rebellion were suggested to be resolved through the establishment of a federal system of government composed of six regions. Hence, the NDC included representatives from all the Yemeni regions and population's factions (including the Houthis), along with a 40% participation of the youth and 30% representation of women.⁸⁵ The NDC failed to establish stability on which a positive institutional change can be built and has so far not been successful as, delayed by the civil war, it did not yield a new constitution or elections.⁸⁶

The war in Yemen erupted in 2015 as the apogee of the failed power transition in 2011. The wave of the Arab Spring swept Yemen and forced its authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over the presidential power to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, following pro-democracy protests of the Yemeni people. This was a welcomed move seen as a step towards democratization and liberalization of the country.⁸⁷ The Houthis – adherent to the Zaidi Shia Islam that represent 35 to 40% of the 27 million⁸⁸ people Yemeni population and years-long opposition to the Saleh rule – used Hadi's struggle to face various problems like jihadi attacks, the separatist movement in the south, corruption, unemployment and food security.⁸⁹ They took over Sana'a, Yemen's capital and its largest city, seized the presidential palace and declared the formation of a new government between 2014 and 2015, which

⁸⁴ Laub, "Yemen in Crisis."

⁸⁵ Schmitz, "Yemen's National Dialogue."

⁸⁶ Laub, "Yemen in Crisis."

⁸⁷ Hlavsová, "Yemen."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Yemen Crisis."

triggered the civil war.⁹⁰ When the Houthis declared the formation of a new government in February 2015, Hadi was forced to resign but remained the internationally recognized president.⁹¹

Hadi declared in March 2015 the temporary nomination of Aden as the capital of Yemen and the move of the recognized government to Aden as the Houthis actions were illegitimate. In that same month, a Saudi-led coalition launched a military offensive and an economic isolation against the Houthis, in support of Hadi. A naval blockade has been also implemented to block shipments from Iran to their allies, the Houthis. UN-brokered peace talks between the two governments has been stalled in the summer of 2016. Hadi has been reportedly in exile in Saudi Arabia since December 2017.⁹²

The Houthis and the Saleh loyal security forces, that were once on opposing sides, joined forces against the government of Hadi. However, Saleh broke the alliance with the Houthis and encouraged his supporters to turn their arms against them, which led to Saleh's killing and the defeat of his forces within two days, in December 2017.⁹³ Thus, the conflict in Yemen cannot be simply labelled as a Sunni-Shia conflict, seen that religious differences were not at the heart of the fighting. On the contrary, the Houthis' demands, and the country's struggles were primarily economic and political – Yemen is the poorest country of the Arab world. Yet, the conflict is dragged, on a regional level, into the broader Sunni-Shia divide and the Iran-Saudi “cold war”.⁹⁴ In June 2018, government forces launched an attack on one of the main rebel-hold ports, the port of Hodeidah, because Iran had been allegedly providing the Houthis with weapons through that port.⁹⁵

The conflict between all parties is still ongoing. It is not a simple war between the government and the Houthis, but it is multilateral – there are separatists that are fighting in the south of the country (the Southern Transitional Council), AQAP is based and active in Yemen, the self-proclaimed Islamic State has an active cell in the country and many other groups and militias. The reasons and dynamics of those infights go beyond the scope of this work. However, Saudi Arabia negotiated, in November 2019 a power-sharing deal between the southern separatists and the Yemeni recognized government, in an attempt to save the

⁹⁰ “Global Conflict Tracker - War in Yemen.”

⁹¹ Laub, “Yemen in Crisis.”

⁹² “Global Conflict Tracker - War in Yemen.”

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Key Facts about the War in Yemen.”

⁹⁵ “Yemen's Conflict in 400 Words.”

anti-Houthi bloc.⁹⁶ This highlights the active involvement of Saudi Arabia in Yemen and its power to influence the course of action.

The civil war in Yemen is a combination of a civil war, a foreign military intervention, a UN sanctions regime and a humanitarian crisis.⁹⁷ The war quickly turned into a humanitarian crisis as a big portion of the population became entirely reliant on aid for survival with the danger of famine is imminent: it is estimated that 22 million of people are in need of assistance, eight million are at risk of famines, and one million of them has been affected by cholera.⁹⁸ In addition, the war caused for millions of people to flee their homes and become displaced inside the country, or to seek refuge in neighbouring countries like Djibouti and Somalia.⁹⁹ The above-mentioned port of Hodeidah is an important point of entry for a large part of the aid going into Yemen, along with supplies of wheat, rice and oil. The Saudi-led airstrikes have damaged many of the country's infrastructure like markets, food production facilities, roads and bridges. The battles also took a toll on the financial and economic situation as many people lost their jobs and/or have a lower purchasing power due to currency depreciation.¹⁰⁰

Several international actors are involved in the developments of the crisis, in all its aspects, as Yemen became a power struggle among regional superpowers like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran, and other international actors like the US and the EU. Saudi Arabia launched a military intervention in Yemen with the support of other countries. The coalition included in 2015 the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan that were actively involved in the military operations as they were sending aircrafts. In addition, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Pakistan were ready to take part in any ground offensive. The coalition was also supported by the US with logistical and intelligence assistance.¹⁰¹ It is worth noting that Oman is the only GCC country that did not participate in the intervention. While all the coalition countries are of Sunni majorities fighting against the Shia and Iran-backed Houthis, Oman is of Shia denomination. Hence, Oman's carefulness in taking part in such an offensive as religious affiliations are strong and play a major role in the geopolitical sphere

⁹⁶ Salisbury, "The Beginning of the End of Yemen's Civil War?"

⁹⁷ Hlavsová, "Yemen."

⁹⁸ "Global Conflict Tracker - War in Yemen."

⁹⁹ "Key Facts about the War in Yemen."

¹⁰⁰ Laub, "Yemen's Spiraling Crisis."

¹⁰¹ "Saudi Arabia Launches Air Strikes in Yemen."

in the region. In fact, Saudi Arabia and its allies consider the Houthis as Iran proxies and fear another Iran-influenced/dominated state in the region.¹⁰²

Seen the power status that the US holds in the international arena, their support or condemnation of a certain issue plays a big role in justifying the behaviour of others. On the same day as al-Jubeir's statement, the White House also issued a statement condemning the military actions taken by the Houthis against the "elected" government of Yemen and that are the reason behind the instability in the country. Moreover, the spokesperson acknowledged that the US are coordinating with the coalition "on issues related to their security" and are supporting the coalition's actions to "defend against Houthi violence" by providing them with logistical and intelligence support. The US are not going to participate directly in the military action but are establishing a Joint Planning Cell with Saudi Arabia to coordinate that support.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the US Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken visited Riyadh in April 2015, in an attempt to reaffirm the US security support to pro-US Arab Sunni regimes, obviously including Saudi Arabia (at the time of the US rapprochement with Iran).¹⁰⁴ During this visit, Blinken praised the Saudi work in showing the Houthis and their allies "that they cannot overrun Yemen by force" and announced the expedition of weapons deliveries to the Kingdom.¹⁰⁵ Yemen has been the target of the US counterterrorism operations against AQAP and the Yemeni branch of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The US conducted up to 200 strikes in Yemen since 2002. The US concern and involvement in the situation in Yemen originate from their interest in the Saudi infrastructure and security that could be threatened by the Houthis and the war, seen that Saudi Arabia is a strategic partner for the US regional policy and interests.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the coalition was accused of conducting airstrikes that are in breach of international law as many civilians were hurt, killed or materially influenced by the bombing. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen warned on May 10, 2015, that the conflict has taken "a dreadful toll on civilians", with his special concern over the airstrikes on the city of Sa'ada. He stated that "*thousands of more civilians were forced to flee their homes after the coalition declared the entire governate in Sa'ada a military target*"¹⁰⁷. In addition,

¹⁰² Botelho and Ahmed, "Saudi-Led Coalition Strikes Rebels in Yemen, Inflaming Tensions in the Region."

¹⁰³ Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Yemen."

¹⁰⁴ Aronson, "US to GCC."

¹⁰⁵ "US Steps up Arms for Saudi Campaign in Yemen."

¹⁰⁶ "Global Conflict Tracker - War in Yemen."

¹⁰⁷ "Yemen Conflict Is Taking 'Dreadful Toll' on Civilians – UN Top Relief Official."

OCHA claimed that coalition airstrikes have damaged the runways at Sana'a international airport, hindering the ability of emergency relief and medical workers to reach the country – this airport is among the airports and seaports that are considered as important lifelines.¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch blamed the coalition for violating the laws of war, for instance, when airstrikes targeted on March 30, 2015, a displaced-persons camp in northern Yemen and harmed a medical facility and a market.¹⁰⁹

More accusations followed in 2016 because of the continuation of the attack and military actions undertaken by the coalition in Yemen. Moreover, the latest allegations from September 2019 incriminated the UK, US and France for being complicit in the war crimes in Yemen by providing arms and support to the Saudi-led coalition, which in turn was accused to starve civilians as a war tactic. This could have put some pressure on the Western countries to reassess their arms deal with the coalition and to push the coalition to alter its behaviour.¹¹⁰

5.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRISIS

The significance of the crisis in Yemen stems from the understanding of the national interests of the different actors. The geographical position of Yemen plays a major role in the regional and international trade, security as well as geopolitics. Yemen should concern the world for the suffering of the population alone. However, different actors and the international community also have some interests in Yemen and what is happening there, leading to their involvement to various degrees and reasons. Nevertheless, Yemen's strategic position on the Red Sea gives it importance as the Red Sea area has become the bridge of the significant increase of Middle Eastern countries' engagement with their neighbours in the Horn of Africa; besides being one of the world's most heavily trafficked trade maritime routes. The Sea represents a trade connection between Europe, Asia and the Gulf, which makes it a critical location for the freedom of navigation. Hence, it is the subject of interest not only of the neighbouring countries but also of other powers like the EU; adding all up to the ongoing rivalry and competition for power and influence. The Red Sea security has become closely tied to the regional security, putting Yemen at the heart of it, especially that there are terrorist

¹⁰⁸ "Yemen," May 4, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ "Saudi Coalition/US."

¹¹⁰ Wintour, "UK, US and France May Be Complicit in Yemen War Crimes – UN Report."

organizations operating in Yemen, like al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates, whose threat is more emanate with the growing instability in the country.

Yemen is important for Saudi Arabia as the country presents yet another battleground for the Saudis to fight for power with Iran. This concerns the power status of the Kingdom in the region as it has been long interested in controlling the Yemeni politics and thus secure its outer borders. Additionally, the Red Sea and the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb are vital for the export of Saudi oil.

Moreover, EU member states have economic interests in Yemen – for example, France’s oil company Total operates on the Yemeni oil fields. Consecutively, the deteriorating situation in Yemen has direct consequences on the economy, not only of Yemen and the region, but also on the EU. The EU also has great potential to playing a key role in resolving the crisis. The EU does not succumb in its foreign policy to a member state, but it is a collective effort, hence it cannot be accused of serving the interests of one member like other international organizations. The EU has members, like Germany, that have a relation with the Houthis (Germany gave asylum to the brother of a Houthi leader for several years) – those ties give Germany some credibility in the eyes of the Houthis, who in turn might be willing to negotiate with the Germans. In addition, Yemen is a chance for the EU to prove its humanitarian and human security narrative in practice.

6. ACTORS IN THE WAR IN YEMEN – THEIR INTERESTS AND HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT

6.1. THE HOUTHIS

This part of the thesis will attempt to interpret the narrative that the Houthis have constructed around the situation in Yemen. The Houthis are officially known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God) but are called the Houthis after the name of their founder Hussein Badruddin al-Houthi, from the Houthi tribe. They belong to the Zaidi Shia minority, which forms up to one-third of the population. That fraction of the population was marginalized during the 1960s civil war and were further side-lined in the 80s as Salafist Sunnism grew stronger in the neighbouring Saudi Arabia and its ideals were consecutively exported to Yemen. Hence, the Zaidi clerics started to militarise their people against the Saudis and their allies. The Houthis’ use the slogan “God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews,

victory to Islam”.¹¹¹ The Houthi movement started gaining support from the wider Shia population of Yemen, as they were frustrated by the corruption and the authoritarian ruling of the Saudi-ally former president, Ali Abdallah Saleh, especially after the events of 9/11 and the US invasion of Iraq.¹¹² This already alludes to their identity and the image they present of themselves, as well as to the resistance narrative they follow.

This sub-chapter will be based on an analysis of a selection of statements, videos and social media posts from the side of the Houthis, with the aim of determining the Houthis’ narrative in regard to the crisis in Yemen. The statements and videos will be drawn from the website of al-Masirah network, and the social media posts from its twitter page. Al-Masirah is a Houthi-run TV and a media outlet¹¹³, headquartered in Lebanon and supported by their Lebanese ally, Hezbollah¹¹⁴. On the other hand, it presents itself as a Yemeni network that seeks to spread awareness and values of truth and justice among the various segments of Arab and Islamic societies in the spirit of the Quranic culture, gives priority to the Palestinian cause and confronts fake news from the enemy with credibility and professionalism.¹¹⁵

Al-Masirah website offers an archive of videos and audio-visual broadcasts divided into different sections such as reports, speeches of Abdul Malek Badruddine al-Houthi, war reports, chants, newscast, videos, Quran teachings etc. The broadcasts used in this thesis will draw from the “videos” section, which exhibits a list of recordings that goes back to May 2019. Hence, the author will choose a variety of videos to analyse, with a special focus to those from November 2019 onwards, ensuring the presentation of diverse topics and types of statements (reports, infographics, speeches), and making sure to have the representation of the latest documentation and hence the latest narrative. Moreover, the twitter posts will be presented from 25 until 31 March 2015, when the Saudi-led intervention started. This aims to prove that the narrative is constant throughout the years and homogenous in the two timeframes chosen for this thesis. It is also worth noting that Al-Masirah’s Facebook and YouTube accounts have been deactivated and thus the links that have been shared in the tweets are not available to be included in the analysis. It is also important to note that Houthis speak of the official government or mention any governmental functions (the army,

¹¹¹ McKernan, “Who Are the Houthis and Why Are They Fighting the Saudi Coalition in Yemen?”

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Abdul Salam: Al-Masirah TV Continues to Fight for the Truth and the Suffering of the People (in Arabic).”

¹¹⁴ Moubayed, “Houthis’ Visit to Beirut Stirs Division and Controversy.”

¹¹⁵ “Al-Masirah Network.”

ministers), they refer to the government they have established and not the one under Hadi and internationally recognized.

6.1.1. AL-MASIRAH MEDIA NETWORK

The Houthi news did not deny that they have carried out attacks against Saudi facilities on Saudi territories. On the contrary, they praised the careful monitoring and accurate planning that those operations took to execute. They described them as a response to the continued aggression and siege, imposed by the US-Saudi “aggression” and to the crimes committed by the coalition amid international silence. The targets were labelled as vital and legitimate as most of them were against Saudi Aramco, a vital organization for the Saudi authorities. As for their military and strategic importance, the targeting of Aramco is supposed to damage Saudi Arabia’s financial resources, that the Saudi’s use to finance their ongoing aggression against Yemen and hence the legitimacy of the operations.¹¹⁶ The Houthis attacked Aramco again in September 2019 as a “warning that the upcoming targets will be more painful”. The Houthi leader Abdul Malek commented the attacks by addressing the coalition that “the continuation of the aggression will not bring them security or stability rather it is dragging them into scourge as they are by themselves losing security even in their own lands because of the continued aggression”.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, al-Masirah accused Western governments of selling arms to Saudi Arabia, while they officially reject the humanitarian situation in Yemen – billions of USD goes into arms deals while only a fraction is sent to Yemen in the form of “rotten” aid.¹¹⁸ Al-Masirah investigated the UN World Food Program’s rotten food shipments to Hodeidah and claimed that the humanitarian aid sent to Yemen is poorly stored and contained expired products, unfit for consumption.¹¹⁹

In May 2019, the Houthis reported on the progression of the manufacturing of drones, which has been announced few years earlier. This is what the Houthis considered “doing instead of saying”, in response to the “aggression”. Hence, the drones are meant to complement and reinforce the activities of ballistic missiles. The Houthis used this to threaten the “aggression countries” of hitting their capitals.¹²⁰ In this context of praising this qualitative progress, the

¹¹⁶ “Videos: In New Development, Yemeni Drones Target Vital Saudi Oil Pipelines.”

¹¹⁷ “Videos: Continuous Escalation of Yemeni Attacks on Saudi Oil Company Aramco.”

¹¹⁸ “Videos: Hypocrite Western Governments, Sell Arms to Saudis and Send Rotten Aid to Yemen.”

¹¹⁹ “Videos: Almasirah Investigates the UN World Food Program Rotten Food Shipments in Hodedah.”

¹²⁰ “Videos: Progression and Importance of Yemeni Drones Development.”

Houthis explained, in another video, that Yemen has ballistic, air defence and manufacturing capabilities that the enemy do not know of, which is in favour of Yemen against the “disintegrating and weakening coalition of aggression”.¹²¹

In a televised speech on November 28, 2019, the minister of defence, Mohammed Nasser al-Atefi, addressed a message to the world, especially the countries participating in the “US-Saudi-led aggression”. The message was to assert that Yemen has the initiative and the necessary deterrence, in terms of weapons, to defend the country’s sovereignty. He also said that if the aggression and the siege continued then the “real war” between them has not yet begun. He communicated to the countries of the world and specifically the countries of the coalition led by the Zionist entity that the global security and particularly its economic aspect depend on the national security of the Republic of Yemen. In other words, he affirmed the security-for-security equation, which was stressed by the revolutionary and political leadership in more than a speech. Hence, the options are on the side of the countries of aggression as well as of the states and entities supporting them. He added that either there will be security and stability for the Republic of Yemen as well as economic wellbeing or the global security will be affected. The Yemeni people is obliged to defend itself and this is not out of show but they (as in the Houthi government) must defend the Yemeni people, who are being killed while the world is watching.¹²²

On November 22, 2019, al-Masirah posted a reportage covering a “scandal” that reveals the French role in the “global war” on Yemen. It starts with the question: is it conceivable that the state of France does not know that a Total gas station in Yemen has turned into an Emirati prison? – quoting a French deputy that addressed that question to the French minister of defence. This was reported by the French newspaper Le Monde, which uncovered the extent of the abuse committed in the prison and consequently exposing the French role in the international war against Yemen. The reportage then shows the debate that happened between the two French politicians – an exchange that did not answer the initial question, which was commented by the reporter that the answer hands in the Elysée, where human rights are first balanced against interests.¹²³

¹²¹ “Videos: Yemeni Defense Minister’s Statements and Military Capabilities Development.”

¹²² “Videos: Messages of Yemen, Defence Minister to Countries of US Saudi-led aggression.”

¹²³ “Videos: New Scandal Reveals French Role in the Global War on Yemen.”

In another reportage from December 2019, the channel described the UN promised of medical bridge as hollow and careless. It states that the proverb “much ado about nothing” suits best the UN’s dealing with the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The optimism that accompanied various initiatives and solutions, aiming to ease the suffering, was abundant for nearly five years, without any tangible result on the ground. They also reproached the UN for not being able to oblige the other party to implement the provisions of, not only, the Stockholm Agreement – the provisions that were supposed to make the city of Hodeidah a safe passage for humanitarian aid. The organization even found itself unable to manage the medical bridge to transport patients, which the “coalition of aggression” was forced to accept. The network claims that a UN plane evacuated fifty injured people on December 3, 2018 to Oman, a step towards what the UN called supporting confidence-building efforts ahead, at the time, of the peace talks in Sweden. The UN promised that this evacuation is to be followed by humanitarian flights for medical cases incurable with the local capacities. However, the “coalition of aggression” is determined to underestimate the suffering of the Yemenis while the international community is silent and complicit. Hence, the mentioned flight was the first and last of its kind. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen has been mere figures and statistics circulated by UN organizations to solicit international sympathy and make money, despite the shocking and bloody connotations that have made the situation the worst crisis in the world. The reportage states that reports of the ministry of health showed that the closure of Sana’a airport to critical cases have caused the death of more than 43 thousand of cases along with the death of more than 28 thousand cases of cancer patients, also due to the siege and the lack of necessary medical supplies. The commentary ended by saying that it is not just that the “coalition of aggression” has breached the announced agreements but even the humanitarian issues, which international organizations claim to sponsor, seem to be merely media propaganda that has no place in reality. This clarifies the picture of the international organizations being the cause of the suffering of the Yemenis.¹²⁴ Furthermore, a video warned that the Yemeni airspace “is not for a stroll”. It showed an aircraft run by the Saudi air force and its specifications, the way it was shut down (using new technology and surface-to-air missile) and the result (aircraft completely burned and to Saudi crew officers were killed). The video means to send the message that approaching Yemeni airspace is prohibited.¹²⁵ In this regard, the Houthi outlet stated that part of the “great’ efforts

¹²⁴ “Videos: UN Promises of Medical Bridge Hollow and Careless.”

¹²⁵ “Videos: Our air is not for a stroll.”

of the military industrialization department of the army and the popular committees was the advanced level of the defensive and offensive options, which had a “great” impact in changing the equation of the conflict with the force of the US-Saudi “aggression”. One of the last achievements is the announcement of a new defence system that managed to shoot down a Saudi helicopter, Apache, while it was carrying out hostile missions. The armed forces spokesman said that the attack on the aircraft led to its complete burning and the death of its Saudi crew and that the targeting of the aircraft was carried out by a surface-to-air missile with a new technology. The declaration referred to the ability of the air defences to confront any attempts by the enemies to carry on with the violation of Yemeni airspace without a decisive response; and to the continuing efforts to develop air defence capabilities until the Yemeni airspace is fully protected. The reporter goes on to say that the forces “of aggression” have realized, following their accumulated disappointments, that the prolonged aggression has become the main motive for developing the capabilities of the Yemeni army in the field of confrontation with the aggression and its mercenaries. *“This is evidenced by the realities in the field changes in the military scene, which is always winning thanks to the sacrifices and legendary resistance of the Yemeni people, and against which the latest advanced military and defence techniques have failed”*.¹²⁶

Another segment broadcasted a speech of the Houthi leader, Abdul-Malik Badruddin al-Houthi, in which he warned the “Israeli enemy” that in case it engaged in any folly against the Yemeni people, then the people will not hesitate to declared jihad against this enemy nor to launch the most severe strikes against important targets of the Israeli entity. The segment ends with the slogan “ready to respond” in English, Arabic as well as Hebrew.¹²⁷ The Houthi leader’s same speech, showed in another broadcast, addressed the “oppressive coalition of aggression” to stop the aggression and siege on [their] “dear” people. [Their] people will never retreat from the liberation path and those who are seeking to control [them] as Yemeni Muslim people through war, siege, aggression and daily crimes and to bring them to their knees, are seeking the impossible as nothing but damage and harm awaits them. Al-Houthi called on the Saudi regime to stop the aggression and siege, to respect the right of neighbourliness, otherwise the risk of continuing in the aggression is going to be great and

¹²⁶ “Videos: Yemeni Air Defenses Down Saudi Apache Helicopter off Asir.”

¹²⁷ “Videos: Yemenis Ready to Respond.”

the results will be severe. He added that after five years, the Saudis should be aware of that.¹²⁸

Moreover, the network posted a video regarding the city of al-Durayhimi in Hodeidah (one of the main provinces, where fighting is taking place, because of its location at the shore of the Red Sea). It claims that the city of al-Durayhimi, like other cities in Hodeidah, is subject to brutal aggression and systematic destruction by the forces of the US-Saudi “aggression”. This led to a catastrophic humanitarian situation that has made the besieged city more like an open prison for missiles and daily assaults committed by the “aggression forces” and their mercenaries. Al-Durayhimi has been an unjust siege for more than a year and a half in light of the great satiety experienced by the human conscience, which is living at the expense of Yemeni blood. The reporter narrates that in false human equations, oil prevails over rights. It also shows images of a communication network that has been destroyed and buildings that are completely or partially destroyed, which as the reporter claims, reveals the misguidance of the slogans of the UN and its envoy for Yemen, since this “slow murder” is taking place and they are aware of it. More than seven thousand civilians are living in a difficult and disastrous humanitarian situation as the forces of “invasion and occupation” surrounded the city and cut off all the ways of live for its inhabitants. Their difficult conditions and constant appeals are met with a clear evasion of responsibility – the self-proclaimed international peace sponsor is involved in harming the Stockholm Agreement. Despite the commitment of the Yemeni army to that agreement, the brutal aggression continues in the form of siege against the city and heinous crimes against its people.¹²⁹

In addition, the country is witnessing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world according to international and UN reports while the forces of “aggression” and their mercenaries have exploited the state of chaos it has caused in their areas of control, in order to plunder wealth over five year of domination over the Yemeni sources of wealth such as oil, gas and others. The information indicates that the looting of Yemeni wealth amounted to more than 12 trillion riyals since the start of the “barbaric aggression” on Yemen – an amount that is enough to pay state employees their salaries for more than twelve consecutive years. This looting tactics have been systematically targeting the country’s economy, starting with the hold-up of financial centres such as transferring the central bank to Aden under an

¹²⁸ “Videos: Stop Aggression and Siege.”

¹²⁹ “Videos: Ad-Durayhimi between a Rock of Siege and a Hard Place of Bombing.”

international cover, printing huge amounts of the local currency without covering it with foreign currencies and taking arbitrary measure to prevent the arrival of the basic needs of the Yemenis like food, medicine and obtaining his human rights (traveling, healthcare, education). On the other hand, the political leadership of the Salvation Government (formed by the Houthis) is exerting double efforts to alleviate the suffering of Yemenis as it is always seeking to find logical solutions that would ensure that the people have access to their human rights and basic needs. In that regards, the leadership has initiated a public exposure of the taxes and customs revenues and will be demanding their inclusion in the account of the bank branch in Hodeidah under the supervision of the UN. Nevertheless, the UN insists on fulfilling its humanitarian obligations through means supporting pressure and political blackmail from the “aggression” forces.¹³⁰

Speaking of the role of the UN in Yemen, al-Masirah also used the proverb “much ado about nothing” earlier in November 2019. Over five years of aggression and unjust siege, the UN has promoted in many forums and statements the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the modern era but it has not taken any practical and serious steps to end it and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people, which raises big questions about the nature of its work in Yemen. On the humanitarian level, there are UN planes landing daily in Sana’a and many statements about its achievements in harmony with the humanitarian response plan launched annually to fight hunger and disease outbreaks. However, many see on the ground that these are merely deceiving slogans accompanied by special annual reports published by the organization itself. While the UN reports have showed that there is an increase in the number of people affected by the humanitarian crisis every year, it was absent in helping out with the dengue fever outbreak and ignored the official calls to do its duty and fulfil its obligations such as operating a medical bridge. The negative role of the UN was not only that it did not fulfil its humanitarian obligations but it also covered for the siege against the people of Yemen – while the “aggression” has been holding ships of oil and food for almost 3 months, the UN did not do anything or even condemn the arbitrary measures of aggression, along with being unable to implement the Hodeidah agreement, which stipulates that the UN shall receive and inspect ships in Hodeidah instead of the port of Djibouti, despite of the fact the first phase of the agreement has been met by the “national side”. With these suspicious roles, the UN is added to the triad of death on the Yemeni people, besides the “aggression and its

¹³⁰ “Videos: Starving Theft of Wealth US Saudi Aggressive Approach under UN Cover.”

mercenaries”, who are thieves of the country wealth.¹³¹ In addition, the UN special envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, has been accused of appearing as a journalist for a news agency when reading is briefing to the UNSC, as he does not say anything new but a dull narrative and does not add any additional information, already available to the spectator on the television, website and news agencies. This reflects the lack of seriousness in moving forward in the Yemeni question and reaching solutions to end the suffering of the people. In one of his briefings, Griffiths tried to look even for small achievements in Yemen’s war but what is “ironic” is that he found nothing else to state as an achievement other than the coalition of “aggression” stopped once its raids for 48 hours in the five years of conflict in Yemen and the Riyadh agreement, albeit not under the auspices of the UN, which enshrines Saudi guardianship over the southern provinces of Yemen – Griffiths presented the deal as a platform for a comprehensive peace solution to what is happening in Yemen, while he did not omit to thank the Saudi government for agreeing to form a committee to pay salaries in Hodeidah, even before its formation and seeing its output. Griffiths was also overly optimistic by saying that the war in Yemen is about to end, forgetting that words must be followed by actions, as confirmed by the “national side” more than once and in more than one situation.¹³²

Finally, al-Masirah posted other reportages in November 2019. One of them was dedicated to the US-made weapons that was sold to Saudi Arabia and the UAE and transferred to groups such as al-Qaeda and other separatist militias in Yemen. It claims that the US will be investigating that, since the US arms sales include a ban on the transfer of arms and equipment to a third party. The Houthis are also in possession of US-made weapons but that is so after the Yemeni forces were able to inflict losses on the Saudi mercenaries.¹³³ The network also showed Saadah’s children raising pictures, on the occasion of the international children’s day, of some of the ongoing US-Saudi aggression against children in the governorate. A child gave a speech and expressed that, while the countries of the world are celebrating, the children of Yemen are living between cluster bombs dropped by the planes of the “aggression” on schools, residential neighbourhoods, farms and roads, claiming thousands of lives of Yemeni children; in addition to the suffocating blockade, resulting in a lack of food and medicine, and the spread of diseases and epidemics. Then, the protesters

¹³¹ “Suspicious Role of the United Nations in Yemen.”

¹³² “Videos: UN Envoy to Yemen Adds Cosmetics on the Ugly Face of Saudi Arabia.”

¹³³ “Videos: US to Investigate UAE and Saudi Weapons Violations.”

questioned the rights of children in Yemen and the role of the organizations concerned with what is happening in Yemen. This statement was addressed to all the “free people of the world” for their solidarity with the children of Yemen. It also appealed to the UN to lift the injustice and take full responsibility for what is happening and to the entire world to defend childhood and preserve the rights of the child.¹³⁴ Another video reported on a US-Saudi “aggression” war crime against a family in Saadah, where the warplanes committed a “dreadful massacre” - the raid led to the death of a “boy and a woman” and the injury of four others, including two children, one of whom did not exceed nine months of age. The video shows the family telling their experience, “in shock from the horror of the crime and the aggressor’s boldness”.¹³⁵ The network even has short films illustrating different incidents, such as an airstrike hitting a school bus with children in northern Yemen. It is filmed in a documentary style with comments from the reporter and interviews with different people ranging from medics, survivors and families of the victims.¹³⁶

The list of videos offer other recordings entitled, for example: “targeting Saudi Abha airport is war crime, killing the Yemeni people for four years is not” (2019), “Maariv confirms Tel Aviv involved in Saudi war on Yemen” (2019), “Saudi Arabia ignored warnings of the leader of the Revolution, now face consequences” (2019), “Halima the child survivor of the US-Saudi massacre in Saadah governorate” (2019), “Sayyed Abdul Malik warns Saudi regime of harsher attacks if aggression and siege against Yemen drags on” (2019).

6.1.2. SOCIAL MEDIA OVERVIEW

The Houthis started by announcing that Saudi warplanes have again violated the Yemeni sovereignty and flew over the capital Sana’a (one of the first tweets addressing the military intervention).¹³⁷ It also reported on different movements of the forces loyal to president Hadi. For instance, al-Masirah reported the rapid decline in the ranks of the Hadi and al-Qaeda “militias” in Lahij governorate.¹³⁸ The network reported that protesters in the capital vowed to an earthshattering response to the crimes of Saudi Arabia and the US, and to the Yemeni bloodshed.¹³⁹ It also reported, few days later, on a large popular demonstration in the Diraz

¹³⁴ “Videos: March of the International Children’s Day in Saadah Province.”

¹³⁵ “Videos: Another US Saudi Aggression War Crime Against Family in Baqim district Saadah.”

¹³⁶ “Videos: Short Movie - ‘Collateral Damage’ (In Arabic).”

¹³⁷ “@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015.”

¹³⁸ “@almasirah on Twitter, 25 March 2015.”

¹³⁹ “@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015.”

region in Bahrain¹⁴⁰ and on a demonstration in Sana'a, both rejecting the "Saudi-American aggression"¹⁴¹. It also stated that the Saudi-American "aggression" targeted a specific region with three raids.¹⁴² When speaking of the resumption of airstrikes over Sana'a, al-Masirah used the word hostile (or the word can also be translated into enemy) airstrikes and added that the Houthi defensive is reacting to the strikes.¹⁴³ Additionally, the network announced specific coalition airstrikes targeting different regions – the Saudi regime "assaulted" (or violated) the border region of Shaza with missiles.¹⁴⁴ It also reported that an American spy plane and a Saudi fighter aircraft flew over Sana'a while the Houthi anti-aircraft was responding.¹⁴⁵ The Houthis claim that they were closing on al-Qaeda and Hadi's militias in some regions¹⁴⁶ and on takfiri forces in other cities¹⁴⁷, supported by popular committees (armed groups).

Furthermore, the Houthis referred to all the actors that do support their activities, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, noting that both are Iran's allies and to some extent its proxies. Hence, Hezbollah stated that the brutal attack on Yemen serves the US interests and provides a great service to the Zionist enemy.¹⁴⁸ In that context, al-Masirah declared that according to the newspaper Israel Today there are common interests between Israel and Saudi Arabia, towards the crisis in Yemen.¹⁴⁹ Hezbollah also condemned the participation of some Arab and non-Arab countries in the "aggression" and providing it with a political cover.¹⁵⁰ Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah said that it is the Yemeni's people right to defend themselves and they will win.¹⁵¹ He accused the Saudi intelligence to be behind the suicide attacks, car bombs and assassinations in Iraq.¹⁵² The news outlet communicated that the Iraqi prime minister al-Abadi stated that the "foreign interventions" in Yemen only make the situation worse and more complicated.¹⁵³ According to al-Masirah, the Russian president

¹⁴⁰ "@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015."

¹⁴¹ "@almasirah on Twitter, 28 March 2015."

¹⁴² "@almasirah on Twitter, 28 March 2015."

¹⁴³ "@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015."

¹⁴⁴ "@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015."

¹⁴⁵ "@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015."

¹⁴⁶ "@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015."

¹⁴⁷ "@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015."

¹⁴⁸ "@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015."

¹⁴⁹ "@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015."

¹⁵⁰ "@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015."

¹⁵¹ "@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015."

¹⁵² "@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015."

¹⁵³ "@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015."

Putin stressed the importance of an immediate cessation of military operations in Yemen.¹⁵⁴ It also broadcasted that there was a protest stand in front of the Saudi consulate in Istanbul condemning the “Saudi-American aggression” on Yemen¹⁵⁵ and a protest stand in London for the same reason¹⁵⁶.

The Houthi spokesperson addressed the Saudi authorities with the statement that they the Houthis are ready for a long-term war and are sure of their victory¹⁵⁷; and that all those running to the Saudis are the defeated.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, Al-Masirah reported that the Tribal Cohesion Council called on the “free” Yemeni tribes to go out to the “arenas of pride and dignity in the fields of jihad”.¹⁵⁹ It also stated the numbers of civilians victims and injured as a result of the “brutal Saudi military air aggression”.¹⁶⁰ The spokesperson blamed Hadi for committing high treason because he asked foreign actors to target his country with everything in it.¹⁶¹ Al-Masirah accused the Saudis and the US for targeting the military and vital infrastructures in the capital Sana’a and other surrounding governorates like Taiz, Aden and Lahij.¹⁶² It also reported on other airstrikes conducted by Saudi-US aviation in various regions and towards different targets.¹⁶³

6.1.3. ANALYSIS

Controlling the local and international narrative is a crucial component for the Houthis. Hence, when they took over Sana’a, the Houthis seized many news outlets all over the country and/or established their own, ranging from TV stations, newspapers, broadcasts and online accounts, and replaced journalists with people that would disseminate the Houthi narrative. On the other hand, the internationally recognized government focused on spreading information through social media, in a country ravaged by war and where the majority do not have access to the internet.¹⁶⁴ Thus, Hadi’s government seemed more focused on addressing the international community while the Houthis attempted to control

¹⁵⁴ “@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015.”

¹⁵⁵ “@almasirah on Twitter, 29 March 2015.”

¹⁵⁶ “@almasirah on Twitter, 29 March 2015.”

¹⁵⁷ “@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015.”

¹⁵⁸ “@almasirah on Twitter, 27 March 2015.”

¹⁵⁹ “@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015.”

¹⁶⁰ “@almasirah on Twitter, 26 March 2015.”

¹⁶¹ “@almasirah on Twitter, 29 March 2015.”

¹⁶² “@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015.”

¹⁶³ “@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015.”; “@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015.”; “@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015.”; “@almasirah on Twitter, 30 March 2015.”

¹⁶⁴ Nasser, “The Yemen War, Media, and Propaganda.”

the local narrative and communicate with the Yemenis, aiming to gain a support base, which is crucial for Houthi activities and vital for their rule.

The Houthi narrative towards the crisis in Yemen tended to demonize the Saudi-led military intervention by constantly calling it an aggression and using the verb “violate” (or assault) to describe the Saudi actions. It also described that situation in Yemen as a global war on Yemen or the international war against Yemen. The Houthis attacked and blamed them for the suffering of the Yemeni people. The different reports and commentaries, broadcasted on their official network, aimed to discredit the UN and other international actors in the eyes of the public, by accusing them of doing no real action to uphold the humanitarian principles they constantly preach. The UN was also accused of delivering rotten food deliveries to Yemen, unfit for consumption and thus not really helping those in need. France was accused of playing a role in the war by allowing a Total station turning into a UAE prison and hence putting interests over human rights. The UN was the main target of the accusations and the proverb “much ado about nothing” was used several times to describe UN activities. The Houthis reproached the UN for not being able to bring the other party to implement the provisions of various agreements, while they claim that their side have showed full commitment to any agreement, shifting the blame for the failure of the agreements on someone else. The narrative further put the responsibility of the suffering of the people on the UN and the international community, that are silent and complicit to the aggression. Furthermore, the Houthis put the responsibility on the coalitions’ countries for what happens next, hinting that they take only defensive actions to defend the people, while no one else is helping them. They linked the security and stability of Yemen to the global security. The Houthi narrative acknowledges the “catastrophic” humanitarian situation that prevails in the country, casting all blame on other actors. Al-Masirah has a comprehensive archive of reportages and videos documenting different Saudi-led attacks in various parts of the country and proving the aggression committed against Yemen and its people. Furthermore, the Houthis heavily relied on footages showing children as the victims of different airstrikes. This should appeal to the sympathy of the international community and support the Yemenis against the coalition. At the same time, it should turn more Yemenis against the coalition and discredit the latter in the eyes of those who still support them.

The Houthis presented themselves as militarily capable of countering the enemy, and “defend the country’s sovereignty”. The speeches and statements threatened the opposing

side, claiming that they still did not unravel their full capacities and power. Many al-Masirah videos had a threatening/warning tone to reflect the power of the Houthi capacities – videos showing their military capabilities like drones or missiles. For instance, to warn that the Yemeni airspace is not for a stroll, a video showed how Houthi technologies shut down a Saudi aircraft. Although the coalition is primarily led by the Saudis and the US is only supporting it logistically and with intelligence, the Houthis associated the intervention to both Saudi Arabia and the US in its labelling of the “aggression”. In addition, the Houthis added more level of involvement to include Israel as another threat and danger to Yemen. This falls in line with the Houthi slogan “God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam”, that got to represent their stance towards different issues.

Finally, the Houthis spoke of Yemen and its people as their own, putting themselves on the same level of the people suffering the consequences. The Houthi leader spoke of the Yemeni population as the Houthis’ “dear people” and used the possessive pronoun “our” to refer to them. He also touched, on several occasions, on the Muslim identity of the country – not differentiating between Sunni and Shia. In other words, the Houthis victimized the Yemeni people, to which they belong and are part of, who are suffering at the hands of the Saudi enemy and all its allies. To further enforce that narrative, the Houthis showed in their documentaries, broadcasts and social media posts that the Yemenis are refusing the Saudi-led intervention and are ready to fight for their country. Finally, by adopting this image (of being part of the people), the Houthis are exercising their legitimate right to fight a foreign “aggression” in their country. In other words, the Houthis do not give themselves an extra role any more than that they are defending their “own” people and their country, which are suffering at the hands of other actors.

6.2.SAUDI ARABIA

This subchapter will focus on the narrative of Saudi Arabia as the leading actor of the Arab coalition. The analysis will be based on official statements, official sources such as websites and twitter posts of the Saudi Press Agency (SPA)¹⁶⁵. The social media posts will be considered from March 20, 2015 until March 30, 2015 (few days before the Operation Decisive Storm and few days after its beginning), noting that the Operation started on March

¹⁶⁵ The official account dedicated to the news of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Crown Prince and the Council of Ministers, official and royal decrees and statements.

25-26. SPA is an official source of news representing the Saudi government and thus the analysis of its Twitter account should illustrate the narrative that the Saudis and their military intervention adopted. Seen that the amount of SPA's posts from 2015 up until now is a huge number of data to be sorted through, the author chose this narrow timeline as a sample of official communication through which the strategic narrative was set and is conform with the discourse that the Saudis and their allies constructed in regards to the situation in Yemen, to how blame is assigned and the humanitarian crisis as such.

6.2.1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MILITARY INTERVENTION

Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi ambassador to the US at the time, announced on March 25, 2015, the launch of the military operations in Yemen. The reason, he presented, behind this decision, was the direct request from the “legitimate” government of Yemen – he stated that *“the operation will be limited in natures, and designed to protect the people of Yemen and its legitimate government from a takeover by the Houthis, a violent extremist militia”*¹⁶⁶. The main narrative revolved around the GCC's intentions to facilitate a peaceful governmental transition in Yemen, but the Houthis hindered the process. Al-Jubeir used the expressions “occupying territory”, “seized weapons”, “the Houthis have reneged on every single agreement [...] and continue their quest to take over the country by violent means” and “occupation of the country” to condemn the behaviour of the Houthis. He illustrated how the GCC offered a platform for all parties concerned with the preservation of the “security and stability” in Yemen to convene and the Houthis rejected the invitation and continued their “violent onslaught in Yemen”. Furthermore, the statement referred to the principle of self-defence, included in the Article 52 of the UN Charter, and of the Arab League's collective defence mechanism as legitimate reason for the internationally-recognized president of Yemen, Hadi, to request support *“by all means necessary – including military intervention to protect Yemen and its people from the continued Houthi aggression and to support it in fighting al-Qaeda and ISIL”*¹⁶⁷. Based on this explanation and “the Kingdom's responsibility to Yemen and its people”, al-Jubeir announced that Saudi Arabia, with its GCC and non-GCC allies, launched military operations in Yemen.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ “Statement by Saudi Ambassador Al-Jubeir on Military Operations in Yemen.”

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

The first phase of the military intervention was called Operation Decisive Storm, also known as al-Hazm Storm, that consisted mainly of airstrikes. The Saudi-led coalition presented it not only as a way to protect Hadi's government and the Yemeni people from the Houthis' violence but also as a deterrence of the strategic threat posed by the Houthis and Iran's growing power in the region. In fact, UAE's foreign minister Anwar Gargash stated that the intervention was necessary to counter the Houthi violence and their threat to the region through the missiles they are pointing at GCC states. He also praised Operation Decisive Storm for being a new area of Arab cooperation to enhance the region's security.¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, the Egyptian president, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, claimed at the beginning of April 2015 that the security of the Gulf region is an integral part of Egypt's national security, calling his Gulf partners as brothers to his nation. He said that Egypt will fight back whoever will attack those "brothers" and is invested not only on a military level but also on a political level in resolving the Yemeni crisis to prevent unnecessary losses to all parties. He also mentioned the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb as an important factor in Egypt's national security.¹⁷⁰

In April 2015, the Saudi-led coalition announced that the military operation has ended but that the forces will continue to target Houthi movements. The initial goal of removing the threat to Saudi Arabia and the region, in terms of heavy weapons, was achieved, as stated by SPA.¹⁷¹ This led to the launch of another operation, entitled Operation Restoring Hope that aimed to protect civilians, fight terrorism, evacuate foreign nationals and intensify humanitarian and medical aid to the Yemeni people. This means that the coalition's intervention moved into a more political phase, rather than military.¹⁷² This new phase of the intervention emphasized the reduction in the use of force and a stronger focus on proposing a political solution.¹⁷³

6.2.2. SOCIAL MEDIA REVIEW

Actors that supported the Operation Decisive Storm, according to SPA

SPA reported on the announcements made by different states and actors in support of the Saudi-led coalition and its intervention in Yemen. It announced that the US agreed on

¹⁶⁹ Roberts and Shaheen, "Saudi Arabia Launches Yemen Air Strikes as Alliance Builds against Houthi Rebels."

¹⁷⁰ Al-Sibai, "Al-Sisi and Operation Decisive Storm.. participation or boycott? (In Arabic)."

¹⁷¹ Browning and Hashem, "Saudi-Led Coalition Announces End to Yemen Operation."

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Stephens, "Mixed Success for Saudi Military Operation."

providing the Operation with logistical and intelligence support.¹⁷⁴ Morocco expressed support to the Kingdom and the coalition countries in their effort to protect the legitimacy in Yemen.¹⁷⁵ Jordan, Sudan, Egypt and Pakistan also expressed their willingness to participate in the intervention.¹⁷⁶ Pakistan declared that any threat to the safety of Saudi Arabia will evoke a strong reaction from their side¹⁷⁷, as the latter is a “brother” country and it is Pakistan’s duty to defend its safety.¹⁷⁸ Bahrain announced its participation in the coalition, in line with the common effort to preserve the security of the GCC countries.¹⁷⁹ France supported the Operation and condemned the destabilization of Yemen caused by the Houthi putschists.¹⁸⁰ Turkey may consider offering logistical assistance to the Operation.¹⁸¹ SPA communicated that Germany described the Operation as legitimate¹⁸², and a right stance, while accusing the Houthis of violating the UN agreements to end the power struggle.¹⁸³ Russia confirmed its support of the legitimacy of the president of Yemen.¹⁸⁴ Kuwait¹⁸⁵, Belgium¹⁸⁶, Britain¹⁸⁷, Mauritania¹⁸⁸, Libya¹⁸⁹, the Muslim World League¹⁹⁰, the council of foreign ministers of the Arab League¹⁹¹, the Lebanese Mufti¹⁹² and the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq¹⁹³ also expressed their support or their recognition of the military action led by Saudi Arabia. As for the direct participants in the coalition, the UAE council of ministers appreciated the active role of the Saudi leadership in building the international alliance.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the Bahraini cabinet valued the role played by Saudi Arabia in facing the dangers threatening the nation.¹⁹⁵

¹⁷⁴ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁷⁵ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁷⁶ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁷⁷ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁷⁹ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁸¹ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁸² “@spagov on Twitter,” March 27, 2015.

¹⁸³ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 29, 2015.

¹⁸⁴ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 28, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁸⁶ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁸⁸ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 27, 2015.

¹⁸⁹ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 27, 2015.

¹⁹¹ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 26, 2015.

¹⁹² “@spagov on Twitter,” March 27, 2015.

¹⁹³ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 28, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 29, 2015.

¹⁹⁵ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 30, 2015.

Saudi officials expressed their positive opinion regarding the Operation. For instance, the Prince of Asir said that the Operation is a wise decision that made the Islamic and Arab world, and the entire world, come together around it.¹⁹⁶ Prince Mutaib bin Abdallah, member of the Saud family and a former minister, declared that the king's decision protects the country from danger.¹⁹⁷ Officials from the Jazan region also applauded the decision of the country to launch the Operation.¹⁹⁸ On March 30, 2015, the Saudi King thanked all the countries participating in the coalition and those supporting or in favour of the Operation, that aims to enhance peace and security in the region and the world. He said that Saudi Arabia welcomes all Yemeni parties wanting to preserve the security and stability of the country and invites them to convene under the auspice of the GCC.¹⁹⁹ The Saudi cabinet expressed its appreciation of the Saudi King for his decision, along with the "brotherly" and neighbouring countries, to respond to the request of the Yemeni president Hadi and his people to protect Yemen from the aggression of the Houthis - the Houthi militias that are backed by regional powers with the goal of extending its hegemony over Yemen and making it a base for its influence in the region.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, SPA reported, in more than one tweet, that thousands of Yemenis took over the streets in support of the Operation,²⁰¹²⁰² including some tribes. Hamid al-Ahmar (a Yemeni politician and businessman) supported the airstrikes against the rebels.²⁰³ The Yemeni diaspora in Jeddah recognized the Operation as an initiative to restore freedom and dignity to the Yemenis.²⁰⁴

Updates on the development of the Operation

On March 21, Saudi Arabia hosted a meeting with GCC officials, where they discussed the situation in Yemen and expressed their concern about the developments and their consequences in Yemen. They warned that Yemen would slide into a dark tunnel, which would have severe repercussions not only for Yemen.²⁰⁵ On March 23, the Saudi council renewed the country's support of the legitimacy in Yemen and its people. They emphasized

¹⁹⁶ "@spagov on Twitter," March 27, 2015.

¹⁹⁷ "@spagov on Twitter," March 27, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ "@spagov on Twitter," March 30, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ "@spagov on Twitter," March 30, 2015.

²⁰⁰ "@spagov on Twitter," March 30, 2015.

²⁰¹ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²⁰² "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²⁰³ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²⁰⁴ "@spagov on Twitter," March 29, 2015.

²⁰⁵ "@spagov on Twitter," March 21, 2015.

the need for an urgent response by all parties, which could take place at the GCC meeting in Riyadh. They also condemned the terrorist attacks and bombings that would lead to the destabilization of the country and expose its people to strife and destruction.²⁰⁶

SPA posted that it is the responsibility of Saudi Arabia and its allies towards the Yemeni population to respond to Hadi's request with all means to protect Yemen. Moreover, the attacks also affected the Saudi territory and the GCC countries were facing a continuous threat to the security and stability, because of the heavy weapons and short and long-range missiles in possession of illegitimate forces. This and the fact that the Houthi militias were not responding to the repeated warnings from the GCC and UNSC and that they conducted large military exercises with live ammunition near the Saudi borders, revealed the intentions of the Houthis to repeat such aggressions, especially after the unjustified attacks on the Saudi territories in November 2009. Hence, the GCC decision to intervene.²⁰⁷ The coalition also justified its decision by claiming that the Houthi coup threatened not only the Yemeni state but also the regional security and the international peace and security.²⁰⁸

At the launch of the military operation, SPA addressed the public by announcing that "*the Saudi Hawks decisively stormed to defend the homeland, so do not forget your duty to support them by avoiding rumours and refraining from spreading anything that may affect their safety*"²⁰⁹. On the same day, the president of Yemen Hadi arrived to Riyadh.²¹⁰ Moreover, the minister of defence oversaw the execution of the first airstrike against the Houthis.²¹¹ The Crown Prince met with the minister of defence, who informed the former about the details of military plans and operations.²¹² Similarly, the deputy Crown Prince visited the minister and was briefed about the plans.²¹³ Many tweets announced the success of airstrikes in destroying Houthi military targets.²¹⁴

On March 28, SPA declared that 86 Saudi, Arab and foreign diplomats arrived to Jeddah, after being evacuated by the Saudi naval forces from Yemen.²¹⁵ The former spokesman of the coalition Ahmad Asiri, claimed that the coalition targeted Houthi cluster munitions and

²⁰⁶ "@spagov on Twitter," March 23, 2015.

²⁰⁷ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²⁰⁸ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²⁰⁹ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²¹⁰ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²¹¹ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²¹² "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²¹³ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²¹⁴ "@spagov on Twitter," March 26, 2015.

²¹⁵ "@spagov on Twitter," March 28, 2015.

supplies warehouses, and Houthi movements between the regions;²¹⁶ and that the Houthis no longer have any aircrafts.²¹⁷ Asiri also informed the public that the Houthis and their allies have been targeting the Yemeni people in their homes with mortars to deceive them into thinking that the coalition forces are bombing them.²¹⁸ In addition, the Saudi navy has become fully deployed on March 30, implementing a complete blockade on the ports while the forces are monitoring the smuggling of weapons and people through those Yemeni ports.²¹⁹ Asiri declared that the intensity of the airstrikes would be intensifying to prevent the militias from moving and harming the Yemeni people.²²⁰ The coalition forces have been supported on the ground by all the supporters of the legitimacy in Yemen, whether tribes or popular committees, in resisting the militias.²²¹

Finally, SPA stated that the Saudi ground forces carried out a continuous artillery shelling from the regions of Najran and Jazan against the locations and vehicles of the Houthis.²²² Asiri assured the public that the situation in border regions of Saudi Arabia are calm and stable as there are plans to protect the borders and its people.²²³ In another tweet, he stated that the militias, based between houses, targeted coalition aircrafts, and hence the need for the coalition forces to respond. The post was accompanied by satellite photos of the targets.²²⁴

6.2.3. THE SAUDI HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT IN YEMEN

Saudi Arabia inaugurated the King Salman Centre for Relief and Humanitarian Aid (KSrelief) in May 2015. It is, as reported by the Saudi news outlet, “*part of its humanitarian endeavours to alleviate the suffering of people all over the world, especially victims of civil wars and natural calamities*”²²⁵. KSrelief’s website refers to the Islamic teachings that gives the people the responsibility to help the afflicted and poor and attempt to preserve human life and dignity whenever possible. Hence, the centre aims to coordinate and provide

²¹⁶ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 28, 2015.

²¹⁷ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 28, 2015.

²¹⁸ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 28, 2015.

²¹⁹ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 30, 2015.

²²⁰ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 30, 2015.

²²¹ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 30, 2015.

²²² “@spagov on Twitter,” March 29, 2015.

²²³ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 29, 2015.

²²⁴ “@spagov on Twitter,” March 30, 2015.

²²⁵ “King Salman Relief Center Implements 428 Projects Worth \$1.7 Bln.”

international relief to crisis-afflicted communities. The country allocated one billion SAR to execute the centre's mission, in addition to the one billion SAR previously dedicated to the humanitarian aid towards Yemen. This should fall in line with the goals of the Operation Restoring Hope, announced before.²²⁶ The Saudis claim that “[their] full commitment to Restoring Hope to [their] Yemeni brothers and sisters gives the centre a clear mandate to provide the highest level of attention and care to their humanitarian need”²²⁷. The centre partnered up with many international humanitarian organizations, giving it a wider scope of reach and recognition – some of the partners are the US Agency for International Development, the UK Department for International Development, FAO, ICRC, IFRC, International Medical Corps UK, IOM, OCHA, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNDP, WHO and others.²²⁸ Many of the donations and the humanitarian aid go through those international agencies to reach their beneficiaries or fulfil the services they were meant to achieve. For instance, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait donated the largest donation in the history of the UN, which amounted to one billion and 250 million USD in 2019 to Yemen.²²⁹

Up until October 31, 2019, Yemen was the main beneficiary of KSrelief's activity as it was subject to 383 projects that cost almost 3 billion USD – in comparison to 204 projects in Syria, the second main beneficiary, with the value of almost 300 million USD.²³⁰ The projects are involved in a range of sectors such as food security, health, water and sanitation, education, protection, logistics, nutrition and camp coordination.²³¹ The four specific humanitarian programs that KSrelief listed on its website are all related to Yemen. Furthermore, KSrelief considers its achievements, since May 2015, to include the implementation of projects in Yemen in accordance with the international humanitarian law, impartially to all in need and with the partnership of international agencies.²³²

Finally, KSrelief states that one of the current humanitarian challenges in Yemen is the port blockages and obstructed access of the humanitarian aid, which prevents its delivery to the affected people. It blames the Houthi militias for blocking, confiscating and looting aid. For instance, the website proved with some statistics to support that claim: the Houthis (from

²²⁶ “About KSrelief - Establishment.”

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ “About KSrelief - Partners.”

²²⁹ “KSrelief Supervisor General: KSA, UAE and Kuwait Provide \$ 1 Billion and 250 Million in 2019, Largest Donation in the History of UN.”

²³⁰ “About KSrelief - Where We Work.”

²³¹ “Project Statistics - Details of Country.”

²³² “Reports - Yemen Presentation.”

2015 to 2018) blocked 88 aid and commercial ships, targeted 7 ships in the Red Sea, looted more than 696 trucks etc.²³³ In addition, Saudi Arabia casts the blame on the Houthi side for several violations such as the use of anti-aircraft guns in civilian areas, planting landmines in civilian areas, recruitment children as soldiers in the conflict and targeting schools.²³⁴

6.2.4. THE SAUDI REACTION TO ACCUSATIONS

Asiri was hosted in an interview in May 2016 by National Public Radio and he was asked about the criticism the Saudis and the coalition are receiving for killing thousands of civilians. He responded to that by saying that they regret any casualty as they had no intention to cause them as “*Yemen is [their] neighbour. [They] have family on both sides of the borders*”²³⁵. When asked about the fact that many parties are being accused of committing war crimes but the majority of civilian deaths are attributed to coalition airstrikes, he stated that the coalition does not have any ambition in Yemen – they did not lose resources, soldiers and equipment to influence or occupy Yemen but because they “*saw a population undermined and oppressed by militias*”²³⁶. He also discredited the Human Rights Watch reports by claiming that the organization have no teams on the ground because no one can get to Yemen without the permission of the coalition. Finally, when asked whether the intervention has improved things in Yemen and whether the initial goals are being met or the stability of the country is any closer, he declared that the intervention contributed to bringing the militias to talk peacefully with the government within the framework of the peace talks that were taking place in Kuwait. According to Asiri, they also incapacitated the militias’ ballistic missile threat. He concluded by asking if there is any alternative to the current situation – the priority is to reach a solution through the talks but if not, “*will we try or are we wating until it becomes another Somalia*”²³⁷.

Other accusations were related to the coalition’s forces bombing a Yemeni funeral and killed 140 people, most of which were civilians.²³⁸ The Saudis admitted to bombing the funeral hall but blamed it on receiving wrong information from the Yemenis that Houthi leaders will be gathered at the given location. Additionally, they claimed that the air operations centre in Yemen targeted the location without the approval of the coalition command. This is the

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Kelly, “Saudi Arabia Regrets Civilian Casualties During Operations In Yemen.”

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ “Yemen Conflict: Saudis Blame Funeral Hall Bombing on Mistake.”

conclusion that the Joint Incidents Assessment Team, tasked to investigate the incident, came with. It also decided that “appropriate action will be taken against those who caused the incident, and that compensation will be offered to the families of the victims”, along with the need to review the rules of engagement of the coalition forces.²³⁹

6.2.5. ANALYSIS

Nature of the conflict

The main narrative, that Saudi Arabia have presented, is that their military intervention into Yemen was a mere response to the request of the legitimate government to help the Yemeni people against the Houthis. Furthermore, the coalition used the language of the closeness of the countries in the region and that it is a duty to help the Yemeni “brothers”. They also touched upon their own security that is being threatened by the Houthis – an Iran proxy, used yet to control another country and spread Iran’s influence in the region.

The official statements did present how different countries and organizations, including important international actors such as the US and the UK, supported the military intervention and praised it as a necessity to face the Houthis and maintain the control of the Yemeni legitimate government over the whole country. Although the operations did not have a UN mandate to make it legitimate and legal according to international law, but the broader the public support the more the operation gained legitimacy, making it easier to justify the actions. Hence, the Saudi-led coalition did not act as a lone wolf but have an international support to pursue the ultimate goal of protecting and enhancing the regional as well as international peace and security, in this case against the Iran-backed Houthi threat.

Portrayal of the adversary

The use of words like militia and rebels to describe the Houthis proves the pejorative narrative given to the Houthis. They do not give them the status of an equal actor but as a “troublemaking” factor that is causing all harm to the Yemeni people and is at the heart of the Yemeni conflict in the first place. Moreover, the Saudis tend to even exclude the Houthis out of the Yemeni people and present them as an external spoiler and a mere tool of Iran to spread its influence in the region. The official statements reported the coalition’s successes

²³⁹ SPA, “SPAENG on Twitter.”

and the Houthis' losses, putting the former on a higher power level while degrading the latter to an incapable and weaker counterpart that cannot defeat the much stronger coalition.

Portrayal of self and of own actions

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and its allies justified all their actions, including accusations of committing war crimes, by blaming the Houthis; and when it was necessary to blame someone from their own side, they always did at a lower level of leadership and a lower position in the chain of command. This removes the culpability from the higher leadership, whose people are the “face” of the countries and/or of the military and political interventions (kings, princes, generals). It is always easier to claim to hold the culpable individuals accountable for their actions when pointing downwards in the chain of command.

Finally, Saudi Arabia became, soon after the start of its military operation in Yemen, the major humanitarian donor to Yemen, with the aim to help the people facing difficult living conditions that are caused by the Houthi rebellion against the legitimate government. Plus, the Saudi government is claiming that the Houthis are blocking humanitarian aid from reaching the people in need by blocking, confiscating or looting the deliveries - giving a bad image of the Houthis as harming not only other actors but also their own people. In contrast, the coalition presents itself as a saviour, a helper and the brotherly neighbour that would not leave the Yemenis to their fate at the Houthis' hands.

6.3. THE EU

The EU's engagement in the Yemen crisis has been focused on three main aspects: political support, security and human rights; humanitarian assistance; and development assistance. The EU has contributed with more than one billion EUR since 2015, showing the importance of its involvement in Yemen, with the main goal to “operationalise the development-humanitarian nexus”. Hence, the EU programmes can be classified according to their orientation on immediate, medium- and long-term needs, with a particular focus on the resilience of the country.²⁴⁰

The EU operates by setting a guide to its responses through Council Conclusions, which are going to be, along with other primary sources and statements, analysed throughout this part of the thesis. A search of the keyword “Yemen” in the press releases and statements of the

²⁴⁰ EEAS Press Team, “EU-Yemen Relations.”

European Council²⁴¹ yielded with the first result dating back to February 2015²⁴², when things started escalating in Yemen. This sets the starting date of the analysis of the EU narrative up to the present. Moreover, the EU also operates, since April 2017, a twitter account for its Delegation to Yemen (@EUinYemen). That part will solely rely on the tweets and retweets of the EU Delegation to Yemen – the tweet and retweet of statements, press releases, ambassador tweets and other organisations’ tweets. The overview of the social media posts will cover one year of publishing – from April 2017 to April 2018, which will be a sample of the EU’s narrative of the crisis in Yemen. This sub-chapter will subsequently present some posts from May 2019 onwards, that the author will judge as important and illustrative of that narrative, noting that the EU’s narrative is conforming and homogenous throughout the years. Seen that the EU’s politics do not get personified into specific figures and its foreign policy gets formulated through a complex process that represents all members, all the information stated in the following sub-chapter will be considered as the basis to analysing the narrative put forward by the EU towards the war in Yemen.

At this point, it is also important to introduce the concept of human security, which is relevant to the narratives adopted by the EU. Human security refers to the type of security that relates to the ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’ of individuals and communities. In other words, human security can be defined by what threatens it – the notion of human security is threatened by genocides, slavery, natural disasters, massive violations of the right to food, health and housing. Hence, human insecurity does not consist only of the impact of military violence but is also about the consequences of human rights violations, violent crime and the material consequences of conflict. In fact, most of the deaths, that occur in contemporary wars, do not take place during battles but are rather the result of violence targeting civilians or of indirect effects of war, such as the lack of access to healthcare, disease, hunger and homelessness.²⁴³ In the article “Human security: a new strategic narrative for Europe”, the authors argue that the focus on human security is a qualitative characteristic of the conduct of foreign and security policy. The article also determines that this is particularly relevant for the EU “*as it seeks to improve its effectiveness and visibility as a collective global actor*”²⁴⁴. Furthermore, the article explains that the EU adopts a human security approach

²⁴¹ Press releases and statements from the European Council and its president, the Council of the EU, Council preparatory bodies and the Eurogroup President.

²⁴² “Press Releases and Statements.”

²⁴³ Kaldor, Martin, and Selchow, “Human Security.”

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

for the argument of self-interest and ethics. The former is to address issues that affect the EU and are intertwined with crises abroad. The latter means that being concerned about wars, human rights, the environment and poverty, has become a part of the European identity, so when Europeans are aware of tragedies somewhere in the world, they want to be able to help ease the consequences. Finally, the EU aims at promoting international law and some global norms – human security means upholding those norms even in crisis situations. This would help in developing the EU’s strategic culture as a “normative, ethical or civilian/civilizing power” rather than aspiring to great power status.²⁴⁵

6.3.1. THE EU’S ENGAGEMENT IN YEMEN

As stated on the EEAS factsheet about the EU-Yemen relations, the EU supports the UN and its efforts in achieving a peace settlement in Yemen. “*The EU pursues political consultations with all stakeholders, both in Yemen and in the region, with a view to complementing the efforts of the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and push for the resumption of political negotiations*”²⁴⁶. In fact, the EU financed crisis-response activities in the amount of thirteen million EUR as well as promoted local dialogues, trained journalists, provided economic and development analyses and facilitated the agreement on local ceasefires.²⁴⁷ For instance, the EU motivates an inclusive peace process towards a political transition in Yemen through the support of local de-escalation, conflict resolution, reconciliation and the women’s involvement in the process.²⁴⁸ Additionally, the EU funds an initiative that aims to identify Yemen’s economic, humanitarian, social and development priorities, in order to be able to prepare for the post-conflict recovery period.²⁴⁹ It also encourages the de-mining process in the country and provides technical and security guidance to the reopening of the Sana’a airport.²⁵⁰

Furthermore, the EU closely cooperates and coordinates with the UN and other donors on initiatives such as raising awareness on the conflict, building trust among parties and promoting a reflection on the future of the country. The EU also donates to the UN’s Peace Support Facility for Yemen and to UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism in Djibouti.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ EEAS Press Team, “EU-Yemen Relations.”

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Press and information team of the Delegation to Yemen, “Supporting Inclusive Peace-Making Efforts and Political Transition in Yemen.”

²⁴⁹ “About.”

²⁵⁰ EEAS Press Team, “EU-Yemen Relations.”

This conforms with the EU's efforts to support any action taken to facilitate the flow of commercial items and humanitarian aid into Yemen, a country that relies heavily on imports. Additionally, the EU backs stabilisation initiatives with actions worth eighteen million EUR to enhance the capacities of local key security providers like the judiciary and law enforcement institutions. The EU also encourages accountability measures in Yemen to achieve sustainable peace through supporting the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen established by the UN Human Rights Council.²⁵¹

In terms of the humanitarian crisis, the EU acknowledges its severity as “the conflict in Yemen continues to fuel the world's largest humanitarian crisis”. Over 80% of the population are in need of humanitarian assistance, along with the prevalence of food insecurity, the danger of famine and the spread of preventable diseases. Thus, the EU has reacted “by stepping up its contribution to the humanitarian effort” – the EU has contributed with almost 440 million EUR²⁵² since the beginning of the conflict in 2015. EU's humanitarian aid manifests in the funding of various projects implemented by EU partners across the country. The EU focuses not on assisting the internally displaced people, on nutrition, healthcare and food security but also on gender-based violence, education, response capacities, logistical support and coordination and advocacy actions.

Finally, the EU is engaged in the area of development assistance, dealing with the lasting devastating effects on livelihoods of the population. This is more long-term oriented, and the EU has so far provided 323 million EUR for that assistance, “making the EU one of the leading development donors in Yemen”. The main goal is to ensure that “local communities are protected from famine and disease, strengthening their resilience in the face of crisis”. It is also focused on various social and economic initiatives.²⁵³

6.3.2. NARRATIVE USED IN OFFICIAL STATEMENTS AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The EU reacted to the Houthi takeover of Sana'a by releasing a council conclusion on February 9, 2015. It expressed its grave concern over the violence in several provinces and the resignation of Hadi and his government. It considered those developments as putting the promises of the Yemeni transition in jeopardy as “*these developments are hindering*

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

prospects for a prosperous, stable, democratic and united Yemen, and threaten the territorial integrity of the country and the stability of the region, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation”²⁵⁴. The Council also saw that “all political forces”, particularly the Houthis, should have taken responsibility for their actions and was concerned by the unilateral declaration of the formation of the Houthi government, which the EU considered to have no legitimacy. It called on all parties to refrain from violence and return to dialogue as the only way to reach a sustainable solution to the crisis. It also urged “all parties to safeguard humanitarian principles and ensure humanitarian access on the ground”.²⁵⁵

The council followed up on the situation in Yemen in April 2015 by expressing again its concern over the deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in Yemen. It specified that the crisis threatens the stability of the region (Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and the wider Middle East). The EU condemned the “destabilising unilateral actions taken by the Houthis and military units loyal to ex-president Saleh” while reaffirmed its support to the legitimate authorities. Additionally, the EU acknowledged that Hadi informed the UNSC that he has requested from the GCC and the Arab League to support him by all necessary means, including military, to protect the country from Houthi aggressions. The Council added to that, that the ultimate solution to the conflict must be political and that the EU supports the international call for an inclusive political process. Thus, it urged all parties to refer to dialogue and consultation to resolve their differences. The EU also condemned terrorist attacks taking place in Yemen and the threats posed by extremist and terrorist groups like AQAP. It also referred to the humanitarian impact of the “fighting between different militias, bombardments and disruption of essential services on the civilian population”. Hence, it urged all sides to give unrestricted access to humanitarian aid and workers, in accordance to international humanitarian and human rights law.²⁵⁶

In June 2015, the EU announces its arms embargo and other targeted sanctions against a Houthi leader and Saleh’s son for “the destabilising unilateral actions taken by the Houthis and forces loyal to ex-president Saleh”. This action is in line with a UNSC resolution (2216).²⁵⁷ Another press release, from November 2015, points out the EU’s concern over the humanitarian situation, since “*all humanitarian actors described the humanitarian situation*

²⁵⁴ Foreign Affairs Council, “Council Conclusions on Yemen.”

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ “Council Conclusions on Yemen,” April 20, 2015.

²⁵⁷ “Yemen,” June 8, 2015.

as catastrophic for many Yemenis, as fighting continues in a number of areas, and humanitarian access for essential supplies of food and fuel remains extremely limited”²⁵⁸. That statement also expressed that Yemen is experiencing an “unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe” as a result of bombardments, the reported use of cluster munitions, the disruption of essential services, the “indiscriminate targeting of civilian infrastructure [...] and the use of civilian buildings for military purposes”. Hence, the EU urged all parties to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality and recalled again the need for a political solution that would result in a durable ceasefire and launch an inclusive political transition. “*The EU and its Member States, having so far committed more than 200 million EUR worth of humanitarian assistance to Yemen in 2015, stress[ed] once again the need for coordinated humanitarian action under UN leadership*”²⁵⁹, while referring again to the international humanitarian and human rights laws. Consequently, the EU announced the implementation of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for commercial shipping, to which it will be contributing financially and condemned terrorism and the AQAP’s activities in Yemen.²⁶⁰

Furthermore, the Council issued the declaration of the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Yemen in April 2016 at the occasion of a nationwide ceasefire entering into force. The declaration stressed the importance of the decrease in violence and military activity, and of political negotiations “*as the only way to end the conflict and properly and effectively address state fragmentation, human suffering, as well as to tackle the growing threat of terrorist groups*”²⁶¹. It also affirmed the EU’s readiness to play its part in humanitarian, development, reconciliation and reform efforts to benefit all Yemenis.²⁶² In April 2017, the EU reaffirmed its concern over the devastating consequences of the conflict on the country and its population – referring to the situation as catastrophic. It stated again that “there is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen” and condemned the attacks on civilians. The EU proposed to increase its efforts to support UN actions in the search of political settlement of the crisis by offering its good offices in order to reach an end to the hostilities and launch a negotiation process, all while increasing humanitarian and development assistance.²⁶³ Thus,

²⁵⁸ “Council Conclusions on Yemen,” November 16, 2015.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ “Declaration of the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on Yemen.”

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ “Council Adopts Conclusions on Yemen.”

the EU “*is committed to provide support to the parties in reaching a settlement to the conflict and to contribute to the country’s future reconstruction*”²⁶⁴.

The Council adopted at one of its meetings, in May 2017, conclusions on operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus, in relation to the dire humanitarian situation in several countries, including Yemen. It acknowledges that humanitarian assistance cannot address the situation but needs to be combined with sustainable development, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, diplomatic and political efforts to enhance peace and security.²⁶⁵ In December 2018, the EU supported the consultations in Sweden between the representatives of the Yemeni parties, also known as the Stockholm agreement – the agreement includes a ceasefire and exchange of prisoners. The EU saw that “diplomacy has a chance in Yemen” and that the Stockholm agreement is “the result of a collective engagement by the parties, the UN Special Envoy, the EU and the whole international community”.²⁶⁶ Finally, the EU expressed the same humanitarian concerns and its support of political and peaceful – away from the military - solution to the crisis, in several other statements²⁶⁷.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The EU also expressed on social media its concern over the humanitarian crisis that was deteriorating from the military operations.²⁶⁸ It announced that it was to pledge 116 million EUR for “those in need in Yemen”.²⁶⁹ In fact, a representative of the EU explained that this donation is a result of the EU stepping up vital humanitarian assistance as the whole country is suffocating from a lack of food, water and fuel, and the economy is collapsing.²⁷⁰ He continued that civilians are paying the highest price while attacks are still recurring even against aid workers and that “*the EU is committed to supporting the Yemeni people and [...] to help humanitarian agencies in the country that operate under extremely difficult circumstances to continue delivering lifesaving aid to those in need*”²⁷¹. The EU also

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ “Council Conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus.”

²⁶⁶ “Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the Consultations in Sweden between the Representatives of the Yemeni Parties and the Stockholm Agreement.”

²⁶⁷ “Yemen: Council Adopts Conclusions,” June 25, 2018; “Foreign Affairs Council,” November 19, 2018.; “Yemen: Council Adopts Conclusions,” February 18, 2019.; “Foreign Affairs Council,” March 18, 2019.

²⁶⁸ “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 5 April 2017.”

²⁶⁹ “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 25 April 2017.”

²⁷⁰ “EU Pledges Additional €116 Million at Yemen Pledging Conference in Geneva for Urgent Needs of Civilians.”

²⁷¹ Ibid.

expressed its support to the people of Yemen considering the intensifying cholera outbreak.²⁷²

In November 2017, the EU High Representative (HR/VP) Mogherini issued a statement²⁷³ stating that the EU recognizes the security threat that emerges from the situation in Yemen but that hindering vital humanitarian access to the civilians, that are already facing famine and cholera, will not solve the security concerns.²⁷⁴ Some tweets²⁷⁵ were dedicated to announcing new EU humanitarian funding in support of civilians in Yemen with food, water and medical services, while others²⁷⁶ illustrated the humanitarian situation in Yemen through figures, statistics and maps.

In addition, the EU Delegation in Yemen retweeted many of their partners' posts such as the ones of the UNDP in Yemen (@UNDPYemen). Those posts²⁷⁷ are concerned with the joint projects coordinated by the EU and other agencies and are funded by the EU. For instance, the EU informed, in November 2017, about a training program dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship skills in reviving the community's basic services.²⁷⁸

The EU commented, in June 2017, on the bombing of a market in northern Yemen that resulted in the death of more than 20 civilians by expressing condolences to the families of the victims and reminding the public that the civilians "are the ones bearing the brunt of a war that has devastated their country". It also voiced its increasing concern over the humanitarian situation in the country.²⁷⁹ Consecutively, the EU addressed the strikes on civilian areas in Yemen in August 2017 by expressing condolences to the families of the victims and renewed its call to all parties "*to ensure the protection of civilians through humanitarian law and international human rights law in the conduct of hostilities as well as proper investigation into possible violations in order to hold those responsible accountable*"²⁸⁰. It once more stated the EU's stance that there is no military solution to the conflict and the need for a ceasefire and peace negotiations.²⁸¹ Moreover, when addressing

²⁷² "Statement by Commissioner Stylianides on the Unprecedented Cholera Outbreak in Yemen."

²⁷³ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 21 November 2017."

²⁷⁴ "Statement by HR/VP Mogherini on the Situation in Yemen."

²⁷⁵ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 7 December 2017."; "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 24 June 2017."

²⁷⁶ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 26 November 2017."; "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 11 December 2017."; "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 18 March 2018."

²⁷⁷ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 8 October 2017."; "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 6 July 2017."

²⁷⁸ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 12 November 2017."

²⁷⁹ "Statement by the Spokesperson on Yemen."

²⁸⁰ "Strikes on Civilian Areas in the Neighbourhood of Ahrab in Sanaa."

²⁸¹ Ibid.

the military intervention, the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, said that the Saudi-led decision to close the air, sea and land entry points to Yemen in November 2017 has caused major disruptions in the urgent delivery of life-saving activities and a sharp rise in the price of basic commodities. Hence, the EU called for an immediate restoration of unrestrained access to avoid the suffering from famine and further undermining the prospects of a sustainable political settlement to the conflict. The Commissioner also stated that the EU has been in contact with Saudi authorities and urged the coalition to ensure the resumption of UN flights and activities, and the opening of borders to humanitarian relief.²⁸² In December 2017, the EU commented on the assassination of former president Saleh by considering the repression, harassment, detention and murder of many political and civil figures by the Houthis as a serious concern. For that matter, the EU urged the Houthis to immediately cease all violations of fundamental human rights and to respect all groups of the Yemeni society; and all stakeholders who can influence the conflict to intensify their efforts to find a political solution to the crisis.²⁸³ Then, Mogherini spoke about the ballistic missile attacks on Riyadh, which was publicly claimed by the Houthis. She said that the attacks are an unacceptable violation of international law and a further escalation of the conflict and that the cycle of successive retaliations has worsened the already bad humanitarian situation. Thus, the EU again called for de-escalation and the resumption of peace talks.²⁸⁴

Early in 2018, the EU Delegation to Yemen shared that one of the EU's human rights priorities in 2018, as set by the Foreign Affairs Council, was to "*continue to demand that the delivery of life-saving assistance be granted to Yemeni people in need*"²⁸⁵. In March 2018, the EU ambassador to Yemen visited Sana'a, which she justified as part of the EU's efforts to reach out to all Yemeni parties to encourage them to engage in talks to find a durable political solution as well as raise some humanitarian and human rights issues.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, the EU stated that the Houthi missiles attack on Saudi Arabia, including its Riyadh airport, is "unprecedented in the conflict" and that it reaffirmed its firm position behind the UN efforts to resume political negotiations, while continuing to help the people

²⁸² "Statement by Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides on the Humanitarian Situation in Yemen."

²⁸³ "Déclaration de La Porte-Parole Sur La Situation Au Yémen."

²⁸⁴ "Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the Situation in Yemen."

²⁸⁵ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 26 February 2018."

²⁸⁶ "@EUinYemen on Twitter, 20 March 2018."

of Yemen.²⁸⁷ A tweet of the EU ambassador to Yemen, related to that incident, illustrates the tone used by the EU – she said that she is “*strongly condemning the launch of missiles to Saudi Arabia. Military escalation has never been a shortcut to achieve peace, but rather it will trigger a worsening of the humanitarian situation of Yemeni people who are desperately asking just for one thing: peace*”²⁸⁸ – although, so far, the EU did not use the word “condemn” in its official statements. The Delegation tweeted, in April 2018, that the EU “*stands with Yemen civilians, providing life-saving aid and supporting them on a path towards resilience, recovery and self-reliance*”²⁸⁹. This was to announce the EU’s new pledge of more than 100 million EUR to address the urgent needs of the civilians in Yemen.²⁹⁰ Stylianides commented that the EU is committed to assist those affected by the conflict and to save lives on the ground while all parties must ensure safe, unhindered and continuous humanitarian access to all Yemenis.²⁹¹ He also condemned the “cowardly” attack on a humanitarian Red Cross convoy in Yemen as it is a “gross violation” of international humanitarian law and “saving lives should never cost lives”.²⁹²

This is conforming with the narrative the EU has constructed up until the present. One of the Council conclusions on Yemen from June 2018²⁹³ mentioned that the EU is concerned about the intensification of the military operations in and around the city of Hodeidah, “including the impact of the military operations by the Coalition on the civilian population”. It also condemned the launch of ballistic missiles by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia, including at civilian targets and vessels.²⁹⁴ Additionally, the EU condemned in a separate point the attacks against civilians and called “*on all parties to protect civilians and comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including to respect the principle of distinction between civilian population combatants, as well as between civilian objects and military objectives, the principle of proportionality, and to take precaution in the conduct of hostilities*”²⁹⁵.

²⁸⁷ “Statement by the Spokesperson on the Firing of Missiles against Saudi Arabia.”

²⁸⁸ “@AntoniaCalvoEU on Twitter, 26 March 2018.”

²⁸⁹ “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 3 April 2018.”

²⁹⁰ “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 3 April 2018.”

²⁹¹ “EU Pledges €107.5 Million to Address Urgent Needs of Yemeni Civilians.”

²⁹² “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 21 April 2018.”

²⁹³ “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 25 June 2018.”

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ “Council Conclusions on Yemen - Council Conclusions (10369/18).”

The EU has highlighted the importance of including women in the peace process as well. In December 2018, the EU hosted a high-level dialogue on advancing the role of women in peace processes, mainly in Syria and Yemen. Mogherini commented that event by saying that women continue to pay the heaviest price of the conflicts and that they “can be the best agent for change: empowering them gives peace a greater chance of success”. She added that the EU has no other agenda than to achieve peace, be it in Yemen or any other part of the world – “[the EU] will continue to do [its] utmost to be at the side of the populations and of women in conflict”²⁹⁶. The same support to the Yemeni women was showed by the EU Ambassador to Yemen on the occasion of the international women’s day, when she said that the EU Delegation to Yemen has set women’s rights in Yemen as a main priority, as women are central in ensuring inclusive and sustainable peace.²⁹⁷

6.3.3. ANALYSIS

In that context, the EU’s narrative towards the crisis in Yemen follows that line of human security. Generally, the institution always expresses “concern” over any negative development. The language used reflected the EU’s consideration of the poor conditions that prevailed over the lives of the Yemeni people but usually did not harshly condemn or blame any side of the conflict for those bad consequences. Hence, the human security narrative, through which the EU focuses on human rights, people’s suffering, international standards and cooperation such as international laws and the UN, diplomacy and peace processes. It is also that human security narrative that guides the actions taken by EU, as reflected in the first part of this chapter.

The EU considered the Houthi takeover over Sana’a in 2015 as a threat to the prosperity, stability, democracy and unity of Yemen. It also saw that the situation in Yemen would have a bad impact on the regional stability as well as the already worsening humanitarian situation. When the EU wanted to point fingers, it usually addressed the blame broadly using expressions like “all political forces”. Statements repeatedly urged all parties to refrain from violence and return to dialogue and negotiations. Nevertheless, the Houthis were particularly mentioned in some cases, such as when they unilaterally declared the formation of a government – an act that the EU considered to have no legitimacy. In other words, the EU

²⁹⁶ EEAS Press Team, “EU Hosts a Two-Day High-Level Dialogue between Syrian and Yemeni Women Representatives.”

²⁹⁷ “@EUinYemen on Twitter, 7 March 2019.”

tended to cast, if ever, the blame on the Houthis and expressed its support to the legitimate authorities. The EU's action in the form of arms embargo and other targeted sanctions against a Houthi leader and Saleh's son also enforces that narrative, which complied with the UNSC's line of action. Moreover, it seems that the EU attempted to adopt a smoother language when addressing the coalition's activities: in one of the statements, the EU recognized the security threats that emerges from the situation in Yemen (the coalition presents the security issues in its justification of the military intervention) but that the humanitarian consequences, resulting from the military actions, will not solve the security concerns. In another statement, an EU official commented the Saudi-led decision to close the air, sea and land entry points to Yemen only in terms of its humanitarian impact. Nevertheless, the EU seems to consider the Houthis as well as the internationally recognized and Saudi-backed government as actors who need to be equally considered when addressing the situation in Yemen. The EU also recognizes the involvement of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, because of their security concerns and hence also recognized this actor in the Yemeni equation.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen is at the centre of the EU's narrative and engagement towards Yemen. It constantly called for the safeguard of humanitarian principles, which could be based on the frameworks set by the international humanitarian law and human rights law. It defends the importance of such laws because they are in place to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure (not only) in times of war. The EU also advocates for the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. EU statements described the humanitarian situation as catastrophic, unprecedented and dire – alluding to the seriousness of the conditions and the importance of dealing with them. Additionally, the EU identified the main causes of that as the continuing fighting as well as the limited humanitarian access to food, medicine and fuel. It condemned the “indiscriminate” targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The EU highly refers and believes in the multilateralism of the UN and UN agencies. Furthermore, it supports any collective efforts that would bring to the table various sides of the conflict, with the aim to reach a peaceful and sustainable solution. Thus, the EU is a strong defender of a political rather than a military solution - it repeatedly states that there is no military solution to the war in Yemen. It stressed, on more than one occasion, that peaceful measures are “the only way to end the conflict and properly and effectively address

state fragmentation, human suffering, as well as to tackle the growing threat of terrorism” - the terrorist label was only addressed towards the extremist groups like AQAP. The EU also cooperates with many UN and international agencies such as the UNDP in Yemen; and posts their joint activities on social media to promote the humanitarian work they are covering in the country.

In other words, the EU presents itself as an actor in terms of humanitarian, development, reconciliation and reform efforts towards Yemen. It acknowledged that humanitarian assistance cannot address the situation but needs to be combined with sustainable development, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, diplomatic and political efforts to enhance peace and security. It showed that it stands on the side of the Yemeni people, as the essential factor to be taken into consideration while addressing the situation – according to the EU, civilians are paying the highest price. Hence, the EU stepped up its humanitarian assistance and stressed its support to the safety of humanitarian workers (that were also targeted in attacks) operating in Yemen and delivering “lifesaving” aid to those in need.

CONCLUSION

As the theory shows, actors adopt a certain behaviour and formulate interests based on their identity – how they see the world and themselves. Identities, which stem from ideas, are socially constructed as they are shaped by collective components of knowledge, symbols, language and norms/rules. Constructivism is concerned with the meaning the actors give to their behaviour and action. In other words, identity defines interests, which means that the formulation of interests depends on social context and thus is realized in practice.

As was defined in the theory, the ontological security, emerging from corporate identity, is the security of the self, not of the body, and of the subjective sense that enables and motivates action and choice. The empirical part showed, for example, that Saudi Arabia and its allies are concerned with Iran's growing influence in the region, since it threatens the ontological security of the Saudis (the Saudi-dominated identity of the region and the interests that result from it).

Actions and their consequences either reproduce or contradict identities, which makes the relation between identity and action a dynamic one – identity determines actions and actions sustain that identity. Moreover, social identity represents the sets of meanings that an actor ascribes to itself, considering the perspective of other. Social identities are relational and intersubjective as they involve other actors and depend on the social context.

Furthermore, an identity can be formulated through imitation and social learning. Imitation takes place when actors imitate the self-understanding of other actors that they perceive as successful. However, success can have different meanings such as power, wealth or prestige. Social learning is the process through which identities and interests are learned – actors process the views that other actors have of them and internalize them into their own identity. If an actor is treated as an enemy, it is likely that it will incorporate that hostility into its own view of itself in regard to others. Here, the relation between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis can exemplify that – they treat each other as enemies, which has become part of their respective identities towards each other. In other words, as Saudi Arabia treats the Houthis as enemies, the Houthis will not consider themselves Saudi Arabia's partner but will incorporate that hostility into their own view of themselves and thus present themselves on the opposing side of the Saudis.

National interests are social constructs created out of the intersubjective and culturally established meanings, with which the international system and the states' positions in it are given meaning. National interest is thus considered in explaining state action and by consequence interpreting international politics. It is the language of the state in regard to the making of foreign policy as policymakers set the tone of foreign policy and the goals to be pursued, through the lens of national interest. Additionally, national interest sets the scale through which state actions gain legitimacy and political support. Since national interest is constructed through shared meanings and understanding of the international system and the place of the state in it, language and discourse play an important role.

This thesis focused on different narratives, in which each actor aimed to justify, explain and/or legitimize certain behaviour and actions. For that matter, actors referred to certain norms, international standards or any standard of appropriateness. By definition, a norm is a standard or appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity. A norm delimits a single standard of behaviour while an institution represents a group of practices and rules. Here comes the differentiation between the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. While the logic of consequences means that a certain action is taken by measuring the costs and benefits, the logic of appropriateness attributes actions based on the principle of legitimacy. Additionally, the evaluative or prescriptive norms set the rightness of behaviour. This leads back to the need for justification of actions as norm embody the notions of right and appropriate behaviour. An actor usually feels the need to justify and explain an action when there is a recognized norm that goes against its behaviour. For instance, militarily intervening in another country is not usually an accepted behaviour in international relations. In the ideal case, such action should be legitimate and legal through UN resolutions. Hence, Saudi Arabia tried to justify its military intervention by emphasizing that it was at the request of the "legitimate" government of Yemen and that it had a wide international support.

Hence, there is a necessity to communicate among actors, alluding to language, discourse and narrative. A strategic narrative is basically the "story" that an actor presents with the goal of making others understand it and identify with it. It is a framework, in which people connect actions and events, and give them a sense as well as a structure, through which meaning is established. It allows leaders to engage with publics at home and abroad, sometimes to reach goals like influencing foreign publics, so they put pressure on their own

governments to implement certain policies. This was especially dominant in the Houthis' narrative. For example, the Houthis showed how Western countries are selling weapons that are consecutively used in the strikes against Yemen and causing the dire humanitarian situation, from which the Yemeni people are suffering. This aimed to show that, according to them, the same countries that preach human rights are somehow also involved in the violence against the Yemeni people. This is supposed to discredit those countries and influence their publics to pressure their governments to take action against Saudi Arabia and the coalition.

Discourse form the basis for communication as it is used by actors to form narratives – discourse gives structure to narratives, which in turn gives a causal transformation to events. The recurrence of certain representations in statements and practices allows the institutionalization of language over time. Thus, discourse analysis shows why an actor is considered as an enemy by another or how it decided to behave in a certain way. Discursive practice is key in understanding foreign policy. Discourse represents the level of research of this thesis and the basis for the analysis.

As the empirical part proved, states with different identities behave differently, seen interests are the product of identities - a state that identifies itself as a great power or at least regional power like Saudi Arabia, behave differently than a state or an actor with EU identity.

The case study of the Houthi narrative demonstrated that they constructed the crisis by demonizing the Saudi-led military intervention by calling it an aggression. They put all the blame of the people's suffering on the Saudis. They also attempted to discredit the UN and other international actors in the eyes of the public, by accusing them of doing no real action to uphold the humanitarian principles they preach. They also reproached the UN for not bringing the other parties to implement the provisions of various agreements, while they claim that their side have showed full commitment, again shifting the blame for the failure of peace agreements on someone else. The narrative further put the responsibility of the suffering of the people on the UN and the international community, that are silent and complicit to the aggression. The Houthis justify their actions as a mere response to the Saudi offence as it is their duty to defend the Yemeni people. The Houthi narrative acknowledges the "catastrophic" humanitarian situation that prevails in the country, casting all blame on other actors. Al-Masirah has a comprehensive archive of reportages and videos documenting different Saudi-led attacks in various parts of the country and proving the aggression

committed against Yemen and its people. Furthermore, the Houthis heavily relied on footages showing children as the victims of different airstrikes. This should appeal to the sympathy of the international community and support the Yemenis against the coalition. At the same time, it should turn more Yemenis against the coalition and discredit the latter in the eyes of those who still support them. As for their presentation of self, the Houthis presented themselves as militarily capable of countering the enemy, no matter how strong, as they are defending the country's sovereignty. They went as far as threatening the coalition with retaliation, which the latter has no one to blame for but itself. Additionally, they put themselves on the same level as the Yemeni people, that are suffering the consequences of the Saudi violence. In other words, the Houthis victimized the Yemeni people, to which they belong and are part of, who are suffering at the hands of the Saudi enemy and all its allies.

As for the Saudi narrative, the military intervention was only a response to the request of the legitimate government, alluding to their duty to help their Yemeni "brothers". The Saudis also referred to their own security being jeopardized by the Houthis. They defended the image that they did not act as a rogue actor in international relation but that the intervention has international support and it has the goal of protecting and enhancing the regional as well as international peace and security against the Houthis and the threat of the spread of Iran's influence in the region. Furthermore, the Saudi narrative gave pejorative attributes to the Houthis and thus did not recognize them as an equal actor to be considered in the conflict but as an external spoiler and troublemaking factor that is causing all the harm to the Yemenis and is the main cause of the war. Moreover, the Saudis justify their actions, including addressing accusations of committing war crimes, by blaming the Houthis; and when it was necessary to blame someone from their own side, they always did at a lower level of leadership and a lower position in the chain of command. This removes the culpability from the higher leadership, whose people are the "face" of the country. The Saudi government is claiming that the Houthis are blocking humanitarian aid from reaching the people in need by blocking, confiscating or looting the deliveries - giving a bad image of the Houthis as harming not only other actors but also their own people. In contrast, the coalition presents itself as a saviour, a helper and the brotherly neighbour that would not leave the Yemenis to their fate at the Houthis' hands.

As the Houthis and Saudi Arabia are fighting each other, comparing their narratives shows that both demonize the other and cast all blame on the other actor, without taking

responsibility for any of their action. They both claim to be defending the Yemeni people against the aggression of the other. While they both acknowledge the worsening humanitarian situation in the country, they continue fighting without really committing to a peaceful resolution and keep condemning someone else either for blocking humanitarian aid, which the Houthis are being accused of, or for not doing enough action to help the people, which the UN is being accused of.

Finally, the EU proved again its commitment to the human security narrative. It tried to maintain a certain level of impartiality by casting blame very broadly and urging all parties to a peaceful solution instead. Although the EU tends to condemn more openly the actions of the Houthis than of the Saudi Arabia, the language it uses is still not as harsh as would be adequate in response to the dire humanitarian crisis. In fact, the EU described the humanitarian situation as catastrophic and put it at the centre of EU's narrative as well as engagement towards Yemen. It keeps referring to the humanitarian principles, embodied in the international humanitarian law and human rights law. Additionally, the EU identified the main causes of that as the continuing fighting as well as the limited humanitarian access to food, medicine and fuel. It condemned the "indiscriminate" targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure. The EU highly refers and believes in the multilateralism of the UN and UN agencies. Furthermore, it supports any collective efforts that would bring to the table various sides of the conflict, with the aim to reach a peaceful and sustainable solution. Thus, the EU is a strong defender of a political rather than a military solution - it repeatedly states that there is no military solution to the war in Yemen.

The comparison of the three actors shows that each bases its position and actions on a different narrative, that in turn stems from distinct identities. The humanitarian question is the common point for all three case studies. However, each actor used it in a different way: the Houthis used it to discredit other actors and evoke sympathy for the suffering people, and thus gaining more legitimacy and support; the Saudis portrayed the suffering of the people as the main reason why the Houthis must be countered and used the humanitarian crisis to present themselves as fulfilling their duty as Muslims to save their Yemeni "brothers"; the EU played the role of the humanitarian defender, using the humanitarian crisis to urge all parties to suspend violent actions and aim for a peaceful resolution. Nevertheless, the conflict is soon entering its fifth year and all three actors keep doing what

they have been doing so far with no prospects of the situation getting better any time soon, while the Yemenis are paying the highest price.

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