CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Edin Bajramović

Saudi Arabia's and Iran's Foreign Policy Towards U.S.-Designated Terrorist Organizations

Master thesis

Prague 2020

Author: Edin Bajramović

Supervisor: Mgr. Bohumil Doboš, Ph.D.

Academic Year: 2019/2020

Abstract

The Middle East, as one of the most dynamic and troubling world regions, has a wide range of problems. However, in my view, the essential, if not the most essential, security issue here, is terrorism. It seems that the relative decline of terrorist groups, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, has made us forget that there are indeed underlying problems that cause the emergence of these deadly organizations. This paper aims to identify these causes by analyzing Saudi and Iranian foreign policy towards U.S.-designated terrorist organizations: Hezbollah, Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State. In the process, the thesis will establish the general motives of these two states to support and fight terrorism, as well as their means of doing it. Furthermore, it will dive into the specifics of the policies that these two formulate towards every one of the previously stated groups. That will be done in order to prove arguments contending how Riyadh, in many ways, hinders U.S. counterterrorism efforts, while Iranians, contrary to popular belief, contribute to it. Acknowledging that there are many things on which these two states need to improve, the thesis will offer recommendations pointing to the need for Washington to take a more balanced approach to these two countries if it wishes to create a region where its involvement can be minimized

Contents

Introduction

Foreign policy toward terrorist organizations can represent a powerful insight into the overall political trajectory of the state in question, as well as the general geopolitical goals it intends to achieve. It has two sides to it. As one can assume, the first, more obvious side, is the defensive aspect. States fight terrorism to ensure safety for their citizens. Also, by guaranteeing security, countries retain a certain level of power, which would otherwise be compromised, if the former was lacking. Terrorism does not know borders, and this is what incentivizes essentially every state to inhibit it effectively before it is too late.

Unlike the first straightforward element, there is a second, far more complex side to it. Supportive state foreign policy towards a particular terrorist group can often yield benefits for the policymakers who practice it. More precisely, as noted by Daniel Byman, states and terrorist groups have had for a long time "a lethal relationship (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005)." Many of the most dangerous terrorist organizations had, at certain stages in their evolution, ties to at least one supportive government. Ironically, the very same countries that fear so much, if terrorism will strike them next, have been, according to some findings implicitly involved in the deaths of several thousand people (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005). Hence, the question-posing itself as default is why governments decide to embark on such a dangerous adventure?

At the time, this is done to destabilize and weaken the neighboring regime or to topple it by exporting a new one; however, in most cases, the primary motivation is power projection. No country is even close to having sufficient economic and military capabilities to project power via

conventional means (e.g., aircraft carriers) to U.S. ones. Even the regional powers or second-order states such as Russia and China are lagging, let alone third and fourth-ordered powers.

Therefore, to fill this void, states turn to the strategy of assisting terrorist groups, be that financial help, provision of weapons, logistics, training, or a combination of all four. Using terrorist groups as proxies come in handy as it provides states with a powerful tool of advancing their interests and subduing other countries to their demands. Moreover, this strategy allows a certain degree of deniability that can be used to avoid the potential retaliation of more powerful states. Two of the countries that, to no small extent, used this strategy are Saudi Arabia (SA) and Iran – both primary subjects of the thesis' investigation.

As implied earlier, one of the main motivations for Iran's instrumentalization of this strategy was and still is, among other things, power projection. Consequently, Iran has been accused and labeled as one of the most significant state sponsors of terrorism by the United States. This charge has been there, unequivocally associated with Iran, since the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, during which Iran demonstrated the capability to utilize proxy forces in military warfare (Hiro, 2019). Later attempts by the theocratic regime to distance itself from such labels have proven to be mostly fruitless.

It is undeniable that Iran has been one of the more active sponsors of terrorism. It is also irrefutable that thanks to Iran's assistance, Lebanese Hezbollah has managed to become a strong and relatively independent terrorist group. Also, other alleged support, however, to a lesser degree, to groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Jihad, and Al-Qaeda have been recorded. Nevertheless, for the past 20 years, based on the annual reports of the National Counterterrorism Center, the vast majority of Islamic terrorist attacks in the world following 9/11 have been

associated with Sunni extremist groups, inspired by the puritan ideology of Saudi Arabia (National Counterterrorism Center, 2018). Furthermore, reality shows that, in the last ten years or so, there has been a calming trend related to Iran's terrorism sponsorship activities (Strategic Comments, 2005). Given Iran's desire for international political legitimacy and a more pragmatic approach on the part of some members of the clerical establishment, these activities have been scaled down. This means that Iran has refrained from exercising some of its usual terrorist practices, such as assassinations, hostage-taking, and supporting terrorist actions outside the Middle East region. As a matter of fact, it is arguable that Iran's counterterrorism actions were not enough praised, considering that they were instrumental in the overall decline of one of the most notorious terrorist groups, Daesh (Tabatabai A. M., 2018). Finally, with the groundbreaking Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with Western powers on sensitive issues that have, for such a long time, hindered any meaningful progress. The agreement itself did not solve all of the problems, but it was a step in the right direction (Levitt, How Trump is Going After Hezbollah in America's Backyard, 2017). Despite this success, the discourse contributing to demonization, exclusion, and portrayal of Iran as the main culprit for region's insecurity and primary terrorism- facilitator, has persisted, mostly thanks to the U.S. view on the matter. Since Donald Trump assumed the office, the narrative towards Iran is harsher than ever, visible both in his statements and concrete moves.

On the other side of the coin, there is Saudi Arabia (SA), a vital American ally in the region. More specifically, the kingdom has been aligned economically and in most of the cases politically with the U.S. policies, not excluding counterterrorism ones. However, 9/11 has made many commentators question Saudi Arabia's reliability as a U.S. ally, particularly in this domain. The first evidence incriminating Saudi's potential support for terrorists was the information

revealing that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers, as well as the leader of the hijacker's organization, were born and raised in SA (Gold, 2003). Other proof indicates the potential involvement of two prominent members of the Saudi royal family, Prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz al-Saud and Prince Turki bin Faisal, as well as SA's wealthiest citizens and financial institutions. (Gold, 2003) Despite all of this evidence, this was merely enough for conspiratory rumors, not sustainable allegations. The primary reason for this lies in the fact that all those who investigated Saudi role in the September 11 attacks, did not extend their investigation beyond the tactical elements of terrorism such as the training, financing, acquisition of weapons, and so on – a highly valuable and used methodological tool when it comes to linking Iran to terrorism. If one intends to elucidate Saudi links to terrorism, one needs to do more than focus on the tactical aspects and divert the attention firstly to the roots of terrorism, which in this particular case is a religious ideology called Wahhabism.

This radical and puritan version of Islam practiced within the kingdom, many consider as the primary source for the post-9/11 wave of Islamic terrorism. To have a worldwide outreach, such a doctrine needs institutions through which it can be articulated – educational networks and channels of funding- all of which SA has. According to Joseph Nye, these are the classic "soft power" mechanisms used for shaping the preferences of others (Pandith, 2019). For terrorists to do what they did, for instance, in the case of the 9/11 attacks, they must be indoctrinated or more simply completely brainwashed — no better way to do this than through the aforementioned passive, soft power tools. Linking motivations behind the 9/11 attacks and all of the other subsequent terrorist deeds to economic deprivation or some political grievances are only, at best, a partial explanation of the problem.

Putting both of these countries next to each other should provide a detailed insight into the factual situation, more specifically, the differences between Iran's and SA's foreign policy approach to terrorist groups. Accordingly, the paper will make a comparative analysis of Iran's and SA's general foreign policies towards four terrorist organizations: Hezbollah, Hamas Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The selection of all four terrorist organizations bases on three criteria: 1) the presence on the U.S. current list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs); 2) relevant interaction with Iran and SA; and 3) Middle East origins. The comparison itself will allow us to discover new things about both countries, and hopefully, these novelties will provide us with enough evidence to confirm/disprove the following hypotheses:

1) Iran's foreign policy towards these four terrorist groups is in various ways compatible with U.S. counterterrorism policy

2) SA's foreign policy towards these four terrorist groups is in various ways not compatible with U.S. counterterrorism policy

The extensive research into the topic will be appreciated since terrorism has been the most critical security issue in the region for the last two decades. Despite some commentators contending that the nuclear issue is at the forefront now, it is hard to agree. The intense U.S. pressure placed on Iran, while primarily directed at its nuclear enrichment program, has been inherently motivated by its controversial relationship with various terrorist groups and concerns that nuclear weapons could get into the hands of such a group. Also, the thesis' results could be highly implicative of the U.S. need to realize that Cold War relationships no longer apply and that perhaps there is a need for the reevaluations of its relationships with SA and Iran, respectively.

An overview of the U.S. relationship with Iran and SA

For six decades, the U.S. unique approach to the kingdom has been one of the constants in American foreign policy. It has been traditionally described as an "oil for security relationship" ever since Franklin Delano Roosevelt set the warm tone for the official relations in 1945 after meeting with Saudi King Abdel Aziz (Bronson, 2006). What followed next was, more or less, tight U.S.-Saudi relationship with seldom attempts by American policymakers to compromise it. Some scholars, such as Al-Rasheed and Bronson, contend that the argument of how oil is the primary motivation behind the U.S. strong interests to establish and subsequently preserve this relationship is partially correct (Al-Rasheed, 2018). According to them, as compelling as this view may be, it ignores the very political features of the post-WWII period brought by the Cold War. Therefore, in their view, an essential characteristic of the U.S.- Saudi relationship was shared interest in combating the Soviet Union (Bronson, 2006). Whatever argument scholars may find more compelling, they cannot disagree on the real results of this cooperation. To a large extent, both sides have benefited. On several occasions, the United States has utilized the kingdom's ability to manipulate the supply of oil on the market in periods of crisis. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, SA increased its oil shipments to Americans in order to keep the prices stable (Keynoush, 2016).

The kingdom similarly provided valuable assistance to Washington in the process of keeping the USSR in check. Throughout most of the Cold War, SA instrumentalized its financial

capabilities by actively supporting anti-Communist governments and insurgencies. All in all, Riyadh was a highly reliable ally upon which the Americans could always count when it came to political and financial support. For the United States, this meant a great deal considering the Middle East was full of undependable countries that benefited from U.S.-Soviet rivalry, changing their allegiance from one to another superpower, depending on the circumstances. Iran-Iraq war, Soviet-Afghan conflict are few of the dozen conflicts where SA proved useful.

In return, SA had received a security umbrella, which mainly entailed U.S. commitment to Saudi territorial integrity and the preservation of the ruling house. Over the years during the Cold War, this defense has been critical against external threats, such as Egypt, the Soviet Union, Iraq, and Iran (Al-Rasheed, 2018). For instance, in the 1960s, the United States was instrumental in defending the kingdom from repeated Egyptian bombings during a proxy war in Yemen. The degree to which Riyadh depended upon U.S. security guarantees was even more exemplified in the First Gulf War when SA was about to be attacked by Sadam Hussein's more superior army (Gold, 2003). If there was not for US-led international coalition to thwart this attempt, it is highly improbable that SA would be capable of withstanding the potential attack. Finally, all of the technological know-how, financial injections, and political support for the Saudi Wahhabism that Washington provided, should not be overlooked.

Despite the relatively smooth relationship between the two, the United States and SA did have their fair share of disagreements. The first one was related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although SA's leadership was reluctant to get itself drawn into the whole issue, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, contrary to the expectations, it instituted a short-lived oil embargo against the United States (Gold, 2003). For the first time since the beginning of its statehood, SA's oil did not serve the interests of its most important partner. Further tensions became more prominent as

the mutually shared global interests, which defined the active U.S.-Saudi Cold War cooperation, started deteriorating simultaneously with the transformation of the system itself. However, a significant decline in their relationship did not begin before the events of September 11. The wave of criticism and the profound questioning of the alliance that followed and occupied the Bush administration will be scrutinized in the chapter dealing with the implications of 9/11 on SA and Iran.

During Obama's tenure, a short-lived period of disagreements was also present. Firstly, the president refused to indulge Saudi repeated requests to depose the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, and bomb Iran. Secondly, in 2016 Senate passed the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA), allowing the victims of 9/11 attacks to sue the kingdom in American courts, implicitly acknowledging Saudi's involvement (Stern, 2011). Lastly and most devastating to their working relationship was the US-brokered Iran Nuclear Agreement that signified to Saudi political elites Washington's willingness to end four-decades-long Iranian isolation and diversify its set of allies in the Middle East. It is fair to say that even after all of this, the U.S. commitment to SA remained relatively healthy, evidenced in the fact Washington sold more than $115 billion worth of arms to it during both of Obama's mandates (Al-Rasheed, 2018).

After Donald Trump assumed the presidential office, relations with SA were once again going forward. His historic visit to Riyadh signaled Muhammed Ibn Salman that SA is still one of the critical American partners in the Middle East. Much to the satisfaction of the Crown Prince, in his address there, Trump denounced Iran, reemphasized the economic ties between the two countries, and refrained from mentioning Wahhabism and its connection with radical extremist groups, therefore, absolving the kingdom of any responsibility whatsoever for the promotion of global jihad (CNN Politics, 2017). All of the terminology (e.g., democracy, human

rights, Arab Spring) that would make SA uncomfortable, Trump deliberately left out for re-strengthening the shaken pillars of the U.S.-Saudi alliance.

With Iran, however, Washington had and has, at best, a tumultuous relationship. From friends to foes, this relationship can only be genuinely comprehended, if divided into three periods of their relations. Surprisingly, the first contacts made between the two countries were far from antagonistic. On the contrary, during the period of their initial interaction (1856-1953), both nations signed a Treaty of Commerce and Friendship (1856) – an agreement based on respect and mutual understanding (Mousavian, 2014). Iran regarded the United States as a benevolent actor, whose foreign policy doctrine based on the principle of protecting the weaker states from imperial forces, was precisely what Iranians needed to stand any chance against the hostile empires of Britain and Russia. U.S. policymakers reaffirmed this understanding by deciding not to meddle in the internal affairs of Iran. Even when Washington was "present" in the Iranian internal affairs, it was to actively assist Tehran during the process of reforms and strengthening of its institutions following the Constitutional Revolution. Necessarily, Washington would occasionally send advisory teams, mostly civilian-based, to assist Tehran in the issues ranging from financial to the educational sector (Hiro, 2019).

The United States also provided help when it came to protecting the independence and neutrality of Iran. On first such occasion in 1917, Washington interfered by shielding Iranians from the agreement imposed by London, which, if ratified, would make Iran a protectorate of Great Britain. The second instance occurred in the immediate aftermath of WWII. At the very beginning of the war, British and Soviet forces invaded Iran under the pretext of curbing German influence in the country. Provided by the 1942 Tripartite Agreement, both of these states were supposed to withdraw after the War's epilogue, but only the former did. When there was no clear

indication that Soviets intend to leave, U.S. president Truman pressured Stalin by threatening to deploy its forces to Iran. In May 1946, the Soviets complied and removed their troops. (Mousavian, 2014)

With the changing post-WWII environment and the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, the strategic location of Iran with its oil resources became increasingly important for Americans, thus encouraging them to maintain good relations with Tehran. As the doctrine mentioned above considered countering the Soviet geopolitical expansion through the provision of economic and military support to various nations, Iranians started receiving millions of dollars worth of aid packages, mostly military equipment (Kinzer, 2003). Nevertheless, this was not sufficient for any improvement in the socio-economic aspect of Iranian society, which was at its lowest point. Oil, for example, could have improved the situation, but instead, its benefits were reaped by everybody other than disempowered Iranian people. When Iran's parliamentary elected, prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, who intended to reverse these unfavorable oil agreements by announcing the nationalization of the resource, UK got so infuriated that it immediately started plotting plans of how to get rid of him (Mousavian, 2014). After having initial troubles convincing Americans to participate, in 1953, these two states, together with their intelligence agencies, MI6 and CIA, instigated a coup hence ejecting Mosaddegh, ending democratic movement in Iran, and laying the foundations for Iranian anti-Americanism (Kinch, 2016).

The second period of U.S.-Iranian relations (1953-79) was characterized by the tyrannical rule of Iran's Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. He unleashed a wave of arrests, imprisonments, and aggressive secular reforms – all of which ultimately led to the civilian dissent within Iranian society pawing the way for the Islamic Revolution in 1979. For all of these moves, Shah had

unlimited backing coming from Americans, while in return, the United States benefited by taking 40 percent share in Iran's oil consortium. For this reason only, Washington had no interest in doing anything other than strengthening Pahlavi's rule within the country (Kinzer, 2003). That was reflected in the fact that the CIA helped to create an Iranian intelligence agency, called "SAVAK," whose main goal was, as in every dictatorship, to eliminate any opposition to Shah. A large number of the individuals who were targeted by the "SAVAK" would later become the most prominent members of the new political establishment that took place after 1979. One of those individuals was the future Iranian leader, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Mousavian, 2014).

Although thanks to Americans, Iran possessed the formidable military capability and intelligence apparatus, Shah could not curb down the revolutionary spirit that was taking over Iran. In January 1979, millions of Iranian protesters poured into the street, demanding a change, ultimately forcing Shah to resign. Despite Pahlavi's evident loss of power, the Carter administration decided to support him regardless (Keynoush, 2016). With anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini seizing power and the Islamic Republic emerging, there was no doubt that U.S.-Iranian relations were about to enter a crisis period marked with antagonism and hostility. Iran was no longer to be U.S. pillar in the Middle East against the spread of communism.

After the revolution, highly-defining events for the U.S.-Iranian third period of interaction took place: American Hostage Crisis and downing of Iranian civilian plane. A group of radicalized Muslim students stormed the U.S. embassy and took 52 Americans hostage. The other one was the downing of Iran Air passenger flight 655 in 1988 by the USS *Vincennes*. All civilian passengers, among them 66 children, were killed due to the supposed mistake made on behalf of the U.S. military (Kinch, 2016). What infuriated Iranians, even more, was that the

United States, although expressing regret for the loss of innocent life, did not apologize for the attack or took any responsibility for the tragic occurrence. Both sides still use two of these events as the justifications for the lack of progress in their relationship.

To this day, one of the most significant issues that Washington has with Iran is terrorism. The most significant terrorist acts perpetrated by Iran, according to U.S. officials, are the Beirut military barracks bombing (1983); dozens of assassinations throughout Europe of Iranian dissidents (1980s and 1990s); and Khobar Tower attacks in Saudi Arabia (1996) (Azani, Hezbollah's Strategy of “Walking on the Edge": Between Politcal Game and Politcal Violence, 2013). Continuous assistance to terrorist groups such is similarly critical of the U.S. perception of Iran as a terrorist facilitator.

Furthermore, one of the major disputes between the two remains the issue of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). However, as mentioned in the introductory part, the nuclear issue is subordinated mainly to the aforementioned terrorism complexities. Another important obstacle is Tehran's opposition to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This issue is directly linked to the terrorism problem as Iran is deliberately arming and supporting terrorist-militant organizations, which oppose the possibility of peace between Israel and Palestine from becoming a reality (Iranian Foreign Policy: Context, Regional Analyses, and U.S. Interests, 2016). Finally, the last point of contention is Iran's poor human rights situation.

It is no wonder then that both states are trying to damage each other as much and many ways as possible. On one side, the United States has been trying to do this through sanctions, covert operations, the propaganda of demonization, means of support for regional aggression against Iran, and cyberwar. For instance, economic sanctions imposed on Iran by Washington

have been virtually present since the hostage crisis. At the very beginning, U.S .sanctions targeted Iranian oil, Tehran's assets in the United States, and U.S.-Iran trade, only later to expand to other areas like science, military, and politics (Keynoush, 2016). Many of them were nullified with the JCPOA. Nevertheless, the favorable situation for Iran did not last long, considering that the succeeding president, Donald Trump, unilaterally abandoned the treaty and, with this act, revoked many of the prior sanctions.

Another tool utilized by the U.S. government has been covert operations to destabilize Tehran. Iranians have accused American intelligence agencies of providing training and material assistance to terrorist and separatist groups within Iran. Precisely speaking, this pertains to the PEJAK (Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan) and *Mujahedin-e Khalq (*MEK), both of which are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Iranians (Esfendiary, 2016). State Department in 2012 even removed MEK from the U.S. FTO list (Mousavian, 2014).

The last tool worth mentioning is the American embrace of regional aggression against Tehran. An only notable example of this is the Iran-Iraq war, which is still deeply engraved in the memory of all Iranians and represents one of the most enduring grievances in its relationship with Washington. During the eight-year-long War, the Iraqi president, Sadam Hussein, used chemical weapons against Iranian troops and civilians. Not only that, Americans did not do anything to condemn these attacks, but they also assisted Iraq throughout the whole duration of the war, tacitly approving the most horrific chemical attacks in the history of warfare (Kinch, 2016).

Saudi Arabia-Iran relations

The roots of Saudi-Iranian antagonism can be traced to the Iranian revolution. Once a very close alliance, created in order to contain the rising influence of Arab nationalism, Nasserism, and the Soviet Union, deteriorated in the aftermath of the revolution to the extent that even 40 years after, their hostility considerably shapes the events within the region. For its part, the Western world, particularly the United States, was content with the alliance, aware that the very nature of the political systems in these conservative monarchies made them antagonistic to any kind of Soviet intrusion within their respective domains (Hiro, 2019). With the ousting of Shah, things dramatically started changing. A new Iran entered the stage - a more revisionist Iran that was ready to shift away from its previous role of maintenance of the status quo and do whatever was necessary to disrupt the current equilibrium. It viewed itself, exactly like SA, as a real and sole representative of Islam. According to Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, that is precisely what made them natural competitors (Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran: Is Regional Proliferation Inevitable?, 2012). As this new agenda went beyond the standard U.S.-USSR proxy interactions, which characterized the region up until that moment, SA became worrisome of how the changing political setting can affect it.

The kingdom was, after the breakup of the alliance, in a slightly better position, as it had America on its side supporting it. Nevertheless, House of Saud was wary of what was waiting for them next despite the reassurances by the American allies of its commitment to protecting the ruling family. Regardless, in the mind of the Saud family, there was only one thing. From their point of view, Americans failed Shah Reza Pahlavi, as he provided with similar security guarantees just to, in the end, forcibly be removed by opposing forces. Iran's persistently emphasized goal to delegitimize and, more importantly, get rid of SA's ruling house reaffirmed

Saudi worries (Keynoush, 2016). From that point on, SA's every major political decision took into account the threat of revisionist Iran.

One of those decisions was a sustained campaign of defense reforms aiming at creating professional military apparatus capable of contributing to national defense, both against internal and external threats. Given that, at the time, Iran possessed one of the most advanced militaries within the region, thus creating a wide discrepancy between itself and any other power-aspiring Middle East country, reforms seemed like an expected response. Unsurprisingly, the 80s were featured with an unprecedented military buildup in the Gulf region (Soltaninejad, 2018). Another Saudi decision to undermine Iran was its support for Baghdad during the Iraq-Iran war. Since the atrocities of that conflict remain enshrined in the memory of every Iranian who experienced the war, SA's millions-dollars' worth assistance to Sadam Hussein represents one of the most severe grievances in their complicated bilateral relationship (Rich, 2012).

Post-revolutionary Iran, as the newly proclaimed spiritual vanguard of Islam, in particular, Shiism, obligated itself to instigate and provide assistance to any Shia minority group that found itself under oppression. The opportunity for this came immediately after the revolution as the numerous Shia riots erupted throughout Sunni-dominated monarchies, most notably SA's provinces of Al-Hasa and Qatif, whose Shia groups constitute between 10% and 15% of the overall Saudi population (Ostovar, 2016). For a country with this kind of revolutionary agenda, it was a perfect time to seize the moment and try to disrupt its nemesis. Iran's active encouragement of militant Shite groups such as Hezbollah Al-Hejaz and various other is illustrative of the strategy (Ostovar, 2016). From Saudi's perspective, however, Iran's attempt to take advantage of this significant demographics represented a considerable security threat.

Diverging interests on the Afghan civil war in the 90s continued to exacerbate their poor relationship. One of the first outside actors to get involved in this conflict was Iran by assisting Wahdad militia allied with the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shad Masoud. Compared to 1974, when Shah extended his influence on Afghanistan with zero objection from Saudis, this civil war proved to be different as SA was not ready to allow Afghanistan to fall under the influence of the Islamic Republic. On the opposite side, Riyadh started providing support to the Taliban, which eventually emerged victorious. Slowly, Afghanistan was turning into first of the many battlegrounds to follow in the Iranian-Saudi proxy war (Hiro, 2019).

With the arrival of liberal Rafsanjani's and Khatami's administrations, it looked for a moment there that the poor relations between the SA and Iran would start to improve. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was also one of the pivotal events detoxifying their relationship. After an exhausting period of Tehran's factional rivalries debating what stance to take towards the war, much to the surprise of Saudi policy-makers, who assumed opposite response, pragmatic Khatami decided it was the best for Iran to remain neutral. That was highly appreciated within Saudi circles laying the groundwork for the re-establishment of diplomatic ties that followed after the threat of Hussein's invasion was over (Gold, 2003). Both states started initiating policies of rapprochement, cooperation, and regional integration. SA, on its part, loosened the security restrictions for *hajj* pilgrims coming from Iran. In December 1995, Prince Abdullah and President Rafsanjani met on the sidelines of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Islamabad, after which the former acknowledged the broader regional role for Iran. Saudi political establishment even went that far to suggest that Iran could be brought into the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Rich, 2012).

Notwithstanding the highly unlikely possibility of this scenario coming to life, the very suggestion indicated that the long-decades rivalry could finally come to its end. Even the series of events that Americans strategically attempted to exploit did not endanger the revival-process of the relationship between the two. First one of those was bombings in Khobar in Eastern Province for which Iran was blamed. Second, a much more severe occurrence came with 9/11 and subsequent "axis of evil" speech (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005). With the signing of a regional security agreement, their rapprochement was still slowly heading in a positive direction. In addition, Prince Abdullah refused to reference Iran as part of the "axis of evil (Soltaninejad, 2018)." However, the high level of optimism shared by both sides did not last long. It turned out that the relationship-revival was, after all, of short-term nature. Consequently, in 2005, visible differences in their regional agendas began surfacing once more.

On August 1, 2005, a far right-wing oriented politician, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, was sworn into office as the president of the Islamic Republic. That was one of the reasons for the renewal of tensions between SA and Iran. As his election coincided with the increasing power of Iran's intelligence and security apparatus – more assertive and conservative part of Iran's power structures – Tehran again started pursuing policies intended to facilitate its Shia agenda and thus harm its Sunni competitor (Hiro, 2019). The more assertive stance taken by Iran was also partially catalyzed by the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, which resulted in the toppling of Saddam Hussein and his Sunni-dominated government, therefore, removing a key military counterweight to the spread of Tehran's influence (Inafuku, 2010). Ahmedinejad ended Iran's voluntary cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and resumed the enrichment of uranium hence declaring Tehran's nuclear ambitions. (Iranian Foreign Policy: Context, Regional

Analyses, and U.S. Interests, 2016) Since then, SA has taken a firm stand against Iran's nuclear program, and this stance, up to this moment, did not change. Riyadh's attitude even further harshened with the signing of the JCPOA agreement. Fast forward to U.S. withdrawal from the treaty and Iran's continuation of uranium enrichment; the nuclear issue unsurprisingly remains one of the most fundamental disagreements between the two regimes (Wolf, 2018).

Another important diverging issue emerged in the last five years. To be more exact, uprisings started occurring in the Middle East as a result of long-accumulated grievances and people's dissatisfaction with the dictatorial regimes. Both Iran and SA have, to a significant extent, tried to exploit Arab Spring to their advantage, most notably in Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen (Rich, 2012). In the process, their overlapping agendas precipitated the mutual distrusts between the two. For now, in many ways, Iran is winning the struggle, and with the kingdom's young, impulsive, and aggressive leader, Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, SA is putting much effort to keep up. One thing is sure: these are not just simple and easily solvable disagreements. Momentarily, a wide range of issues is understood to be political flashpoints that could, at a certain point, flare up the whole region. Despite currently stable issues like Bahrain and relatively normalizing conflict in Syria, they can still, in the foreseeable future, serve as the proxy playgrounds for Riyadh and Tehran. In this process of outsmarting, interacting with terrorist organizations comes to play an essential foreign policy tool.

Implications of 9/11

Inarguably 9/11 attacks had enormous implications for the whole world, in particular, Iran and SA. At the very beginning, for the former, this looked like an excellent opportunity to initiate some rapprochement dialogue with Americans. As one of the first states to condemn the

attacks, Iran was also concerned with the Wahhabis and Taliban, whose discourse was openly hostile to Shias. Tehran viewed this as an enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend-situation, and although there were some ongoing talks before Bush's presidency, unfortunate events surrounding 9/11 fostered much more substantial negotiations. These meetings, held in Geneva, Paris, and Bonn, covered not only the pressing issues such as terrorism and U.S.-Iranian security cooperation in Afghanistan but also some historical grievances between the two countries. As a result, the negotiations materialized in Iran's assistance during the U.S. attack on the Taliban. Speaking more precisely, Tehran granted Washington access to its airspace and port facilities (Byman, Iran, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2008). Even more notably, Iran used its good connections with one of the factions in the Afghan War, Northern Alliance, by appealing to its members to cooperate with the arriving American troops. That is why the subsequent offensives executed by the Americans, Northern Alliance, as well as IRGC on Afghanistan's largest cities, Kabul and Herat, were successful in removing the Taliban from the rule. Several other assistance such as the provision of intelligence about Afghan society, extradition of roughly 500 Al-Qaeda members, and a financial pledge worth US$500 million for Afghan reconstruction aid should not be sidelined (Tabatabai A. M., 2018). In the immediate-post-9/11-context, U.S.-Iranian dialogue had an unprecedented drive, not seen since the revolution, where the common interests on a few particular issues did not materialize into more potent cooperation on a broader set of problems.

What happened exactly is that amid this unprecedented cooperation on Afghanistan, in January 2002, George W. Bush delivered his famous "axis of evil" speech labeling Iran, alongside Iraq and North Korea, as the terrorism-supporter and facilitator (Soltaninejad, 2018). As much as the help was appreciated in the American political circles, fresh Khobar Towers

terrorist incidents, 2002 Karine A Affair, and most importantly, Iran's long-standing support for Hezbollah were something that Bush's neoconservative advisors could not put aside. "War on Terror" doctrine was so clearly articulated that sidelining of a few of these issues would mean its very contradiction. Although the talks were ongoing even after the infamous designation, they were done with much less enthusiasm for cooperation on both sides, thus leading to increasingly fewer results and eventual collapse of the conversations (Mousavian, 2014). What seemed to be a window of opportunity, ended terribly with horrific ramifications for the relations of both countries.

If 9/11 had enormous implications for Tehran, then what to say for Saudi Arabia, a country from which fifteen of the 9/11 hijackers originated. However, unlike Iran, the process was reversed. In other words, what at the beginning looked like it could be a huge step back for the Saudi-American partnership, turned out to be, in a sense restrengthening of their relationship. During the immediate period following 9/11, a debate was initiated among American elite foreign policy thinkers whether their country needed to re-evaluate Saudi Arabia's reliability as an ally. Laurent Murawiec, an analyst at the government-funded RAND think-thank, held a controversial presentation concluding that U.S. policy towards Riyadh in the wake of September 11 should all be about "targeting the kingdom's oil resources, financial assets, and holy places." RAND unequivocally refuted this view (Bronson, 2006). Nevertheless, this implied that there is a potential change on the horizon regarding the U.S. political attitude towards the kingdom.

American investigators also elucidated the relationship between the Saudi capital on one side and the mosques and madrassas, which provided foot soldiers for Al-Qaeda, on the other. They, therefore, targeted various channels of funds that made this possible. For instance, Riggs bank, used by the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington, and the New York branch of Arab

Bank, became a subject of intense financial scrutiny resulting in a legal suit. Moreover, one of the reports on the kingdom's alleged connection with Al-Qaeda, sponsored by the Council of Foreign Relations, found out how "for years, individuals and charities based in Saudi Arabia have been the most important source of funds for Al-Qaeda (Stern, 2011)." Besides, the document acknowledged the unwillingness of the Saudi officials to counter this problem by all disposable means. These controversial funding channels that were with the backing of the West utilized as a strategy during the Afghan War, instead of being dried up, only expanded as Americans turned their attention somewhere else (Geltzer, 2011). Despite the attempt of certain Saudi officials to turn all of the revealed connection to New York attacks into a conspiracy theory, for instance, by depicting Jews as the main antagonists of the whole tragedy, congress' investigation and final report into the events surrounding the 9/11 confirmed these allegations once more (Byman, Saudi Arabia and terrorism today, 2016).

Americans needed to reassess Saudi's credibility as a close ally in the Middle East. However, Washington was reluctant to initiate any harsher sanctions that could potentially damage their alliance. The minor measures imposed by Washington, such as visa restrictions for Saudi citizens and benign legal suits targeting Saudi financial channels, were indicative of this. Even the aforementioned part of a congressional report that reasserted Saudi connections to 9/11 was published more than 13 years after the inquiry finished (Byman, Saudi Arabia and terrorism today, 2016). Bush administration gave a significant amount of time to the kingdom to initiate some internal reforms to prove its willingness to fight terrorism. This period, vividly described by Rachel Bronson as "the fight for Saudi Arabia's soul," was characterized by the internal struggle for power between the pragmatic elements of the ruling family and religious establishment that, for many years, advocated Saudi support for radical Wahhabi groupings. The

former was more successful, but only thanks to the series of terrorist attacks that took place inside the kingdom in 2003 (Bronson, 2006). As a result, the reformists were given the necessary push to subordinate the religious establishment for a short-term period, at least.

Combined with the significant results regarding the prevention of the flow of funds to religious extremists, the reformist policies started positively resonating in American political circles. Accordingly, Washington's negative view of Riyadh gradually began to change. What followed next was intensified Saudi-American counterterrorism cooperation during which the U.S. administration obligated itself with procurement of highly sensitive information to Riyadh related to any potential terrorist threats (Congressional Research Service, 2019). More importantly for Saudis, they once again proved to Washington that they are indeed reliable partners in the Middle East, despite 9/11 for a moment there threatening to endanger this long-standing cooperation.

Motives and Means for Interacting With Terrorist Groups – Saudi Arabia

Comprehending SA's relationship with terrorism is far more challenging than evaluating Iran's connection to it. Most of the Saudi interaction with terrorist organizations goes through non-state actors, which enjoy a range of relationships with the Saudi regime. Some receive official patronage and others that are truly private and independent of the government, often act in opposition to it. It is challenging to have extensive oversight of these schemes since Riyadh

lacks the institutional capabilities to address the problem. However, SA's culpability must be addressed. The government's and royal families (tens of thousands of princes) finances are interwoven, so when a prince supports an extremist group and nothing is done to sanction him, it has tacit government approval (Gold, 2003). The motives behind such behavior and a comprehensive explanation of the entire mechanism are given on the following pages.

Motives

In Saudi Arabia's example, primary motives for interacting with terrorist organizations, whether that was in the form of supporting, fighting, or just tolerating them, did not look the same in the 1960s, late 1990s, and beginning of 2000s. They were in one way or another reformulated, complemented, or completely replaced. Furthermore, these motives cannot be examined without looking at their correlation with Wahabism- a puritan ideology mainly similar to the radical views promulgated by Sunni jihadist organizations. This less tolerant and more hardline version of Sunni Islam its not only strictly against other religions but also other forms or practices within Islam. It incorporates the concept of "Takfirism," which, by definition, entails division of the world in the two extremities. A Takfiri is a Muslim who takes the position of Wahhabi-promoted Islam and, in the process, declares any other individual (including Muslim) as a non-believer (Hellmich, 2008). Such a religious view eliminates the possibility of taking a mediate or intermediate position.

A very important motivation to support Islamist goals connected to extreme terrorist groups came as a result of appeasing active Wahhabi elements within the kingdom. At the very beginning, domestic politics led the Saudi regime to start flirting with radical religious views. Since the inception of the modern SA, religion served as the centerpiece of the Al Saud rule. The

founder of modern Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud forged a pact with the followers of Wahhabism, whose main goal was to spread this puritanical version of Islam. Not only that, these followers were useful to ibn Saud as soldiers in the fight against his enemies, but also in providing him with a religious dogma, which united SA's diverse tribes, as well as legitimized his rule (Al-Rasheed, 2018). The subsequent Saudi leaders, in principle, followed this model. Whenever there was a significant and controversial decision to be made, Ibn Saud's successors would turn to the Wahhabi religious officials to legitimate them. The 1990 invitation to U.S. forces to try and defend the kingdom against Iraq was one of these decisions (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005). Consequently, Wahhabi authority naturally grew in the religious spectrum, but what was more surprising, it started having a significant say in education and political issues (Pandith, 2019). Essentially, the ruling house, by drawing on this relationship, acquired spiritual energy, which proved to be instrumental in its internal power consolidation.

Initially starting as inward-oriented- religious energy, the 1960s showed that it could be utilized by political elites to counter Sunni Muslim ideological alternatives such as Egyptian-backed Arab Nationalism, as well as Soviet Communism. Following the decline of the Egyptian threat, Wahhabism has the same purpose, only a different enemy, which is Iranian-promoted Shi'a fundamentalism (Hiro, 2019). For instance, since the creation of Israel, being viewed as the primary voice of Palestinian cause benefits both of SA and Iran, as their influence in the Muslim world grows - a prestigious reputation sometimes deemed more useful than their economic and military tools. Daniel Byman notes that this perception is sometimes more important than reality (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005). Winning the ideological battle and portraying itself as the leader of the Islamic world is something that incentivizes SA to

invest considerable financial resources in the sponsor of religious leaders, mosques, madrassas, books – all of which embrace theological disposition corresponding Wahhabism.

Another critical motivation of SA for interacting with these groups is the power projection. Despite having, enormous defense budget and access to top-notch weapons technology, the Saudi military has a reputation for "complacency and low operational readiness (Rich, 2012)." Historically, the Saudi forces underperformed in their primary function of national defense exemplified in the kingdom's deferral to international forces when deemed incapable of confronting Iraqi troops on the battlefield. Hence, affecting regional events beyond its borders via conventional military means for SA is harder than it seems. However, turning to terrorist groups compensates for this limitation. In the past, to a lesser degree, this was the case regarding Palestine Liberation Organization (until 1991 considered a terrorist organization) and more recently Hamas, when many of the Arab states, including SA, were aware that any kind of war with Israel would be disastrous given their military inferiority (Kostiner, 2009). Therefore, utilizing a tool, which was simultaneously useful and less dangerous, seemed reasonable.

The same model is also beneficial in Saudi decades-long competition with Iran. The kingdom's superior military technology is often emphasized to demonstrate the inherent advantage that SA possesses over Iran's military capabilities. However, it is difficult to contend that in a hypothetical scenario of conventional war between the two, SA would be victorious. According to defense analyst groups, such as Jane's Defense and the International Institute of Strategic Studies, structural issues in the kingdom's military apparatus did not improve so much since the Gulf War. Its ability to handle sophisticated large-scale operations is, at best, questionable (Rich, 2012). Even the major wildcard in such a scenario, like U.S. military assistance, is doubtful. Iran's recent drone attack on Saudi Aramco oil facility did not force the

American government to assertively response- highly surprising given the anti- Iranian rhetoric coming out of the Trump's administration and its presumed role of the SA's protector. The highly speculative nature of these claims does not necessarily disprove that SA became uncomfortably aware that its security issues will have to potentially be handled without the assistance of Washington, as well as that the potential war with Iran would be extremely costly. Possibly, SA's willingness to rely on terrorist organizations as a means to project power elsewhere could be higher than it was before.

In any case, SA should remain careful of succumbing to the temptation. At first glance, many Islamist causes directly connected to terrorist groups do not appear to pose a direct challenge to the Saudi regime, but history has proven otherwise. It took two key events for the Saudis to realize that many of their friends are now their enemies. Those were 2003 May and November attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda. Especially the November attacks, where many of the casualties were Arabs, compelled SA to be more observant when formulating foreign policy towards a terrorist organization (Hegghammer, 2008). That is where the security motive stems from.

Means

SA tries to limit its exposure in direct provision of tactical, financial, and logistical support to terrorist organizations as this is the way it is easily traceable and could potentially diminish counterterrorism reputation that SA tries to maintain in the eyes of the United States. Moreover, in this way, exploiting the "plausible deniability" argument becomes more difficult. That said, there were a couple of instances where the involvement of the members of the Saudi

government was evident. The highest levels of the US intelligence community were sure of the Saudi government striking an informal deal in 1995 with Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. This deal entailed making regular payments to bin Laden to prevent any backlash from the Islamist elements within the kingdom, as well as ensure safety from the group itself (Gold, 2003).

The consistent inflow of high oil revenues has allowed SA to support terrorism beyond merely utilizing direct means. Following the defeat of Egypt in the Yom Kippur war, the leading promoter of "Pan-Arabism," there was an ideological vacuum needed to be filled with another set of doctrines. Saudi-promoted Wahhabism filled it. The kingdom's global outreach substantially increased in political, economic, and social spheres as a result of one of the landmark events in which Gulf monarchies decided to express solidarity towards Arab cause by imposing an oil embargo on Israel and its Western allies. The embargo itself led to prices of oil skyrocketing and thus allowed a small group of individuals in SA to reap the benefits of the situation. It also reflected on its ability to promote the Wahhabi agenda (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005). As the money was the main motor behind the Saudi agenda, a new concept of so-called "financial jihad" emerged. The idea was that through wealthy donations coming from rich Saudi individuals, SA could indirectly contribute to the promotion of Wahhabism. Over the years, this concept turned out to be so successful that Israeli lieutenant, Jonathan Dahoah Halevi, who explored the topic, contended that financial jihad became much more critical relative to self-sacrificing jihad (Stern, 2011).

One of the important mechanisms that weaponize the concept of "financial jihad" is the industry called "Sharia Compliant Finance" (SCF), also known as Islamic Finance – in short, banking activity that complies with Islamic law (Sharia) (Stern, 2011). This tool extends far

beyond the mere transfer of enormous sums of money through oil payments. For several decades now, financial jihadists have trough it successfully managed to infiltrate Western financial institutions, academia, governments, and various businesses.

Take, for example, a large number of financial houses, including Western, that have Sharia advisory boards, in which a handful of Sharia-educated scholars sit. They determine whether an organization or entity, which is supposed to receive the money, is Sharia-compliant or not. Interestingly enough, some of these prominent sheiks and muftis received formal education in Saudi Islamic institutions located in Mecca, Medina, or Jeddah. The rest of them have been educated in Saudi-funded madrassa, Jamia Islamia, in Pakistan, notoriously famous for "playing a major role in helping to establish and sustain, as well as provide many of the recruits for some of the most violent terrorist organizations (Pandith, 2019)." Again, the linkage with Riyadh exists. This relatively small group of people (roughly 30 of them) operate on a high level within a specific company resulting in many of their activities to remain unknown, not only to the company's clients but also to other high-positioned individuals within the organization. Especially worrisome is the fact that most of these scholars are known for their jihadist activities and affiliations. Mufti Taki Osmani, for instance, is one of the most infamous ones known for serving on the Sharia advisory boards in a few influential financial institutions in the West, such as Swiss Re Group, Arcapita, UBS-Warburg, and others. On numerous occasions, he has openly articulated support to terrorism-related activities and publicly endorsed world jihad (Stern, 2011). Such problematic views were similarly expressed by other scholars, some of them who served in organizations implicated for terrorist financing.

Where does this money go? As mentioned earlier, only sharia-compliant organizations receive donations coming from the Gulf region, mostly from SA. These organizations are

predominantly charities and, to a slightly lesser degree, different non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As many of these charitable enterprises are not suitable recipients, according to sharia, the traditional Western charities, like the United Way or Red Cross, do not receive a single dime. Instead, the charities that receive these donations are the ones associated with the most extreme elements of Islam, including Wahhabism. The most notable ones are al-Haramayn, World Muslim League (WML), the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) (Pandith, 2019).

The charities themselves perfectly complement one of the five pillars of Islam. *Zakat* represents a mandatory charitable contribution, described by many Islamic scholars as a type of tax. It is customarily set to 2.5 % of Muslim's total savings. To put it in perspective, this principle applied in 1 trillion worth Islamic Finance industry plausibly accounts for several hundreds of millions of dollars going to terrorist groups under cover of charity (Baylouny & Mullins, 2017).

Although these mechanisms are practically being exercised by most of the oil-rich Gulf countries, it is vital to highlight the importance of SA's role in the overall process: 1) Saudis own 20% of Sharia-Compliant financial institutions, the largest one reportedly being Al-Rahji and National Commerce Bank; 2) in comparative terms, Saudi Al-Rahji bank, with $28 billion in assets, is far ahead from the second-largest Sharia-Compliant investment bank, whose assets account for $4 billion (Stern, 2011).

As elaborated, using charities is one of Saudi's favorite tactics for promoting Wahhabism, hence its link with terrorism itself. These charitable activities often spill over into controversial politics that very often end up to be violent and extreme. Nicely written by Flanigan in an article dealing with the connection among charity, contentious politics, and terrorism, "the ideological

leap between charity and terrorism may not be as far as one would think (Flanigan, 2006)." The majority of the places where these organizations operate are, in various ways, disadvantaged and economically deprived. That provides them with substantial leverage over the local community as they are introduced to local needs and, more importantly, have the means to fill them. As charitable service provision is hugely appreciated in the developing world, these organizations form a special bond with the most disempowered members of society, highly prone to radicalization and manipulation. From the perspective of these powerless individuals, the charities are only helping, and beyond that, they do not see any hidden agendas. Hence, the most neglected and marginalized members of society are subtly coerced.

All the money that charities receive, they try to diversify the ways of how to invest them. Therefore all funds are not only directed to humanitarian causes but also for the purchase of books, construction of cemeteries and educational-religious institutions, and sponsorship of professorships. Even the salaries of the personnel working, whether in mosques or schools, are included. A large charity, such as al-Haramayn, claims that it founded over 3000 mosques, send over 4000 missionaries out to spread its message, and printed millions of books (Pandith, 2019).

Former Yugoslav states represent an excellent portrayal of the ways this framework operates. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia and the devastating wars during the 90s, most of these countries faced a tough situation as they were forced to accept various financial donations in the necessity of reconstructing their economies. These were primarily Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kosovo, as the most backward area of the former state, became the most suitable candidate for Saudi charitable services. Recently, the Financial Intelligence Unit of Kosovo discovered that during the period 2000-2012, much of the money coming from Saudi charity, Al-Waqf al-Islami, instead of going to orphans (the charity's explicitly stated purpose), went

unaccounted. Al- Waqf, along with the other twelve charities, was shut down, but this was too little, too late. Since 2014, a total of 314 (including 28 children) joined the ranks of ISIS, which represents the highest rate in all of Europe (Pandith, 2019). To be clear, money that was coming from charities was not used directly to finance the travel of these people to Syria. Instead, it was being diverted to different Kosovar religious institutions for the funding of priests and thinkers who promulgate violent ideological dispositions matching Wahhabism and jihad. In addition to the example mentioned above, these schemes are also present in the most developed states. In Paris, perpetrators of the Charlie-Hebdo massacre, the Al-Qaeda affiliated Kouachi brothers, were significantly influenced by the Saudi-financed priests operating in one of the Parisian mosques (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

On the more positive note, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, SA did step up its cooperation on counterterrorism issues. The regime reduced its tolerance for many violence-related activities, even more so, after the 2003 attacks that took place in SA. Subsequently, the Saudi government decided to investigate and aggressively tackle terrorist financing, charities, and all other forms of terrorism support. Its primary aim was to strengthen the regulation of simple money transactions and increase restrictions on charitable donations going outside the country. As most of the Saudi mechanisms used for terrorism-facilitation were soft-power-based, the critical element in the counter approach was similar to include subtle, soft tools that will target all extremist elements inside, as well as outside the kingdom, which either directly or indirectly, have a goal of supporting international terrorism (Hegghammer, 2008). One of the senior Saudi officials announced shutting down of Islamic affairs department in every embassy, withdrawing decade-long support for Islamic education all around the world (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005). In 2015, SA announced the formation of an

Islamic counterterrorism coalition, with a joint operations center based in Riyadh (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Washington DC, 2019).

Given that many of Saudi citizens leave their homes in order to fight for a particular terrorist group, the government began offering welfare subsidies to most disempowered members of society, such as financial support, housing allowances, and educational opportunities hoping that they will abandon this goal in favor of returning to the family and society (Congressional Research Service, 2019). A large number of these unprecedented measures implemented by Saudis significantly increased their overall counterterrorism capacity, but it seems that there is a long way ahead until SA becomes a globally credible partner in the fight against terrorism.

Motives and Means for Interacting with Terrorist Groups – Iran

Shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran has remained unequivocally one of the most persistent and active sponsors of terrorism. Debuting on the U.S. State Department's official list in 1984, it has remained there ever since. Tehran has provided backing to different terrorist groups in its immediate neighborhood and even further. Iran's most important client Hezbollah and their close relationship have been described presumably as the most efficient relation between a state sponsor and terrorist organization in history (Anderson, 2007). This unprecedented cooperation that Iran maintains with Hezbollah, along with its linkage to other terrorist groups, has advanced Tehran's strategic interests beyond its borders. Nevertheless, it came with a price of international isolation, scrutiny, and economic sanctions. All of this should not, however, marginalize Iran's recent efforts to wind down its terrorist sponsorship. Over the last decade, Tehran has stopped indulging its usual terrorist practices. Moreover, the country has

developed a relatively sophisticated and modern counterterrorism apparatus that proved valuable to the United States (Esfendiary, 2016). Given these improvements, Iran deserves another look at the motives and means that shape its foreign policy towards terrorist organizations.

Motives

An important motive incentivizing Iran's to support terrorist organizations is ideological. Following the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini started implementing the agenda of exporting Iranian revolutionary ideology throughout the Islamic world. According to him, theological justifications on which the Islamic revolution was premised entailed the spread of Islam, notwithstanding state boundaries. Indeed, this was far from being empty rhetoric. The agenda itself was even institutionalized evidenced in one of the articles in the Iranian constitution, which stipulates how Iranian foreign policy is based on "Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to all of the freedom fighters of the world (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005)." A vague agenda such as this, designating the entirety of the Muslim world as the sphere of the revolution, cannot be materialized with the conventional military means. This is precisely where the backing of proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas comes to play a crucial role.

However, Tehran's motives for supporting Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations, as the cornerstone of the revolutionary agenda promoted by the clerical regime, were not only ideological but also strategic. Iran supported these terrorist organizations as the way of removing Israeli and U.S. footprint from the Middle East. On the strategic front, this approach provides the clerical regime with coercive capabilities that exerts constant pressure on its rivals. On numerous occasions, terrorist organizations have helped Iran in the accomplishment of a number of its

objectives. Through Hezbollah's kidnappings and frequent rocket attacks on Israel, Western and Tel Aviv's influence in Lebanon has been significantly reduced. With few Palestinian terrorist groups on its side, Iran disrupted the Israel-Palestinian peace process on numerous occasions, thereby preventing the two-state solution. The extraordinarily complicated and inconsistent approach to Al-Qaeda, which will be elaborated on the following pages, has similarly served Iran as a reasonably useful bargaining chip in the political dealings with Washington (Tabatabai A. M., 2018).

As previously noted in the case of SA, what makes this approach particularly more attractive is that the strategy comes at a minimum cost: it is risk-averse, and its user is provided with the option of plausibly denying ever using it (Cragin, 2015). Furthermore, by supporting terrorist organizations, similarly like Riyadh, Iran is granted with a possibility to project power well beyond its boundaries. Strategically speaking, this was very much important to Tehran, especially during the turbulent post-revolutionary period. Despite having one of the most powerful militaries in the region, the exhausting war with Iraq reduced Iran's conventional military capabilities. Weakened army and obsolete weapons were simply insufficient given the particularly hostile surroundings in which Iran was trying to survive (Rich, 2012). Outside of regional adversaries, this approach is useful as a deterrent strategy against the United States, which on many occasions professed the desire to initiate a regime change in Iran. It is, therefore, not surprising that many analysts highlight this weapon as the primary source of Iranian regional power, some even putting it before its nuclear capabilities (Byman, Iran, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2008).

Although the revolutionary ideology promoted by the clerical regime designates the whole Islamic world as Tehran's sphere of interest, primary attention is still devoted to core

Islamic territories, like Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrein. Particularly noteworthy is naturally the Palestinian issue. As it has been implied, part of Iran's ideology is portraying itself as a leader and a protector of the entire Islamic world. That objective cannot be achieved without supporting Palestinians in their fight against Israel (Iranian Foreign Policy: Context, Regional Analyses, and U.S. Interests, 2016). For a long time now, has Iran been very supportive of Palestinian terrorism against the Israeli regime, a policy actively pursued since the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000 (Ostovar, 2016). By supporting terrorist organizations, whether Hamas or Palestinian Jihad (PJPJ), the Islamic regime gains a prestigious status as it is associated with the Palestinian grievances. In an environment where Sunni regimes are numerically superior to Shia, it is a valuable card to be perceived as the protector of all Muslims, not only Shiites. Furthermore, as a regime that has been widely perceived as a sectarian player, supporting the Palestinian cause is a potent remedy that could erase this image.

There is one more explanation of why Iran supports terrorist groups. In one of his articles analyzing the potential war between SA and Iran, Ben Rich suggested that Tehran has a slight advantage, mainly due to its combative experience (Rich, 2012). However, unlike the clerical regime, SA has mighty allies, like Israel and the United States. In case of war, such powerful friends could compensate for all of the weaknesses characterizing the Saudi military. Despite the questionable willingness of Washington to defend Riyadh considering the recent events (abandonment of Kurds in Syria), Iran notwithstanding needs to take into account the worst-case scenario, which entails U.S. involvement. Moreover, seeing as the enduring sanctions on Iran prevented it from acquiring advanced weapons and modernizing its military, while Tehran's rivals (SA and UAE) were simultaneously able to do so, it became evident that support of

specific terrorist organizations turned out as a productive strategic investment (Strategic Comments, 2005).

As much as Iran cooperates with terrorist groups, it is similarly forced to counter them. The primary motivation for such a policy arose from security concerns. Initially, Iranian counterterrorism mechanisms developed as a result of a terrorist organization, known as Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MeK), which in the post-revolutionary period represented one of the most dangerous threats to Iranian national security (Bahgat, 2004). With the danger of MeK waning, new threats started emerging. Since the revolution, the most prominent terrorist threats to the clerical regime are Al-Qaeda and ISIS. What constitutes them as a serious security concern is a fact that they harbor strong anti-Shia sentiments. The 9/11 events shed light on former's capabilities, and they served as a turning point for Iranian policymakers, who, from that point onwards, realized that terrorist groups, especially ones harboring anti-Shia agenda, need to be dealt with (Tabatabai A. M., 2018). With ISIS, this assessment proved on point. Even more brutal that Al-Qaeda, ISIS was not a terrorist organization with which one could find any common ground or compromise. One successful ISIS attack against Iran, as well as numerous attempts to form an Islamic State on Iranian soil, were enough for Iran to decide to invest a significant amount of resources in the fight against the most threatening anti-Shia terrorist organizations in the region.

Means

Unlike SA's, Iran's means of interacting with terrorist organizations are much more direct, straightforward, and detectable. Presumably, one of the explanations for Iran being more scrutinized than SA lies here. Another point, which makes Iran's reputation vis-à-vis the issue of

terrorism even more complicated, is the web of institutions that have overlapping mandates and operations. Specifically, many agencies with their branches are simultaneously engaged in counterterrorism efforts, as well as terrorism-facilitation. The most instrumental one is IRGC. It is challenging to provide any conventional explanation for this organization due to its multifaceted nature. Created subsequently to the revolution, from being the security service, economic giant, to social and cultural phenomenon in Iran, IRGC is first and foremost a military and intelligence organization. With more than 125,000 members, IRGC is famous for the employment asymmetric, irregular, unconventional, and guerrilla battle tactics given its history of dealing with militarily more powerful adversaries (Rafati, 2017). It consists of two powerful sub-entities. The first one is Basij, a sizeable voluntary organization primarily used for socio-cultural purposes. The second one, far more interesting for the thesis itself, is the Quds Force, responsible for extraterritorial operations (Ostovar, 2016).

The primary function of the Quds force is to develop and assist external allied armed groups, including a few of the terrorist organizations analyzed here. Quds, unlike Basij force, is much more selective considering the importance of the operations it executes. Its members report directly to the supreme leader. Also, they are well known for their expertise in espionage and explosives, as well as fluency in foreign languages. As the very name implies (Quds means Jerusalem in Arabic and Persian), the initial purpose of the force was to help IRGC's effort against Israel. However, over time, as the importance of IRGC grew, Quds responsibilities expanded to all of the foreign military and covert operations. IRGC, through Quds force, provides a wide range of support to its clients. The support generally includes operational oversight, military assistance, arms shipment, provision of advisers and intelligence, financial backing, organizational support, and training (Esfendiary, 2016). Under the pragmatic leadership

of an excellent strategist, Qasem Soleimani, who is widely viewed as a “martyr" given its accomplishments with the organization, Quds has come to be viewed as the central pillar of Tehran's offense and defense (Tabatabai A. M., 2018).

Although most of the support does not tend to go beyond tangible elements, in the case of Hezbollah, the assistance transcends this very tactical nature. In order to increase the attractiveness for the overall cause among Hezbollah's members, IRGC sends in clerics, who are responsible for preaching the virtues of the revolutionary Islam (Ostovar, 2016). Similarly, like with SA, it is visible that Iran utilizes the soft power tools, but unlike Riyadh, to a much more limited extent.

IRGC is not, however, the only utilized mean in the process. Tehran has taken maximum advantage from its global network of embassies. Based on the research done by Arriane Thabtabai, this "unique asset serves to coordinate local operational support for terrorist activities." She goes further on to explain how "Tehran uses this network for initial surveillance and target designation, as well as pre-planning and the creation of target packages that may be attacked using professionals after a political decision is made in Tehran (Tabatabai A. M., 2018)." In the aftermath of the Hezbollah terrorist bombings on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires, Argentinian investigative authorities revealed this connection between embassies and all those individuals involved in the planning and the attack. According to them, Iranian diplomats who arrived in the Argentinian capital were provided by embassies with a diplomatic cover that allowed them to conduct their pre-planning operations uninterrupted. Even for those operatives arriving in Argentina under nonofficial cover, the embassy proved helpful. Take, for example, the contract for the apartment, rented by one of the agents, was signed at the Iranian embassy in 1994, with embassy personnel serving as witnesses

(Levitt, Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God, 2015). This example is one among many others, illustrating how Iran's network of embassies complements the work of terrorist organizations.

All of these agencies are ironically also vital in Iran's counterterrorism efforts. Even stranger, the counterterrorism strategies used are very much similar, if not identical, to strategies utilized for terrorism-facilitation. IRGC, in particular, Quds, cooperates with various local, regional, and international forces. Apart from direct combat support, they provide them with training, equipment, money, and intelligence. The most frequent collaborations are with the Iraqi government and army, Kurdish fighters, including the Peshmerga forces, Shia and Sunni militias, and the Assad regime. In return, these actors, on behalf of Tehran, operate as the main ground force directly combating terrorists in Iraq and Syria (Tabatabai A. M., 2018).

For the counterterrorism missions, IRGC is assisted by Artesh and the briefly mentioned Basiy volunteer force. While former is Iran's conventional military force and the first line of its defense, the latter, given its extensive network of informants, serves as a valuable resource in collecting intelligence related to the activities of different terrorist groups. Another important asset worth mentioning is Tehran's human intelligence (HUMINT). It consists mostly of Iran's diplomatic channels, but also diaspora and friendly groups (Ostovar, 2016). As the name itself implies, its primary role lies in information-gathering. Reliance on HUMINT enables Iran to identify individuals, in any way connected, for instance, with ISIS or Al-Qaeda.

However, Tehran's counterterrorism efforts continue to be minimized. It can be assumed that the reason for this is directly related to a couple of issues. Firstly, Iran occasionally pursues cooperation with certain terrorist groups, to preempt being directly targeted by them. If that

cooperation can be used in order to hinder Iran's adversaries somehow, it is even better. Accordingly, Iran's unusual marriage of convenience with Al-Qaeda does not come as a big surprise (Hastert, 2007). Secondly, seeing that various bodies within Iran's counterterrorism apparatus have overlapping mandates and responsibilities, the chances for lack of effective communication and unsynchronized policies are higher. Thirdly and most importantly, Iran's counterterrorism chain, especially IRGC, operates on both sides of the spectrum (Byman, Iran, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2008). Its reputation for perpetrating terrorist attacks and cooperating with various terrorist organizations tarnishes Iran's image of being a capable counterterrorism player, which in reality Tehran is.

Foreign Policy Towards Terrorist Organizations

Hezbollah and Iran

The most enduring relationship between a terrorist group and a state is the one of Hezbollah and Iran. If it were not for the clerical regime and its consistent foreign policy approach of supporting this Lebanese group, Hezbollah would not be able to become a sophisticated terrorist organization that it is today. Eitan Azani even describes the group as a hybrid case of a terrorist organization since its scope of activities goes far beyond mere terrorist ones encompassing social, military, and political (Azani, Hezbollah's Strategy of “Walking on the Edge": Between Politcal Game and Politcal Violence, 2013). At the moment, Hezbollah is the most critical stakeholder in Lebanon, as well as a significant player in the Syrian civil war.

Iran's support of Hezbollah dates back to the mid-stages of the Lebanese civil war when the group was established. Tehran's initial foreign policy approach of supporting Hezbollah came as a result of the desire to spread its Islamic revolution (Hiro, 2019). These motives, however, started to change with time as the revolutionary zeal in Iran weakened, and as the change of political and strategic realities in the region began to take place. Before the start of the civil war in 1975, the Shiite community constituted a significant part of diverse Lebanese society. In numerical terms, Shia Muslims were prominent, but that was about it as far as their significance went. Shiites, who were, in political and economic sense traditionally disadvantaged, served as a perfect tool for Iran to extend its influence. The groundwork was already there. Under the guidance of Imam Musa-al Sadr, an Iran-born cleric leader, Shi'a community started its resurgence (Ostovar, 2016). Combined with Israel's invasion of Lebanon and Tel Aviv's conflict with Syrian forces, the overall process of Iran setting its footprint there, accelerated. More specifically, Iran, as Syria's natural ally, realized that Damascus would be quickly overwhelmed by the Israeli forces and therefore lose its strategic ground in Lebanon. That prompted Tehran to intervene and send about 2000 of IRGC personnel, whose assistance from that point onwards became crucial for Hezbollah's further development (Sobelman, 2017).

Through the collaboration of IRGC, Iranian intelligence, and Iranian diplomats, as well as Syrian officials, Hezbollah was founded in 1985. That proved far from being a simple task since the group managed to incorporate a collection of small, differing Shite organizations, which included: Islamic Amal movement, the Lebanese Da'wa, the Association of Muslim Students, and many others (Azani, Hezbollah's Strategy of “Walking on the Edge": Between Politcal Game and Politcal Violence, 2013). Nevertheless, the most significant credit should be given to the efforts invested by a group of Iranian clerics and activists, who, similarly like IRGC

are the reason for Hezbollah's successful establishment and Iran's long-lasting involvement in Lebanon. With the support of the clerical regime, these individuals had the primary responsibility of reaching out to the younger Shia generations interested in joining the ranks of Hezbollah.

It can be pointed out that one of the things that make Iran-Hezbollah relationship unique is the fact that following its establishment, Hezbollah was among the first (and to this day one of the few) non-Iranian entities to proclaim adherence to the central Khomeinist principle of "guardianship of the jurist (Levitt, Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God, 2015)." All of the organization's leaders viewed Khomeini as their supreme religious and political authority. Accordingly, this gave Iran's supreme leader enormous influence within Hezbollah and, as such, the capacity to meddle into Lebanese politics. Even the less important features of the group are indicative of the extent to which Hezbollah s intertwined with Iran. Take, for instance, the name "Hezbollah," which was proposed by Khomeini and the emblem that considerably resembles IRGC's (Ostovar, 2016).

As much as Iranian clerics and activists were responsible for the establishment of Hezbollah, IRGC should be merited for the group's survival over a long time. From the very inception, IRGC provided logistical support and brought military training to Hezbollah's members. Through the Quds force, it helped organize Hezbollah's resistance. Moreover, Quds was directly involved in a large number of operations conducted by Hezbollah. It is then hardly surprising that there is a strong consensus of IRGC's important role in the planning, execution, and funding of activities directed against Israel and Western targets (Azani, The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study, 2013).

One of those activities was the 1983 suicide bombing of U.S. barracks in Lebanon that killed 241 soldiers. On the part of U.S. policymakers, there was little doubt about who was behind the attacks, even before the criminal investigation started. A few days after the attacks, a vast body of evidence was pointing out that "Hizb Allah, operating with the Iranian support under the cover name of Islamic Jihad," conducted the operation. Before 9/11, this was the deadliest terrorist attack to target Americans. FBI forensic investigators even designated it as a single-largest non-nuclear explosion since WWII. The bombing of the U.S. Embassy attack preceding this one, which was fatal for 63 persons (seventeen Americans included), also left a significant scar. Similarly, like with the barrack bombings, the crime scene analysis showed irrefutable evidence of Iranian involvement, especially in terms of logistics and coordination (Levitt, Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God, 2015).

Both of these attacks helped launch the career of Imad Mughniyeh, the mastermind behind Hezbollah's terrorist operations and a close ally of IRGC. As his role was so instrumental in advancing Iranian regional interests, he was considered IRGC's most crucial asset outside Iran, up until his assassination in Damascus in 2008. Besides the attacks mentioned above, the close collaboration between Mughniyeh and IRGC helped materialize an infinite number of assassinations and kidnappings from 1985 to 1988. During this indeed active period, Western sources maintain that Hezbollah received $400 million from Iran (Byman, Iran, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2008). In the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, Hezbollah was Al-Qaeda before Al-Qaeda, and Iran's assistance was making this very much possible.

As Iran took less antagonistic foreign policy stance towards Israel, and in general, the world, so did Hezbollah. Since 1992 the group has been continuously attempting to reform itself by establishing a political wing, participating in Lebanon's parliamentary elections, and

maintaining the extensive network of various types of organizations responsible for providing social and public services (Wiegand, 2008). This change resulted in a slight decrease in Iranian help to the movement. Reportedly, by April 2005, Iran withdrew almost all of its IRGC personnel (which included around 2000 Revolutionary Guards in 1982) with only 15 to 20 remaining (Ostovar, 2016). Still, all the other means of support (financial, logistical, and political) remained relatively the same, considering that the newly assumed social/welfare identity by Hezbollah needed to be maintained.

Despite evolving into something more than a mere terrorist organization, Hezbollah turns to violent means, when necessary and Iran is certainly right there to allocate its resources to the cause and eventually reap the benefits. Besides the aforementioned 1992, Buenos Aries attacks, when Iran and Hezbollah cooperated in multiple ways, one other terrorist attack took place, this time targeting a housing complex in the Saudi city of Khobar. The bombings were fatal for 19 U.S. Air Force personnel. Lebanese Hezbollah, as well as the Saudi-based Hezbollah (Hezbollah al-Hejaz) under the guidance of Iran, perpetrated the attacks. The leading experts on Hezbollah presented overwhelming evidence of Iran's involvement in the provision of money, arms, explosives, maps, and plans (Azani, Hezbollah's Strategy of “Walking on the Edge": Between Politcal Game and Politcal Violence, 2013).

Another example is the Israeli military failures in Southern Lebanon. After waging lengthy and costly guerilla warfare against Israel, Hezbollah eventually compelled the Zionist regime to withdraw its troops. Of course, this invaluable victory would be unconceivable without Iran's resources. After six years of not engaging directly one another (with the exemption of periodic shellings) 33-day long war erupted between Israel and Hezbollah, instigated by the latter's defiant move of abducting and killing few of Israeli soldiers. Once again, the war itself

was not very successful for Israel, which withdrew from Southern Lebanon as a response to Hezbollah's effective guerilla strategies and thousands of missiles fired across its border (Sobelman, 2017). During this period, Iran started extensively supplying Hezbollah with rockets and missiles. According to Israeli intelligence sources, this is a part of Iran's initiative that Israeli Defence Forces named "the precision-guided missile project (IDF, 2019)." They contend that so far, Iran delivered more than 130,000 rockets and missiles to the group. Furthermore, they believe if such an enhancement of Hezbollah's missile weaponry continues and eventually turns from medium to high precision ones, the group will acquire the capability to directly target Israeli civilians, cities, and even strategic assets of high national importance (Feferman, 2019). In all of the cases, it is visible that Iran, through Hezbollah, managed to advance its strategic interests against its most formidable adversaries such as United States, Israel, and SA. Whatever weaknesses Iran has relative to these rivals, relying on Hezbollah enables Tehran to compensate for those deficiencies.

Iran will likely keep on utilizing Hezbollah as a means to an end. Today, this end entails keeping Bashar Al-Assad in power. Islamic Regime just cannot afford to lose an ally that for more than three decades served as an essential pillar in Iran's deterrent strategy. If access to Syria would be in any case jeopardized, so would Tehran's ability to resupply Hezbollah, Hamas, and all of its other clients. Iran would no longer be able to represent a credible threat to Israel, and its deterrence capabilities *vis-à-vis* Tel Aviv and Washington would severely deteriorate (Juneau, 2018). Hence, getting Hezbollah involved was a simple, strategic decision.

Initially, Hezbollah sent its advisors to assist Syrian military officers, but as the prospects of Assad's survival diminished, the group started deploying its combat troops. Cooperating with IRGC forces, Hezbollah succeeded in advancing Iran's and its interest in Syria, thus making

itself nowadays one of the more significant stakeholders within the war-torn country. It is highly likely that the Assad regime for the foreseeable future will remain intact (Juneau, 2018). Some parts of Syria (areas close to the border of Southern Lebanon) could become strongholds from where Hezbollah's fighter would execute missile attacks on neighboring Israel.

However, all the attained goals came at a great expense for both Hezbollah and Iran. Tehran's foreign policy of pushing Hezbollah into the war may have had unwanted effects back in Lebanon, where people supporting the group, started questioning the real intentions behind Hezbollah's involvement in Syria. The recent protests demonstrate this decline in the group's reputation and popularity (Collard, 2019). Furthermore, the death of 2000 Hezbollah's combat troops, including many of the senior commanders, physically weakened the movement (Juneau, 2018). How will these changing circumstances in the region affect Iran's foreign policy towards Hezbollah, remains to be seen, but one thing is sure – Hezbollah is most likely to continue being one the most potent weapons in Iran's arsenal in dealings with its adversaries.

Hezbollah and SA

The kingdom's history with the Shiite organization is rather interesting because it was the first instance where SA demonstrated a tendency of mishandling a terrorism challenge. In 1995, U.S. intelligence officers received information that one of the most wanted terrorists at the time, Imad Mughniyev of Hezbollah, would make a flight stop in SA. The mastermind behind virtually most of the pre-9/11 operation, including the one that killed 241 U.S. Marines, was scheduled to depart from Khartoum and before arriving in Lebanon, to make a stopover in Jeddah, western SA. Bill Clinton's security advisor, Anthony Lake, coordinated the overall operation with the

Saudi ambassador to Washington, Prince Bandar bin Sultan. Something that was supposed to be a smooth operation, turned out to go in the opposite direction. What happened exactly is that at the last moment, Riyadh prevented the Lebanese airliner of landing, thereby effectively letting Mughniyeh elude U.S. capture (Gold, 2003). For the American government, which has long tried and failed to find him, this was a slap in the face.

The motivations behind such a move could be explained in the leadership change that took place subsequently to King Fahd's stroke. His replacement was more liberal, Crown Prince Abdullah. Under him, SA's foreign policy focused more on improving regional relationships, so the reliance on the American military could decrease. This type of foreign policy also included the relationship- normalization with Iran, and as such, with Hezbollah (Keynoush, 2016). It was the perfect timing because, coincidentally, Iran was also pursuing a similar foreign policy agenda. Not only that, SA was reluctant to crack down on Hezbollah, but it also attempted to establish some kind of contact with it. As a matter of fact, Crown Prince Abdullah visited Beirut and publicly met with Hezbollah's delegation (Gold, 2003).

The meeting came shortly after SA's Khobar Tower bombings. Although all of the initial evidence for the attack was pointing to Hezbollah, SA's authorities were very reluctant to cooperate with the FBI. There are two explanations for this behavior. One of them was the aforementioned change in the Riyadh's regional foreign policy agenda. According to an Israeli diplomat, Dore Gold, the assumption for the second was SA's fear of what the FBI could discover. He argued that the FBI's general jurisdiction in investigating the deaths of Americans on foreign soil could have led to the embarrassing revelation of connections between wealthy Saudi families and more extreme religious groups. Only after two years after Khobar bombings did Saudi authorities began sincerely cooperating with their American counterparts. (Gold, 2003)

In order to understand Riyadh's foreign policy to Hezbollah, it needs to be looked at within the context of its proxy competition with Iran. As this competition intensified in post 9/11 years, Riyadh's stance towards Hezbollah became more assertive Despite Iran and Hezbollah firmly entrenching themselves in various areas within Lebanon virtually since 1990, SA is continuously trying to take the country over from Tehran. In this mission, however, for most of its part, SA has been failing.

The first wave of a proxy battle between SA and Iran was the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri, Lebanon's former prime minister and billionaire construction tycoon. This individual was responsible for the reoccurring Sunni empowerment in Lebanon, thus making him Riyadh's most crucial Lebanese ally and the only counterweight to Hezbollah. His assassination, widely believed to be the result of Hezbollah and Syrian efforts, deprived SA of its only way to penetrate Lebanon. Consequently, along with Qatar and Kuwait, Riyadh decided to financially support Wahhabi organizations through various charities, such as the Sheikh Eid Charity Organization and Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (TRT World, 2019). In turn, these Salafist organizations (under Riyadh's guidance) began influencing the deeply divided Sunni community, whose only unifying element – widespread opposition to Hezbollah – entirely fit into Riyadh's decades-long anti-Iranian foreign policy (Pandith, 2019).

Lebanon already had the basis for the development of Wahhabism. After the beginning of the civil war in 1975, Lebanese Sunni imams went to Medina and Mecca for religious training aligned with the Wahhabi doctrine. In the 21st century, this process of Wahhabism-penetration has moved gradually from a subtle preaching-centered stage to a radicalization promoting extreme violence, just to ultimately arrive at jihadism. Wahhabi preachers, who allow for this process to run smoothly, in their rhetoric, among other things, incorporate intense demonization

of Hezbollah and, in general, Shia Muslims. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese Sunnis, particularly from 2013 onwards, have joined jihadist organizations, many of them which became affiliates of either Al-Qaeda or ISIS. The most prominent ones drawing on Wahhabism in Lebanon are: Fath al-Islām, the Free Resistance Brigades,'Usbat al-Ansār, Jund al-Shām, and the 'Abdullah 'Azzām Brigades (Rabil, 2015).

Besides Lebanese Sunnis, another fragile group targeted by Saudi Wahhabi organizations are Lebanese Palestinians. Estimates of their size in Lebanon range from 260,000 to 400,000, most of them still being legally considered as refugees (Younes, 2019). All the hardship Palestinians need to put up with makes them vulnerable to radicalization and, as such, suitable targets for manipulation. The Wahhabi ideology influencing them so far has contributed to the creation of two groups, Fath al-Islām and Usbat al-Ansār, both of them established in Lebanese-situated Palestinian refugee camps (Rabil, 2015).

Interestingly enough, up to this moment, there have not been significant clashes between all of these groups and Hezbollah. That is, not in Lebanon. Precisely speaking, individuals belonging to Lebanese Salafist groups conduct the majority of their violent operations in Syria. As such, they have clashed with Hezbollah more than once (Juneau, 2018). That is the reason why Saudi's foreign policy towards Hezbollah is inseparable from Syria and any other jihadism-infested state.

For the kingdom's policymakers, such a tool is the only mean of countering Tehran in Lebanon. The reliance on the combination of soft power strategy and local Wahhabi groups comes as a result of continuous Saudi failures to galvanize the U.S. and regional Sunni allies for a military intervention against Hezbollah. One of those instances occurred in the Lebanese 2008

political crisis when Hezbollah's leadership, infuriated by one of the decisions made by the Lebanese government, reacted by sending hundreds of soldiers mostly in Sunni neighborhoods. According to WikiLeaks, it was Prince Saud al-Faisal, foreign minister at the time, who proposed to one of the American diplomats possible cooperation regarding military offensive against the Shia militant group (Rabil, 2015). Of course, the idea did not materialize. Given the current political setting in the Middle East, it is unlikely that any of the Gulf states, especially SA, are willing to embark on such an adventure, at least not without American support.

Hamas and Iran

In the competition for the leader of the Islamic world, Hamas holds great importance for Iran. As a Shia country in a predominantly Sunni region wanting to portray itself as a leader of the Muslim world, it surely helps to have Hamas on its side. Ties to Hamas provide Iran with a strong argument that it champions Islamic cause as a whole, not solely Shiism. Furthermore, along with Hezbollah, Hamas serves as another effective deterrent against Israel. Hence, Hamas is perceived to be one of Iran's vital external partners.

Although Iran's involvement with the Palestinian cause goes a long way back when the clerical regime was supportive of Yasser Arafat's secular Fatah organization (up until his alliance with Saddam Hussein), the relationship with Hamas is more recent. It started back in 2006, in the aftermath of Palestinian democratic elections. Once again, as a result of Bush's damaging policies, IRGC was allowed to advance its agenda in Palestinian Territories (PT) (Ostovar, 2016). Back in 2005, his administration started pushing for democratic elections in PT. Contrary to Washington's expectations, the elections did not produce the desired outcome. Its favorite Fatah, due to its perceived corruption problems, ceded its position as a ruling party to a much

more radical Hamas. After securing the majority of the seats in the legislature of the Palestinian National Authority (74 out of 132 seats), the big decision made by Palestinians could not be accepted by Washington, despite U.S. well-orchestrated desire for democracy worldwide. Already then, Hamas was listed by the State Department as a terrorist group, thus providing it strong support like to Fatah, was not an option. That resulted in the U.S. attempt to isolate Hamas by withdrawing all of its economic assistance (Amer, What is behind the Hamas-Iran rapprochement?, 2018).

For Iran, this was a perfect opportunity to step in. The golden age of the alliance between the two in which the clerical regime supplied Hamas with military weaponry, such as Fajr-5, M-75, and M-302 ROCKETS, as well as drones. Iran's financial help amounting to more than 100 million dollars annually was beneficial in Hamas' evasion of financial bankruptcy. Iranian money also increased Hamas' chances to emulate Hezbollah's model of providing socio-economic services to its citizens (Mokhtari, 2006). Tehran's foreign policy towards Hamas also incorporates strong vocal support for the Palestinian cause. According to Iran's law "Supporting Islamic Revolution of Palestine," directors of the Iranian Parliament are obligated to extend its support for Palestinians in many ways, including organizing pro-Palestine conferences. Naturally, these conferences are organized in the opportune moments when the emotions are running high (in the wake or subsequently to Intifadas). In 2006, at one of these conferences, one of the Iranian officials stated that "the creation of the Palestinian state would contribute to Iran's security (Amer, The Hamas-Iran alliance remains and expands, 2019)." Bold statements such as this one contribute to the powerful PR campaign intended to portray Iran in a different light to Muslims in the region, other than terrorism and sectarian player.

Huge tensions between the two started erupting with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. Their opposed allegiances in the war were the cause of this. With Iran opting to side with the Syrian regime, Hamas chose to back the Sunni-dominated opposition. Soon afterward, Iran cut off all of its support to the group (Juneau, 2018). However, recent attempts to make up for the coldness instigated by the Syrian conflict, demonstrate that this setback was only temporary. It is not very easy to believe that their cooperation will return to the pre-2011 level, at least for the short-term period.

Nevertheless, the rapprochement and normalization of the relations began in mid-2017 on both verbal and to a limited degree, practical level. A few official visits to Tehran, firstly by the deputy head of Hamas political bureau and the most recent one by Hamas parliamentary delegation, seem to confirm the verbal point. As far as the practical level goes, Iran gave a $500 grant to financially support the families of the martyrs in the Great March of Return in the Gaza Strip. Additionally, on 4 February 2018, U.S. envoy to the Middle East peace process, Jason Greenblatt, tweeted that Iran is supposedly providing $100 million a year to Hamas for the purchase of weapons and the construction of a tunnel through which it attacks Israel (Amer, The Hamas-Iran alliance remains and expands, 2019). However, due to the sensitivity of the matter, it is hard to estimate, to what extent, Iran's assistance in both financial and military sense goes.

Hamas' decision to re-embrace Iran comes as a result of the financial crisis with which it has been dealing. Tehran's financial help was not meaningless. It accounted for much more than what other Arab states had to offer, so when it stopped, Hamas certainly felt it. That, coupled with Egypt's closure of the trade tunnels between Gaza and Sinai, which contributed a considerable amount of money to Hamas, and PA's decree to cut off funding of state employees, exacerbated already the dubious financial situation in Gaza (Amer, What is behind the Hamas-

Iran rapprochement?, 2018). After the accusations of killing hundreds of thousands of Arabs in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, Iran will once again, through Hamas, try to clear up its name. Another military front that Hamas could represent in the confrontation against Israel is also one of the reasons.

The present regional dynamics tend, and increasing international pressure on the two tend to suggest that Iran's foreign policy towards Hamas in the foreseeable future will be supportive. Nevertheless, this does not imply that there will not be any challenges as they go ahead with the cooperation. Although Hamas found itself in an unprecedented financial crisis and economic dependency on Tehran is more significant than ever, it will be difficult for Iran to meet these high expectations since the Islamic Republic is facing a financial crisis of its own. Secondly, Hezbollah and Iran so far did not manage to remedy the disagreements between Hamas and Damascus. At the same time, the overwhelmingly negative perception of the Assad regime and Iran explains why Hamas is reluctant to rushing back into Tehran's embrace and thereby compromising the tremendous Arab popular support standing behind it. Lastly, there are unhappy external actors, Egypt, Israel, and SA, who are trying to stop this penetrating Iranian influence of reaching Gaza.

It should be clarified that Hamas does not march at Tehran's command. The degree of commitment to the relationship is somewhat speculative. Whether Hamas or Iran are obligated to get themselves militarily involved in case if one or the other gets attacked by Israel, thus far remains unclear.

Hamas and SA

After the group was established in the 1980s, Hamas' leadership enjoyed friendly relations with the Saudis. Riyadh never directly financed the group, but it allowed fundraising to take place on its territory (Amer, What is behind the Saudi campaign against Hamas?, 2019). Although SA desired, it could not play the role of a regional leader similar to the one played by Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s. Its lack of cultural heritage and military prowess simply prevented it from playing this sort of role. By making use of its financial capabilities and conducting fundraising activities for Hamas, Riyadh could maintain this role of supporter for the Palestinian cause, while not significantly antagonizing much more powerful Israel and its principal ally, the United States (Kostiner, 2009). In the period between 2000 and 2004, their relationship intensified as SA funded the majority of Hamas' operations. Based on estimates by some Israeli sources, GCC (whose *de facto* leader is SA) contributed in that time $12 million annually to the group's budget. After 2004, their relations started deteriorating due to U.S. post-9/11 pressure on SA; and Riyadh's reconciliatory policy towards Israel. Hamas started gradually leaning on Iran for financial and logistic assistance (Ramani, 2015).

From that point on, SA continued playing this balancing role, but this time drive by one other motive, which was to prevent Hamas from becoming a full-fledged ally of Iran. That was, however, going poorly for Saudis. In 2006, Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian National Council, overpowering the rival faction, Fatah, on the military and political level. Hamas was perceived now in the Arab world to be the only legitimate representative of Palestinians and their cause (Mokhtari, 2006). Witnessing Hamas' growing power in Palestinian politics under Iranian guidance, Riyadh could not adopt an overly aggressive policy towards the group seeing as that could yield severe damage to its reputation in the eyes of Muslims. It was,

therefore, important for Saudis to carefully approach the situation by adopting a policy of mediation intended to create a new balance between Hamas and Fatah (Kostiner, 2009).

Notwithstanding that approach, Iranian influence was growing in Palestine up to the Syrian war, when both sides started drifting away due to different attitudes towards Assad. Such development created a window of opportunity for Riyadh. Hamas' pivot was more and more reshifting in favor of SA. As an organization, Hamas sought to rebrand its international image. Therefore, a new alliance with SA, which pursued a considerably moderate policy towards Israel and had friendly relations with Washington, was helpful in that quest (Ramani, 2015). Another reason for Hamas' rapprochement with Saudis was increasing its financial resources by utilizing the competition between SA and Iran, as both countries for years now competed to be seen as a greater champion of the Palestinian cause.

In 2014, Saudi government authorities issued an unprecedented decision to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. While the decision itself did not directly include Hamas, it did affect their relationship because the group considered Brotherhood to be its "mother movement." Shortly after that, SA's newspaper *Makkah*, very close to Saudi decision-making circles, published a list of 40 Muslim figures around the world classified as terrorists, many of whom were prominent Hamas individuals, such as Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (founder of Hamas), Khaled Meshaal (former Hamas leader), and Ismail Haniyeh (current leader of Hamas). Other anti-Hamas measures followed. In April, Saudi authorities started detaining dozens of Hamas supporters, one of them which was Dr. Mohammed al-Khodary, responsible for the Saudi-Hamas relations. Reportedly, many of these people were tortured and deported; others have had their assets frozen, and their financial transactions monitored (Amer, What is behind the Saudi campaign against Hamas?, 2019). Amid this negative Saudi behavior, Hamas realized

that once more, Riyadh's official attitude is starting to change, partly due to Crown Prince's support for Trump's policy towards Iran and Palestine. Another explanation could also be seen in Riyadh's desire to normalize relations with Tel Aviv. Despite acknowledging all of the problematic issues that complicate its relationship with SA, Hamas is eager not to sever it completely (Amer, Hamas is worried and silent about Saudi Arabia's policy towards it, 2019). For the moment, the group's leaders are just hoping that the political situation in the region will start to change, leading to an eventual improvement in their relations with Saudis, as it did many times before.

Al-Qaeda and Iran

Of all of the relationships examined here, Iran's connection with Al-Qaeda is arguably the most peculiar and interesting. In one of its opinion pieces, Bloomberg described them as "frenemies (Lake, 2017)." The complicated relationship between the two interchanged rapidly from allies to foes, depending on what one or the other side at the time deemed beneficial for itself. As Thabatabai puts it, the relationship can be described as the "marriage of convenience." Besides the long-standing antagonism towards the United States, Al-Qaeda and Iran share no other long-term interests (Tabatabai A. M., 2018). Their fundamental religious and ideological differences are most likely the reason why they never achieved more strong collaboration. Still, even the small number of instances when the two cooperated needs to be taken into account.

The creation of Al-Qaeda goes all the way to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, but the group was officially established in 1988 (Bergen & Paul, 2012). During this time, Iran was not paying too much attention to Bin Laden and its group, as it was busy fighting off Iraq. The first informal contacts between Iran (more so Hezbollah agents on behalf of Iran) and Al-

Qaeda operatives occurred after bin Laden relocated his operations to Sudan in the early 1990s. Strongly influenced by Sudan's president, Hassan Al Turabi, both sides started putting aside their Sunni-Shia differences. That would lead to the first informal agreement about mutual support regarding actions directed against Israel and the United States. As a part of the agreement, Al-Qaeda operatives started going to Bekka Valley and Iran, where they would receive military training from experienced Hezbollah's fighters and some IRGC operatives – training related to the use of car or truck bombs, which was Hezbollah's specialty. The results of the training are noticeable in Al-Qaeda's 1998 Embassy bombings in Africa, where its operatives used the method of large-vehicle borne explosives. Based on Ali Mohamed's (Al-Qaeda's trainer and bin Laden's confidant) guilty plea statement, during this time in Sudan, some high-level meetings took place between bin Laden and Mughaniyah, presumably with the tacit blessing from top IRGC's officials (Miniter, 2004).

When the Afghan civil war erupted (1992-1996), Iran and Al-Qaeda found themselves on the opposite sides. Although bin Laden pledged not to get involved in Afghanistan's internal matters, it was not long before Al-Qaeda operatives started fighting alongside the Taliban. Iran, on the other hand, was providing weapons, money, and humanitarian aid to Northern Alliance, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The rift in the Al-Qaeda-Iran relationship became even more extensive after the Taliban managed to capture and execute 11 Iranian diplomats (Tabatabai A. M., 2018). Nevertheless, over the years leading up to 9/11, a low level of operational cooperation between Al-Qaeda and Iran was still present. For instance, during Al-Qaeda's recruitment process for the upcoming operations operated from Herat (Western Afghanistan), it was effortless for the recruits to travel from Turkey through Iran and on to Afghanistan. According to Al-Qaeda operatives, this route was found extremely safe for traveling. Similarly, the 9/11

Commission established that Iranian border officers "would not place telltale stamps of these travelers (Miniter, 2004)." It should be highlighted, however, that the coordination in this particular instance was conducted with specific individuals, not the Iranian government. Who ordered these individuals to do this or why remains unknown.

After 9/11, Iran was looking at Al-Qaeda with a different set of eyes. It was clear that relative to its beginnings, the group's capabilities increased dramatically, and any country that was on its target list could suffer a similar faith as the United States. With Al-Qaeda's anti-Shia agenda, Iran viewed itself as one of those potential targets. Besides, bin Laden's alliance with the Taliban was not helping Iran to see Al-Qaeda other than an adversary. Hence, Iran's willingness and openness for the cooperation with Americans in the Operation Enduring Freedom, which proved inarguably valuable to Bush's administration. That mirrors in the very fact that the outcome of the operation was the destruction of Al-Qaeda's infrastructure in Afghanistan and removal of the Taliban regime only 102 days after the terrorist attacks of September 11 (Lambeth, 2005). Despite publicly opposing the operation, the political establishment in Tehran was, at this time extremely enthusiastic supporter of eliminating both Al Qaeda and Taliban.

Interestingly enough, even after 9/11, Tehran's foreign policy towards Al-Qaeda never definitely excluded the possibility of low-level cooperation, which was extremely risky considering the circumstances. In the aftermath of the New York attacks, bin Laden reportedly made an audiotape where he explicitly asked from Khomenei for safe harbor and funding. In response, IRGC allegedly sends several convoys that transported bin Laden's four wives, as well as his eldest son, Saad (Keynoush, 2016). Over the next year, bin Laden himself was being transported from one safe house to another, all controlled by IRGC (Miniter, 2004). When series of attacks, launched by Al-Qaeda, took place in SA in May 2003, everybody was pointing to

Iran's culpability because it allowed some high-ranking members of the group to coordinate the attacks from its territory freely. Under pressure from the international community, mostly the United States and SA, Tehran's government responded by initiating a quite efficient crackdown on all Iranian-based Al-Qaeda elements (Tabatabai A. M., 2018).

Simultaneously with the surfacing of reports that had convincing arguments for Al-Qaeda-Iran cooperation, various other questionable allegations emerged over the last decade. One of those bizarre stories includes supposed meeting between the Supreme Leader of Iran and bin Laden to discuss potential terrorist operations against the United States, implying their cooperation during the 9/11 attacks. This "report" and many other similar ones frequently come from American hawks, whose ultimate goal is not to base their allegations on credible facts and sources, but just to reach the ultimate goal of portraying Iran as a brain behind every terrorist operation. If that requires exaggerating a little bit, so be it.

One thing is for sure. As evidenced above, Al-Qaeda and Iran did cooperate on a small operational level. Many of those small collaborations were done through the high-ranking contacts in IRGC, whose allegiance lies with Supreme Leader, not the Iranian government. Besides, from Iran's perspective, the contacts with Al-Qaeda only served the purpose of leverage over Washington and Riyadh. The members of the group that resided in Iran after 9/11 were probably allowed to do so as a result of Iran's designation as an "axis of evil" member. If the United States somehow endangered Iran, Tehran would probably respond by releasing these members, similarly as it did with former Afghani warlord Hekmatyar following the designation (Miniter, 2004). Also, by maintaining some level of cooperation, Iran made sure not to end up on Al-Qaeda's target list.

Another thing equally sure is that Al-Qaeda's and Iran's long-term geopolitical goals do not align. As much as this was visible in the Afghani civil war, it is visible in Syria, where both parties are on the opposing sides. When motivated enough, Iran has proven its capabilities in effectively cracking down the group's operatives. The strong anti-Shia features in the group's ideology are the reason that Al-Qaeda never considered Iran as one of the recruitment countries. Hence there was never an Iranian member of Al-Qaeda. Their brief periods of cooperation would not be the first time that in the history of warfare, two enemies worked together to achieve particular interests. That is the reason why they are only brief. To simply put, due to profound geopolitical and ideological differences, Iran's cooperative foreign policy towards Al-Qaeda is in best-case scenario somewhat limited.

Al-Qaeda and SA

Saudi relationship with Al-Qaeda dates back to the very inception of the group. At first, this link was only ideological, only to eventually become more tangible. It all started during the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989), in which the Soviet Union was providing support to the communist Afghan government. On the opposite side, there were Muslim insurgents, known as mujahideen, who were rallying up to fight the invaders. For this part of the thesis, two individuals among them are essential: Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian Sunni Islamic Scholar, and Osama bin Laden, Saudi Arabian, and the 17th son of the millionaire construction magnate. During the war, both of them were laying down the foundations for a movement preceding Al-Qaeda. Azzam primarily served as an ideological guide for the group. He was the one who incorporated Wahhabi tenants into Al-Qaeda's agenda by stressing out the centrality of restoring the idea of jihad (Bergen & Paul, 2012). That explains why there is almost no difference between Wahhabi teachings and those of the Al-Qaeda. The main thing they diverge on is the question of

who should be in charge, so to put things in perspective, the difference is similar to that between Stalinists and Trotskyites in the 1920s and early 1930s. Bin Laden, on the other hand, was responsible for the logistical side of the dealings, as he was the one who developed a giant financial network intended to supply jihadist cause with weapons and fighters (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010).

SA was heavily involved in the overall process. The kingdom had a tradition of rallying behind Islamist insurgencies, Afghanistan not being an exemption. The Saudi government incentivized all those wishing to fight for Islamist causes. For example, SA National Airline gave a 75% discount for all those heading to Afghanistan. No surprise that the most extensive contingent siding with Azzam and bin Laden was Saudi. Furthermore, the kingdom's intelligence, which was then led by Prince Turki al-Faisal (who knew bin Laden during his university days), coordinated the funding process of these tens of thousands of volunteers by directing the money through charitable organizations, such as Saudi Red Crescent and Muslim World League. Most of this funding was coming from wealthy Saudi princes (Gold, 2003).

The direct results of these massive donations were visible in Peshawar, Pakistan, where the offices of the charitable organizations mentioned above were located. In a short period, more than 150 Koran study centers and 85 Islamic schools for Afghan students were up and running, ready to spread the ideology of Wahhabism. However, it was not only Peshawar that was affected. All along the Afghan-Pakistani border, a large number of madrassas emerged, becoming suitable training centers for the SA's and Al-Qaeda's future partner in Afghanistan, Taliban (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005).

After the assassination of Azzam in a car bomb attack in 1989, bin Laden took over all of the operations of the group and converted that same year Maktab Khadamt al-Mujahideen into Al-Qaeda (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010). It was at this point when Al-Qaeda started drifting away from the Saudi regime. The first such dispute came after Hussein invaded Kuwait and appeared to do the same to SA. Under this threat, Riyadh decided to invite the American troops for protection. Before the decision, however, bin Laden offered Saudi authorities to use his Afghan-Arab troops to defend the kingdom instead. Naturally, the proposal was not taken seriously. Not long after that, offended bin Laded took off to Sudan, where he would continue successfully expanding his global network of terrorism, but at the price of his excellent relationship with Riyadh (Hegghammer, 2008).

During his time in Sudan, bin Laden openly and confidently attacked the Saudi ruling regime to the degree that Riyadh revoked his citizenship. Many of his accusations originated from the fact that Saudis allowed "infidel" U.S. troops to reside on their holy soil. That is why, contrary to the popular belief, operational infrastructure within SA during the 1990s was not that supportive of Al-Qaeda's goals, as it is generally assumed (Hegghammer, 2008). For the ordinary Saudis, bin Laden's utopian political project of global jihad was too radical, even for the most extreme Saudi Islamists. Al-Qaeda's agenda was similarly problematic for the Saudi ruling class, as it incorporated an all-out war against Washington. As a result of these differences, SA's authorities took a firmer stand against the group. In 1995, Saudi police disrupted the so-called "missile plot," in which Al-Qaeda operatives were supposed to shell the U.S. consulate in Jidda with antitank missiles. Consequently, approximately 900 Al-Qaeda operatives were sent to prison (National Counterterrorism Center, 2018).

The issues that Al-Qaeda and SA had in their relationship most likely reflected on overall contact that the kingdom was maintaining with the movement, but it nevertheless remained significant to the 9/11 events. For the first time, the "missile plot" demonstrated the potential danger that Al-Qaeda could represent for the kingdom. Gold argues that the Saudi government from that point onwards was making regular payments to bin Laden. He contends that, as a part of this informal agreement, SA would turn a blind eye to Al-Qaeda's operations elsewhere, while bin Laden would refrain from conducting them in the kingdom – a perfect recipe for how the royal family members could protect themselves (Gold, 2003). Byman challenges this notion arguing that such a claim lacks specifics to support its evidence. However, even he, who is much more careful when articulating strong accusations, acknowledges that Al-Qaeda received significant financial support from SA before the New York attacks (Byman, Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism, 2005).

The interaction between Al-Qaeda and the kingdom was very much present in the conflicts involving "the Muslim nation"- notably the Chechen wars, Bosnian war, Kosovo crisis, and Palestinian intifadas. As pointed out in the previous chapters, one of Riyadh's most important instruments that facilitated this interaction were charity organizations, many of which operated in these territories providing a subtle but yet very efficient cover for extremist Islamic groups, including Al-Qaeda. For instance, Saudi charitable organizations, al-Haramain and Benevolence International, founded in Bosnia during the 90s, were shut down by the Bosnian government due to its alleged role of channeling finances for the activities of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda. Based on the investigation by the Russian Federal Security Service, these organizations also had the same purpose in Chechnya and Dagestan (Flanigan, 2006). Some evidence shows how Al-Haramain's financial support for Al-Qaeda reached the

group's different affiliates all around the world – from North Africa, the United States, to the Far East (Pandith, 2019). The 90s represented the golden age of Al-Qaeda in terms of organizational expansion. If that was not the case, it is highly unlikely that the group would gain capabilities to conduct the attacks as sophisticated as 9/11.

Within the weeks of the attacks on the World Trade Center, it was difficult for Saudi leadership to continue denying any possibility of Saudi relationship with the group. The USA expected from their trusted allies to respond forcefully to what has happened on September 11. But even then, the only moves that Riyadh took was intensified PR campaign intended to change this view of SA from state supporter for terrorism to trustworthy ally in the fight against it. It was only after 2003, when a network of Al-Qaeda's militants, called "Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula" (AQAP) perpetrated two significant attacks on Riyadh's residential compounds, that SA initiated the most systematic crackdown against a terrorist organization yet. After the fall of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda effectively lost its haven in Afghanistan, thereby reducing SA's value as a source of money and recruits. Its recruits did not have anywhere to train, and international wire transactions were under scrutiny more than ever. Conversely, its value as a theater of operations increased (National Counterterrorism Center, 2018). That is what made SA realize that 2003 attacks could be first of many to follow if more aggressive steps in anti-Al-Qaeda fight were not taken.

Years-long counterterrorism efforts that subsequently followed consisted of information campaigns, financial measures, and minor educational changes. The former aimed at portraying Al-Qaeda's militants as socio-revolutionaries who only wanted to oust the government and kill innocent Muslims. In a sense, SA was waging a very sophisticated battle for the hearts and minds of its population. There was nothing that the group could do to match the formidable

government's resources. Financial measures were mostly aimed at strengthening the regulation of informal money transfers and charitable donations to Al-Qaeda. In this regard, Riyadh has heavily invested in creating a more elaborate taxation system that will be able to provide the government with insight into how much money its citizens have and how they spent it. Even the Saudi educational system advocating Wahhabism, which throughout the years was untouchable, was somewhat accommodated to the need for curbing the denigration of other religions (Congressional Research Service, 2019). One notable result of SA's increasingly aggressive counterterrorism measures was the prevention of the 2010 AQAP cargo plane bomb plot (Byman, Saudi Arabia and terrorism today, 2016).

In the last 16 years, Saudis have made considerable progress in their fight against Al-Qaeda and its close affiliates. Still, there is a long way to go. Saudi links to Al-Qaeda continue to remain strong. The accusations of Wahhabi religious teaching done through various Saudi charities like the Muslim World League (MWL), International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), the Medical Emergency Relief Charity, the al-Haramain Foundation, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth have been piling up. Due to the global presence of these charities, foreigners are being exposed to extremist ideology, thus making them an easy target for Al-Qaeda's recruitment process. Recently, State Department counterterrorism coordinator, Nathan Sales, warned of the threat posed by Al-Qaeda emphasizing that in some places – like Yemen and Syria – its presence has grown (Rizk, 2019). In Yemen, for instance, due to the reckless Saudi decision to start a war there, AQAP has dramatically expanded. Reportedly, SA cooperated on a couple of occasions with AQAP in order to counter the threat of the Houthi movement (Rizk, 2019).

ISIS and Iran

Unlike with Al-Qaeda, there was no room for any cooperation between ISIS and Iran. It is important to note that Daesh (group's Arabic acronym) was a whole another beast compared to Al-Qaeda, as it was much bigger, richer, and at one point operated a pseudo territory that encompassed the territories of Iraq and Syria – Iran's two most important allies in the region. ISIS' unapologetic anti-Shia ideology and brutality provided no common ground based on which Iranian policymakers could start a dialogue (Esfendiary, 2016). Therefore, Tehran realized that its useful ability to form relationships with non-state actors as a sort of defense strategy would not prove useful. There were also suspicions on Tehran's side that ISIS was planning on going far as attempting to create its affiliate in Iran (Tabatabai A. M., 2018). As a result, the foreign policy that Iran decided to adopt was much more assertive and hands-on.

At the very beginning, ISIS did not represent a formidable threat to the regimes of Syria and Iraq. When the group initially appeared in the former, it did not seem that it could turn out to be anything more than an insignificant, passing threat. In the very beginnings of the Syrian civil war, ISIS jihadist was just one of the numerous factions opposing Assad's regime. Iran, at the time, was already heavily involved fighting on the side of Assad. Qaseem Soleimani, who was instrumental in orchestrating the entrance into the war, did not perceive ISIS as a threat and even thought of the group as being beneficial for Iranian interests in Syria. Presumably, this assessment came from the fact that ISIS was not only fighting Assad's forces but also other opposition factions and, in a way, assisting the Syrian regime (Ostovar, 2016). Instead, Suleimani decided to focus on helping Assad to stop major rebel advances and defend Damascus and his other key strongholds.

The plan at the time seemed reasonable, but later on, it showed its downside. By ignoring ISIS, Soleimani inadvertently allowed the group to develop and gain strength. Soon after that, Daesh jihadists were controlling vast territories in Eastern Syria, which they eventually used as a stronghold to launch a successful attack on Iraq. Through spring, ISIS defeated Iraqi government forces, seized much of Western Iraq, including country's second-biggest city Mosul and with it gained global prominence (Esfendiary, 2016). Understanding the severity of the situation it was facing, Iran was ready to formulate the appropriate foreign policy response. More often than not, the Islamic regime would develop its position only in response to a crisis. And more often than not, these policies would reflect pragmatism and flexibility. This was one of those cases.

Similarly, like Syria, Iraq was a key partner to the regime in Tehran. In the light of the international sanctions imposed on Iran, Iraq became one of Tehran's top five trading partners (Byman, Iran, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2008). Since the fall of Sadam Hussein, reliance on Baghdad provided Tehran with the possibility to avoid complete regional isolation. Losing Iraq to hostile anti-Shiite, anti-Iran forces would be devastating. Beyond strategic and political importance, Iraq housed valuable religious shrines in Shiism, making it religiously valuable as well (Ostovar, 2016). For all of these reasons, Iran's assertiveness and determination to counter the ISIS threat did not come as a surprise.

Iran firstly started sending in IRGC advisors, who were responsible for training and supporting local forces, which were the bulk of defense against ISIS. Naturally, militias that achieved the most noticeable results against this terrorist organization were the ones most aligned with the Iranian regime. That essentially enabled them to receive a considerably more substantial amount of resources relative to the other local forces, especially Sunni-dominant militias. The military forces such as Badr Organization, Kataib Hezbollah, Liba Abu Fadl al-

Abbas, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, and Peshmerga (along with other Kurdish groups) were leading the operations in the country's strategically important areas. Iran's foreign policy towards ISIS also incorporated boots on the ground (Tabatabai A. M., 2018).

Along with IRGC forces, roughly 2000 members of briefly mentioned Basij forces comprised a part of Iran's overall contingent in Iraq. Interesting about the boots on the ground approach was its publicity. In every way possible, Iran and IRGC were purposefully publicizing its presence in Iraq through a systematically structured PR campaign in order to project power and influence, as well as send a strong message to ISIS members. Even the pictures of Soleimani posing with Shiite and Peshmerga commanders on the front lines circulated on Facebook and various other social networks (Rafati, 2017). That was extremely unusual, given the mysteriousness surrounding his persona.

The overall net impact of these policies in the broader war against ISIS was positive. By December 2017, ISIS lost a significant amount of its territories in Iraq, including Mosul. On December 9, 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abdi declared victory over the ISIS in Iraq (Hussain, 2019). Nowadays, Iranian counterterrorism efforts are mostly Syria-concentrated, where Tehran provides money and finances to the Assad government to combat ISIS. Also, Iran deployed the Army's Special Forces and Hezbollah to fight the group. In June 2017 Islamic regime in operation "Laylat al-Qadr" fired ballistic missiles from Western Iran that were fatal for more than 170 ISIS forces in eastern Syria (Juneau, 2018).

So far, ISIS has lost 95% of its territory, both thanks to the international coalition, led by the United States, and Iran, but its threat remains, according to former security advisor of Trump, John Bolton (Hussain, 2019). Relative to American anti-ISIS contribution, the Iranian was

ultimately more modest. That said, it should be noted that a couple of local commanders who cooperated with both sides indicated Iranian flexible and speedy decision-making in crises. One Kurdish analyst present during the critical battle of Makhmour told The Intercept when ISIS initiated the offensive, Iranians came first to assist, while Americans only joined the battle a couple of days after. Unlike Washington, which has to push the decision through a thick web of bureaucracy, Iran's security institutions in emergencies proven to be quicker and more effective (Hussain, 2019). That was indeed useful in the overall counter-ISIS efforts, and it can continue to be in the future fights against remnants of the group, still active in several places in the Middle East. Iranian capabilities to help against ISIS or other emerging jihadi groups should not be taken for granted.

ISIS and SA

The foreign policy approach that Riyadh has taken towards ISIS reflects the evolution of its counterterrorism efforts in the post 9/11 environment. Unlike with Al-Qaeda, the kingdom's relationship with ISIS is far less ambiguous and more assertive. Since the establishment of the group, the SA government repeatedly stated that it views it as a direct threat to Saudi national security (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Washington DC, 2019). Nonetheless, Riyadh's stance cannot only be attributed to the maturity of its new counterterrorism policy. To a degree, IS is also responsible, and here is why. Although Al-Qaeda's former affiliate, ISIS reformulated many of the elements that characterized bin Laden's agenda, in particular, its stance vis-à-vis SA's ruling elite. While bin Laden only criticized individual members of the Saudi government, ISIS openly called for their complete removal. In their propaganda, leaders of ISIS have highlighted that their primary goal is the establishment of the Islamic caliphate, to which all religious Sunni Muslims owe allegiance. To Al Saud family members, who for decades now

portray themselves as a protector of Islam and its holiest sites, this was a direct political threat to their legitimacy. Deceased IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, in many instances, viciously challenged these credentials describing the Al Saud family as "the slaves of the crusaders and the allies of the Jews." He went on to accuse them of abandoning Sunni Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis, and others. In addition, al Baghdadi called upon all of ISIS's supporters in the Arabian Peninsula to rise and reject the Saudi government's systematic plan to westernize the kingdom (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

All of the elements constituting ISIS' anti-SA campaign were not merely words. The group reinforced these threats by perpetrating several terrorist operations within the kingdom. ISIS claimed responsibility for the 2015 mosque bombing that took the lives of over 25 Saudi Shia Muslims, including wounding 106. Another mosque attack took place in August 2015 when ISIS-related suicide bomber killed 15 people and injured nine. As this operation was done at a mosque inside a Saudi special forces headquarters, the attack was met with shock and condemnation by the majority of Saudis (Shaul, 2019). SA's political journalist Jamal Khashoggi referred to the attack as the most massive anti-Saudi operation done by ISIS yet (Writtes, 2018).

Riyadh's response was strong. Based on the report of the United Nations Monitoring Team on the ISIS and Al-Qaeda, during 2018, Saudi security forces disrupted three attempted operation by IS (in SA), leading to the deaths of six terrorists, but also eight members of the security forces. Most of these plots were planned by lone actors, who were inspired by ISIS' ideology. So far, Saudi officials claim to have arrested more than 1600 suspected IS supporters. In conjunction with counter-ISIS security operations, Riyadh has initiated a systematic propaganda campaign, which aims at portraying IS as the primary enemy of Muslims. No better way to do this than utilize the powerful message conveyed through Saudi Grand Mufti Abdul

Aziz bin Abdullah Al- Sheikh (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The central assumption of this strategy was that an influential figure like him, both in the internal and external domain of Saudi politics, can make a positive difference in regards to the degree to which ISIS is supported among the Sunni Muslim population, especially Saudi Arabians.

SA has also reaffirmed its commitment to countering individuals who provide financial support to IS by participating in several cooperative initiatives. One of those is Counter-ISIS Finance Group of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, in which SA currently co-chairs alongside the United States and Italy (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Washington DC, 2019). In the ISIS-financing domain, Riyadh has taken various steps to limit the flow of privately raised funds from its citizens and charitable organizations in Syria that could plausibly end up in the hands of ISIS operatives (Fortna, Lotito, & Rubin, 2018). Lastly, Saudi authorities issued a decree in 2014 forbidding its citizens of traveling to Syria to join ISIS or any other extremist group and introduced prison sentences for those who would notwithstanding, commit the transgression (National Counterterrorism Center, 2018).

U.S. authorities have praised Riyadh's enhanced counterterrorism capabilities in all domains, but experts point to deficiencies that remain despite all of the measures. Of more than 3,200 Saudi foreign fighters who traveled to Syria or Iraq, based on some estimates given by the Saudi Ministry of Interior, 760 had returned (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Many of the radicalized returnees who were at some point in contact with ISIS could become terrorist threats, not only for SA but its immediate neighborhood. It seems that as in the case of Al-Qaeda, Saudi individuals who raise funds for ISIS have managed to find a way to circumvent all of the obstacles imposed by Riyadh through the most charity-friendly country in the Gulf, which is Kuwait. Salafi charity organizations and individuals stationed there have sent as much as

hundreds of millions of dollars, from which a significant portion goes straight to ISIS, without any government oversight (Fortna, Lotito, & Rubin, 2018).

For the last point, it should be underlined how recent Eastern Sunday Bombings in Sri Lanka that killed over 250 people, once again illuminate the danger of Wahhabism and Saudi role in spreading it. Since ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks, many have pointed fingers to some Saudi families, who made donations to Muslim-majority towns in Sri Lanka, as the underlying cause of the tragic event. Since the bombings, Sri Lankan authorities have arrested a Wahhabi scholar, and they are considering closing one of the Saudi-funded schools (Ulmer & Rajarathnam, 2019).

The Compatibility of U.S. Counterterrorism Policy with Iran's and SA's Foreign Policy Towards Terrorist Organizations

Hezbollah

Hezbollah's hopes that the Trump administration, being so busy pursuing its "America first" policy, will leave a slightly lighter footprint in the Middle East (especially Syria), have to an extent materialized. Indeed, with gradual withdrawal from Syria and, in general, policies whose ultimate goals are lesser involvement in the region, Trump seems to be doing this. Nevertheless, countering Hezbollah remains a top counterterrorism priority for the incumbent president. During the last two previous administrations, ISIS and Al-Qaeda largely overshadowed Hezbollah, thus allowing the group to expand its network of operations without significant pressure from the United States (Levitt, How Trump is Going After Hezbollah in America's Backyard, 2017). That all looks to be changing as Trump administration is once again

renewing the importance of defeating Hezbollah and accordingly, taking a series of measures to counter it.

The primary strategy heavily relies on sanctions designed to alter the course of its Iranian benefactor by disrupting its access to external markets and international financial structures. The ultimate goal with the approach is to deny Tehran of the financial resources intended to, among other things, maintain a network of proxies, including Hezbollah. According to this line of thinking, the less money Iran has, the less damage can its proxies inflict. As the group established an impressive transnational criminal portfolio that provides it with an additional $300 million per year, U.S. other measures are directed in the areas where these illicit activities are conducted, especially Latin America. These include "indictments, extraditions, public statements and issued rewards for information on wanted Hezbollah terrorist leaders." The administration has issued an extensive request for information (RFI) to its departments to dig up new information that could even further expose Hezbollah for its illegal operations in the Latin America region (Levitt, How Trump is Going After Hezbollah in America's Backyard, 2017). Even the frequent official visits made by the U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, to Latin America countries, illustrate these efforts of delegitimizing Hezbollah and convincing regional governments of the threat posed by the group (DeYoung, 2019). Assured that the trajectory of Hezbollah's international terrorist activities has not changed since the signing of Iranian nuclear deal in 2015, the U.S. policymakers believe that Hezbollah could launch attacks in its backyard – especially given the rising tensions between the U.S. and Iran

Iran's and the U.S. goals vis-à-vis Hezbollah is most definitely going to continue diverging. That reflects in two facts. Firstly, despite the sanctions, Iran still provides Hezbollah alone with $700 million per year, according to the U.S. Counterterrorism Coordinator

Ambassador, Nathan Sales (Tabatabai & Clarke, 2019). There are almost no signs that Iran is in any way, decreasing its assistance. Now that JCPOA is on the verge of collapse and the recent escalation of tensions, Iran is likely to rely even more on Hezbollah. Secondly, Hezbollah is demonstrating its resurgence on the international arena by intensifying the conduct of malign activities in the areas close to the United States. The 2013 thwarted terrorism plot by one of Hezbollah's operatives underscores this assessment (Levitt, Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God, 2015). If the present situation does not de-escalate, Iran's promise to avenge the U.S. killing of Suleimani could at one point materialize by taking advantage of Hezbollah's footprint in Latin America.

Riyadh, on the other hand, will align its interests towards Hezbollah with those of the U.S. It would be utterly naïve to believe that SA would like to anything other than hurt the group that has for such a long time impeded Saudi regional interests on behalf of Iran. Starting from Khobar incident, Lebanon, Syrian war, and alleged support to Houthis in the Yemeni conflict, Hezbollah has proven time after time its relevancy in the Saudi-Iranian proxy war (Tabatabai & Clarke, 2019). Although the U.S. and Saudi end goals in regards to Hezbollah are relatively the same, means to their ends are different, and they could, in the long term, hinder U.S. general counterterrorism efforts in the region. More precisely, SA has shown its willingness to support radical Wahhabi groups, especially in Lebanon and Syria, as a tool against Hezbollah. By indoctrinating them in Wahhabism and also providing them with financial support, SA is playing with fire because such modus operandi, in a way, resembles the process through which one of the most lethal terrorist organizations, like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, were created.

Hamas

Since late 2017, Trump's administration has taken a more uncompromising stance towards the Palestinian issue and, by extent, Hamas. It has practically ended all financial assistance to Palestinians and the UN Relief and Works Agency, unilaterally moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, and embraced Israeli position on the key "final status" negotiation issues (Gordon, 2019). Inadvertently, this approach has incentivized Mahmoud Abbas, president of Palestinian National Authority (PNA), to initiate a series of aggressive policies, such as curtailing the salaries of PNA Gaza employees and cutting off the funding for electricity in Gaza, which exacerbated the already dire humanitarian crisis in the Strip. Other actors involved in the Palestinian issue were also encouraged to cut off remaining lifelines: Egypt, Israel, and most of the Gulf countries (Rumley, 2017).

For most of its part, United States opted to remain relatively disengaged from Gaza in hopes of weakening Hamas. With the exemption of significant breakthroughs, this does not seem to change; on the contrary, it can only get worse. There is no will in Washington to start any kind of dialogue with Hamas representatives considering that would incur severe political fallout for the administration. Even if there was, Trump's strong pro-Israeli position would not provide enough space for it to develop in anything more than a thought. Still, the U.S. administration should be careful to balance its and the pressure of its allies, considering that it could lead to unwanted consequences. An important lesson from the three last wars in Gaza is that pressure on Hamas beyond a certain threshold leads to increased regional tensions and conflict with Israel.

This pressure also tends to divert Hamas' trajectory from its traditional supporters to Iran. It happened before, and it is happening once again. After a fallout over the Syrian war in 2012 and years of estrangement, it looks like Iran is re-establishing ties with Hamas by taking advantage of the group's financial crisis. The recent rapprochement is also based on other factors.

Iran keeps on assisting Hamas because one of the critical features of its ideology is the fight against Israel. By keeping Hamas alive, Iran has deterrence power against regional allies of the United States. Moreover, having Hamas on its side is the best way for Tehran to transcend the Sunni-Shiite divide and portray itself as pan-Islamic power. For the already stated reasons, Hamas' lack of consistent allies, and the highly tensioned situation between Washington and Tehran, it is more likely than not that this alliance will continue expanding – something that does not align with the U.S present counterterrorism objectives.

In the last two decades, Hamas and SA could not find common ground. Accordingly, Riyadh has been one of the leaders in the anti-Hamas efforts, especially in the last couple of years. Nowadays, not only that SA has been launching arrests of Hamas' supporters and cutting off the financial flows to Gaza, but it has also initiated a blockade on Qatar, one of the group's primary benefactors. A more aggressive Saudi position vis-à-vis Hamas could be explained by carefully looking at two developments. Such a stance roughly coincided with the beginning of Iran-Hamas rapprochement. Unsurprisingly, it goes without a question that SA wanted to punish Hamas for approaching the kingdom's biggest nemesis. The second development is related to Trump's "deal of the century." The crown prince has made Saudi support for Trump's plan quite clear, and his intensified pressure on both Abbas and Hamas could be seen as a way to compel them to accept all of the terms proposed by the deal. In the context of increasing Saudi alignment with the U.S. position on Palestine and Iran, Riyadh will look to maintain the pressure on Hamas, if not raise it even.

Al-Qaeda

In the latest U.S. intelligence assessments of terrorist threats, Al-Qaeda has dropped on the priority list. Trump's 2018 "National Strategy for Counterterrorism" (NSC) document correctly warns of the limited threat posed by Al-Qaeda affiliates, but still prioritizes groups, such as Hezbollah and ISIS (The White House, DC, 2018). Many factors contributed to the diminishing of the group in U.S. policy and public discussions. One of them is Al-Qaeda's failure to carry out a sophisticated attack on foreign soil. The last one for which Al-Qaeda took responsibility was 2015 shootings at the offices of the satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, in Paris. Furthering Al-Qaeda's demise was the reported death of Hamza bin Laden, the planned successor of Ayman al-Zawahiri. The last factor may be attributed to the fact that ISIS, another jihadist organization, eclipsed Al-Qaeda in terms of its operations and popularity, thus forcing the United States to focus the majority of its counterterrorism efforts there. Despite American counterterrorism effectively degrading Al-Qaeda's capabilities, the recent trajectory of the organization has been heading more towards political consolidation, than fragmentation. Its regional branches in areas such as South Asia, Somalia, and the Middle East (e.g., Syria) are slowly rebuilding (Riedel, 2019). Although the entirety of the organization has been leaning more to local conflicts, it does not mean Al-Qaeda has lost its interest in international terrorism and the ambition of hurting the United States.

One of the proper ways to portray how Trump has deprioritized Al-Qaeda is to elaborate U.S. policy on Afghanistan. His administration initiated peace talks with the Afghan Taliban to finalize peace agreement that will lead to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the war-torn country (Clarke & Lister, 2019). In order to start with withdrawal, U.S. negotiators require guarantees that the Taliban will prevent the use of Afghan soil for terrorist safe heavens. So far, the Taliban's rhetoric and actions in the field have demonstrated reluctance to denounce Al-

Qaeda, thereby making their assurances highly questionable. On the contrary, a close inspection of the battlefield indicates that parts of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban continue to coordinate specific attacks in northern and eastern Afghanistan (Riedel, 2019). One way or another, the U.S. exit from Afghanistan is going to strengthen Al-Qaeda along with its allies. Therefore, given the U.S. emphasis in the NSC document on the need for other countries to take their share of the burden in counterterrorism efforts, it is critical to evaluate the role of Iran and SA in the potential resurgence of Al-Qaeda.

Over the years, Iran's approach towards Al-Qaeda, as stated in the previous chapters, has been inconsistent. That is why it can be considered problematic to argue that Iran's Al-Qaeda foreign policy, in the scenario where the group rises again, could align with the U.S. approach. Indeed, Iran held some Al-Qaeda operatives after 9/11 in house arrest as an act of defense against the group's potential attacks and a tool for drawing concessions from Washington. However, contrary to Trump's claims, Al-Qaeda and Iran have been more times at odds than they have been aligned since 9/11. While in the past, this was evidenced in Afghanistan, nowadays, it is visible in Syria and Yemen. Most of the evidence shows that Iran never co-sponsored Al-Qaeda's attacks drawing a line there- even when it had the strongest anti-American attitude (Hirsh, 2019). So speculations how Tehran's currently strained relationship with Washington following Soleimani's assassination could serve as an incentive for Iran's participation in Al-Qaeda's attacks against the United States seems to ignore the past experiences and the fundamental differences between the two. If the group would once again gain a foothold in Afghanistan with the help of Taliban, it is even more apparent that Iran would not allow such an alliance in the neighboring country for the same reasons it did not allow it in late 2001 when it cooperated with the United States in the goal of curtailing Taliban influence.

Saudis have designated Al-Qaeda, along with ISIS, as a top security threat. As such, its goals related to the group go hand in hand with the U.S. The prompt Saudi reaction prevented detonation of the AQAP bombs on two separate cargo planes that have already cleared multiple screenings. In addition to the useful sources within the terrorist circles, Riyadh plays a central role in U.S. anti-AQAP campaign in Yemen by hosting a CIA-operating drone base (Congressional Research Service, 2019). These, combined with financial countermeasures, deserve recognition and praise. Nonetheless, some Saudi actions remain problematic for U.S. counterterrorism goals. The Crown Prince's military campaign in Yemen has indirectly assisted AQAP by providing it breathing space. There were even some reports of their direct collaboration against the Houthis. Moreover, money is still flowing from the kingdom to Al-Qaeda-associated groups (Taliban included) via Kuwait to avoid Saudi countermeasures. Although Riyadh officially opposes the group, its antagonism towards Iran is far higher, hence its willingness to cooperate with it Al-Qaeda in places like Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Perhaps most importantly, notwithstanding improved Saudi countermeasures, is the fact that Al-Qaeda is an idea that retains the loyalty of thousands of people and can still attract recruits – an idea effectively exported from SA.

ISIS

Washington has achieved one of its primary objectives to eliminate ISIS' territorial control over a significant part of Iraq and Syria. Also, Trump's national security team, after spending years of hunting the world's dangerous terrorist, secured Baghdadi's death (Seligman, 2019). The group itself does not represent existential threat anymore, with its remnants remaining security problem, as indicated in the 2018 NSC document (The White House, DC, 2018). U.S. security apparatus is, however, currently acting as the threat of ISIS has been

completely eradicated. Many have contended this approach is not appropriate since the group is still alive.

In his recent statements, the U.S. president recklessly claimed that ISIS had been defeated and implemented policies that reflect this resolve of ceasing the fight with the group (Walt, 2019). For instance, the withdrawal of American troops from Syria served as a green light for Turkey to deploy its troops in Northeastern Syria against the alleged Kurdish threat. In this region, Kurdish soldiers were guarding tens of thousands of ISIS prisoners, many of which whom reportedly took advantage of the situation and escaped. For matters to get worse, according to the comprehensive New York article, it seems that the group is regaining its strength in Iraq and Syria, which does not come as a surprise since the regional grievances and conditions that fueled its emergence there, still exist (Seligman, 2019). Given such uninterested U.S. stance vis-à-vis ISIS and the group's continuing threat to regional stability, it is crucial to evaluate Iranian and Saudi role in regards to regional counterterrorism.

Iran was not a part of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, but its critical contribution to the U.S. fight against ISIS is undeniable, especially during the period when the group was at its peak. Tehran, for which ISIS represents one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations since MeK, waged a parallel campaign that, in many ways, mirrored U.S. strategies for dealing with the group (Esfendiary, 2016). As noted earlier, ISIS is recuperating in the areas strategically crucial to Tehran. This fact only indicates that Iran's reaction towards ISIS would not be any less forceful than it was a couple of years ago. In this sense, it is hard to argue that Iran's interests would be only at odds with the U.S. counterterrorism. While IRGC and Iran are perceived as key adversaries involved in planning attacks against U.S. allies and assets, their role in the fight

against ISIS and potential counterterrorism contribution in the foreseeable future, not only against Daesh but other similar groups should not be neglected.

SA, which prioritized ISIS as the national security concern, contributed to the anti-ISIS campaign, as well. That pertained principally to the financial side of counterterrorism. The United States wanted to disrupt funding activities of the group, and in this regard, SA's imposition of strict regulation of the financial flows going through charities to Syria and Iraq was welcomed. In addition, the kingdom's specific anti-ISIS efforts included collaboration with Washington to equip and train Syrian fighters hoping to stop ISIS militants. Similarly, like with Al-Qaeda, Riyadh keeps on playing this paradoxical role by providing an ideological lifeline to many of the extremist groups. It surely looks like SA would be happier seeing ISIS or some other extremists prevail in countries, such as Iraq and Syria than Iran asserting its footprint there. That poses a question of whether SA is genuinely committed to fighting ISIS and other Wahhabi terrorist organizations, especially now when the United States is looking to minimize its involvement in the Middle East counterterrorism affairs.

Recommendations

In the ideal world, the United States would not have to interact with regimes such as SA's or Iran's. Both countries have a great number of flaws, through which they manifest policies damaging both for themselves and the region they live in. However, this world is far from being ideal, hence one must work with the cards assigned and try to get the best out of it. For the improvement of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, especially in the Middle East, this card is not only reliance on SA. The thesis demonstrated that many of the terrorism problems featuring the region

originate from the kingdom. Moreover, these problems are much more enduring and complex than U.S. policymakers tend to acknowledge.

Therefore, the first, most essential step forward, would be incorporating a "two-pillar strategy," a balancing approach already implemented in the period from 1969 to 1979, which entails reliance on Iran and SA to uphold order throughout the Middle East (Mousavian, 2014). White House should engage both states, without antagonizing either. There are many areas related to counterterrorism against Al-Qaeda and ISIS, where Iran and the United States can cooperate, specifically in areas like Iraq and Afghanistan. Such a balancing strategy could facilitate this process of identifying minor common interests that could, later on, lead to the address of some of Iran's problematic regional activities. Furthermore, if Washington would give Iran less reason to fear it, Tehran's foreign policy would be less reliable on Hezbollah and Hamas as a deterrent strategy. Feeling vulnerable, SA will be careful to align its counterterrorism efforts with those of the U.S., thus leading to curtailing of its own support to extremist organizations.

The second step will have to be addressing the environment that allows terrorist organizations to expand and breed, which in the Middle East context are countries infested with civil wars. An aggressive campaign that only focuses on killing and arresting terrorists is not a durable solution. If the United States is indeed hesitant to get bogged down in the swamp of the Middle East political dynamics, it will need help from other states, mostly regional ones. That is why the first step is vital because it creates prerequisites for the implementation of the second. Treating both SA and Iran as allies could bring both countries faster to the negotiating table, accelerating the end of Syrian and Yemeni wars, as well as Qatar blockade. In areas where civil wars rage, America needs to start appreciating more how competent sub-state groups can contribute to counterterrorism even it means tacitly supporting "less evil" groups. IRGC, along

with Hezbollah and its other proxies, are not America's friends, but looking them as the primary enemies can only run contrary to the U.S. fight against terrorism. Guided by practical doctrine and highly motivated because of the hatred that many of these terrorist groups have towards Shiites, Iran's proxies have proven valuable in the counterterrorism.

Third and the most challenging step is the ideological war that the United States needs to start fighting. Although the NSC document correctly calls for confronting "the hateful ideology that provides the breeding ground for violence and terrorism," it takes a very broad approach to the problem without offering any concrete strategies of how to stop it. While it is evident that everybody in America agrees that Wahhabism has been a direct problem for U.S. national security for two decades now, little or nothing is being done about it. Getting serious about preventing the export of Saudi Wahhabism needs to become the central feature of U.S. counterterrorism. Washington could use its sophisticated intelligence network in order to formulate a comprehensive list of all Saudi-affiliated mosques, madrassas, schools, universities, and preachers. This would enable the U.S. administration to untangle further a complex system of financing that goes through Saudi NGOs for Wahhabism-promotion and take appropriate measures. A close look at the kingdom's internal dynamics indicates that even the momentum for implementation of all of these policies is on the U.S. side. Bin Salman, despite his shortcomings, has openly declared his plans to curb the influence of religious radicalism within the country. Whatever approach the presidential administration adopts, it will be a step in the right direction, but it needs to be done quickly because there is a long fight ahead (Al-Rasheed, 2018).

It ought to be pointed out that these recommendations are easier to write than implement. The first limitation addressed here, will, in particular, relate to the first two recommendations. One could argue that policy, which facilitates inclusion rather than isolation of Iran, could be

disadvantageous for two of U.S. closest partners, SA and Israel. An argument like that is valid. Their unsupportive response could compel Washington to stop pursuing such a policy. However, as in the case of JCPOA, Americans have demonstrated occasional willingness to impose their will on these two, despite their objections (Hiro, 2019). The agreement itself was very similar to the balancing approach as it benefited Iran in terms of reducing some of its sanctions and reintegrating it into the international community.

Therefore, the bigger problem for putting these measures in practice, as I see it, would be the lack of diplomatic element in Trump's foreign policy conduct. By relying solely on threats and coercion, his policies have, on numerous occasions, brought unnecessary tensions to the region. The most recent one was the airstrike conducted on Iranian general, Soleimani, which has brought the two countries on the brink of confrontation. Acknowledging that all of these suggestions require skilled diplomatic maneuvering, it is doubtful that Trump's approach can do anything other than complicating U.S. future counterterrorism activities in the region.

Conclusion

Throughout the overall body of the thesis' work, there is a sufficient amount of evidence indicating that Iran's foreign policy towards terrorist organizations, especially in regards to Sunni extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, aligns with U.S. counterterrorism efforts. The problematic relationships that Iran maintains with Hezbollah and Hamas are not justifiable. However, it should be acknowledged that such an approach comes as a result of regional and international isolation Iran has been facing for the last couple of decades. Despite the willingness to improve its counterterrorism sheet, SA remains one of the core problems causing the formation of terrorist groups in the first place. As such, its export of Wahhabism contradicts everything Washington wants to achieve in regards to terrorism-prevention.

The thesis also focused on the identification of the main differences between foreign policy approaches towards terrorist groups of these two states. One of the noticeable things is that Saudi counterterrorism capabilities are inferior to Iran's. Over the years, Iran has developed an incredibly sophisticated counterterrorism apparatus, which proved very efficient against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and ISIS in Iraq and Syria. More so, Iran has proven stronger determination in fighting some of these groups on the ground. However, the problem remains that many of the entities within this counterterrorism machinery get involved to a degree in logistical preparation and execution of Hezbollah-associated operations. Saudi primary method of supporting terrorism goes through non-state actors, thus forcing Riyadh to establish a more comprehensive oversight system that would regulate them better. Improvements are indeed visible, but the problem with the financing of terrorism through various NGOs and charities remains. Even more importantly, Saudis need to focus on certain parts of their political and

religious establishment, which continues to contribute to the extremism within and outside the kingdom. Only then, actual results will come.

The Middle East is more than ever in urgent need of a more balanced approach, not only for terrorism but other issues, as well. The United States is tired of the regional mess that keeps on exhausting its resources. In order for Washington to one day be, in a minimal sense, involved, it must create a security-sustainable regional system, which will include all of the actors, including Iran. There is a high probability that such a system, under U.S. guidance, can create less antagonistic Iran and more accountable SA. Future work is welcome on the more comprehensive development of these approaches that were briefly outlined.

References

Al-Rasheed, M. (2018). *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Amer, A. A. (2018, July 26). *What is behind the Hamas-Iran rapprochement?* Retrieved from Aljazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/hamas-iran-rapprochement-180725150509789.html

Amer, A. A. (2019, May 15). *Hamas is worried and silent about Saudi Arabia's policy towards it*. Retrieved from Memo: Middle East Monitor: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190515-hamas-is-worried-and-silent-about-saudi-arabias-policy-towards-it/

Amer, A. A. (2019, January 14). *The Hamas-Iran alliance remains and expands*. Retrieved from Memo: Middle East Monitor: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190114-the-hamas-iran-alliance-remains-and-expands/

Amer, A. A. (2019, September 23). *What is behind the Saudi campaign against Hamas?* Retrieved from Aljazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/saudi-campaign-hamas-190922221256740.html

Anderson, S. K. (2007). US Counterinsurgency vs Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism. *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, 254-270.

Azani, E. (2013). Hezbollah's Strategy of "Walking on the Edge": Between Politcal Game and Politcal Violence. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 741-759.

Azani, E. (2013). The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 899-916.

Bahgat, G. (2004). The War on Terrorism: The Mujahedeen e-Khalk Saga. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 377-385.

Baylouny, A. M., & Mullins, C. A. (2017). Cash is King: Financial Sponsorship and Changing Priorities in the Syrian Civil War. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.

Bergen, P., & Paul, C. (2012). Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years. *Studies in Conflict % Terrorism*, 1-36.

Bronson, R. (2006). *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership With Saudi Arabia.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Byman, D. (2005). *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Byman, D. (2008). Iran, Terrorism, and Weapons of Mass Destruction. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 169-181.

Byman, D. (2016, September Thursday). Saudi Arabia and terrorism today. *Brookings*. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/09/29/saudi-arabia-and-terrorism-today/

Clarke, C. P., & Lister, C. (2019, September 4). *Al Qaeda Is Ready to Attack You Again*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/04/al-qaeda-is-ready-to-attack-you-again/

CNN Politics. (2017, May 17). *Transcript of Trump's speech in Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from CNN Politics: https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-saudi-speech-transcript/index.html

Collard, R. (2019, November 27). *Untouchable No More: Hezbollah's Fading Reputation*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/27/lebanon-protests-hezbollah-fading-reputation/

Congressional Research Service. (2019). *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations.* Washington: Congressional Research Service.

Cragin, R. K. (2015). Semi Proxy Wars and U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy. *Studies in Conlfict & Terrorism*, 311-327.

DeYoung, K. (2019, July 20). *Pompeo focuses on Iran and Hezbollah at Latin America counterterrorism conference*. Retrieved from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/pompeo-focuses-on-iran-and-hezbollah-at-latin-america-counterterrorism-conference/2019/07/19/2c14c36a-aa65-11e9-9214-246e594de5d5_story.html

Esfendiary, D. &. (2016). A Comparative Study of US and Iranian Counter-ISIS Strategies. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 1-33.

Feferman, B. (2019, September 2). *Hezbollah's Precision Guided Missile Project and Iran's Dangerous Strategy*. Retrieved from The Times of Israel: https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hezbollahs-precision-guided-missile-project-and-irans-dangerous-strategy/

Flanigan, S. T. (2006). Charity as Resistance: Connections between Charity, Contentious Politics, and Terror. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 641-655.

Fortna, V. P., Lotito, N. J., & Rubin, M. A. (2018). Don't Bite the Hand that Feeds: Rebel Funding Sources and the Use of Terrorism in Civil Wars. *International Stuides Quarterly*, 782-794.

Geltzer, J. A. (2011). Taking Hand-Outs or Going It Alone: Nationalization versus Privatization in the Funding of Islamist Terrorist Groups. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 144-170.

Gold, D. (2003). *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism.* Washington: Regnery Publishing, Inc.

Gordon, P. H. (2019, February 28). *Rethinking U.S. Policy Toward the Palestinians: Why Punishment and Coercion will Backfire*. Retrieved from Council on Foreign Relations: https://www.cfr.org/report/rethinking-us-policy-toward-palestinians

Gunaratna, R., & Oreg, A. (2010). Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution. *Studies in Conflict&Terrorism*, 1043-1078.

Hastert, P. (2007). Al Qaeda and Iran: Friends or Foes, or Somewhere in Between. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 327-336.

Hegghammer, T. (2008). Islamist Violence and Regime Stability. *International Affairs*, 701-715.

Hellmich, C. (2008). Creating the Ideology of Wahhabism. *Studies in Conlfict & Terrorism*, 111-124.

Hiro, D. (2019). *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Struggle for Supremacy.* London: Oxford University Press.

Hirsh, M. (2019, June 24). *U.S. Intelligence Undercuts Trump's Case on Iran-al Qaeda Links*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/24/u-s-intelligence-undercuts-trump-case-on-iran-al-qaeda-links/

Hussain, M. (2019, November 18). *Iran's Shadow War on ISIS*. Retrieved from The Intercept: https://theintercept.com/2019/11/18/iran-isis-iraq-kurds/

IDF. (2019). *Hezbollah's Precision Guided Missile Project*. Retrieved from IDF: https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/hezbollah/hezbollahs-precision-guided-missile-project/

Inafuku, E. (2010). How Does the 1979 Iranian Revolution Affect Current Iranian Fundamentalism and International Politics. *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 414-436.

Iranian Foreign Policy: Context, Regional Analyses, and U.S. Interests. (2016). New York: Nova Publishers.

Juneau, T. (2018). Iran's costly intervention in Syria: A pyrrhic victory. *Mediterrenian Politics*.

Keynoush, B. (2016). *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Friends or Foes.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Kinch, P. (2016). *The US-Iran Relationship: The Impact of Political Identity on Foreign Policy.* I. B. Tauris.

Kinzer, S. (2003). *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror.* New Yersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Kostiner, J. (2009). Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process: The Fluctuation of Regional Coordination. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 417-429.

Lake, E. (2017, December 3). *Iran and al-Qaeda: Best of Frenemies*. Retrieved from Bloomberg: https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2017-11-03/iran-and-al-qaeda-best-of-frenemies

Lambeth, B. S. (2005). Operation Enduring Freedom: An Assessment. *Rand Coorporation*.

Levitt, M. (2015). *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God.* Washington, DC: Georgetown Univesity Press.

Levitt, M. (2017, November 11). *How Trump is Going After Hezbollah in America's Backyard*. Retrieved from Politico Magazine: https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/11/30/donald-trump-hezbollah-latin-america-215987

Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran: Is Regional Proliferation Inevitable? (2012). *The International Spectator*, 127-148.

Miniter, R. (2004). *The untold Turth of How Bush is Winning the War on Terror.* Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc.

Mokhtari, F. (2006). Countering Terrorism: Could Hezbollah and Hamas Show the Way? *Contemporary Security Policy*, 376-396.

Mousavian, S. H. (2014). *Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace.* New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

National Counterterrorism Center. (2018). *FY 2017 Assistance Related to International Terrorism Annual Report.* Washington: U.S. Department of State.

Ostovar, A. (2016). *Vanguard of Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Pandith, F. (2019). *How We Win: How Cutting Edge Enterpreneuers, Political Visionaries, Enlightened Business Leaders, and Social Media Mavens Can Defeat the Extremist Threat.* Custom House.

Rabil, R. (2015, February 20). *Salafism in Lebanon*. Retrieved from The Washington Institute: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/salafism-in-lebanon

Rafati, N. (2017). Iran's Revolutionary Guards: Readying Strength. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 167-176.

Ramani, S. (2015, September 17). *Hamas's Pivot to Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/61315

Rich, B. (2012). Gulf War 4.0: Iran, Saudi Arabia and the complexification of the Persian Gulf equation. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 471-486.

Riedel, B. (2019, September 10). *Al-Qaida today, 18 years after 9/11*. Retrieved from Brookings: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/09/10/al-qaida-today-18-years-after-9-11/

Rizk, A. (2019, August 27). *How Saudi Arabia And Israel Undermine The War On Terror*. Retrieved from Lobe Log: https://lobelog.com/how-saudi-arabia-and-israel-undermine-the-war-on-terror/

Rumley, G. (2017, June 29). *The Squeeze Is On Against Hamas*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/29/the-squeeze-is-on-against-hamas/

Seligman, L. (2019, October 27). *Baghdadi Is Dead, but ISIS Remains Emboldened Since Trump's Drawdown*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/27/isis-islamic-state-leader-baghdadi-killed/

Shaul, S. (2019, May 23). *Saudi Arabia- the terror threat and the response*. Retrieved from International Institute for Counter Terrorism: https://www.ict.org.il/Article/2398/Saudi_Arabia-the_terror_threat_and_the_response#gsc.tab=0

Sobelman, D. (2017). Learning to Deter: Deterrence Failure and Success in the Israel-Hezbollah Conflict, 2006–16. *International Security*, 151-196.

Soltaninejad, M. (2018). Coalition-Building in Iran's Foreign Policy: Understanding the "Axis of Resistance". *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 1-17.

Stern, S. N. (2011). *Saudi Arabia and the Global Islamic Terrorist Network: America and the West's Fatal Embrace.* New York: Palgrava Macmillan.

Strategic Comments. (2005). Iran's terrorist sponsorship. *Strategic Comments*, 1-2.

Tabatabai, A. M. (2018). Other side of the Iranian coin: Iran's counteterroris apparatus. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 181-207.

Tabatabai, A., & Clarke, C. P. (2019, October 16). *Iran's Proxies Are More Powerful Than Ever*. Retrieved from Foreign Policy: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/16/irans-proxies-hezbollah-houthis-trump-maximum-pressure/

The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Washington DC. (2019). *Saudi Arabia and Counterterrorism.* Washington: The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Washington DC. Retrieved from https://www.saudiembassy.net/sites/default/files/SAUDI%20ARABIA%20AND%20COUNTERTERRORISM.pdf

The White House, DC. (2018, October). *National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America.* Retrieved from The White House, DC: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf

TRT World. (2019, Februar 13). *The Saudi-Iranian battle over Lebanon*. Retrieved from TRT World: The Saudi-Iranian battle over Lebanon

Ulmer, A., & Rajarathnam, O. (2019, July 5). *Wahhabism confronted: Sri Lanka curbs Saudi influence after bombings*. Retrieved from Reuters: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-saudi-insight/wahhabism-confronted-sri-lanka-curbs-saudi-influence-after-bombings-idUSKCN1U00LY

Walt, S. M. (2019, August 27). *ISIS Is a Survivor*. Retrieved from ISIS Is a Survivor: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/27/isis-is-a-survivor/

Wiegand, K. E. (2008). Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party. *Studies in Conlfict & Terrorism*, 669-680.

Wolf, A. B. (2018). After JCPOA: American Grand Strategy toward Iran. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 167-176.

Writtes, T. C. (2018, October 15). *On Jamal Khashoggi, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from Brookings: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/10/19/on-jamal-khashoggi-the-muslim-brotherhood-and-saudi-arabia/

Younes, A. (2019, July 20). *Why Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are protesting*. Retrieved from Aljazeera: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/palestinian-refugees-lebanon-protesting-190719194412471.html