The Hidden Cost of Coercion:
Targeting Civilians in the Yemeni Civil War

Master Thesis

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"When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers."

\- African proverb

Abstract

In March 2015, a coalition of forces led by Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen in support of the government to counter the rising influence of the Houthi Movement in the country. The Saudi-led military coalition conducted a series of air strikes, which aimed at defeating the rebels and restoring the government of President Hadi in Yemen. However, the air campaign of the coalition resulted in a considerable damage for the civilian population, as air strikes started hitting civilian infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, markets and residential areas. The Saudi-led coalition failed to discriminate between military and non-military targets, thus causing a humanitarian crisis in the country. The purpose of this Master thesis therefore is to explain the causes for the indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemeni Civil War. The existing academic literature on the topic of indiscriminate targeting of civilians offers a limited insight into the causes of violence against non-combatants during armed conflicts. The following study aimed at filling this research gap by testing three possible explanations for the targeting of civilians in Yemen. First of all, the Saudi-led coalition applied indiscriminate targeting as a response to the Houthi missile campaign on the territory of Saudi Arabia. Second, the coalition imposed an aerial and naval blockade on Yemen in order to cut external supply lines to the rebels, which in turn caused victimization of the civilian population. Lastly, the transfer of weapons to Saudi Arabia from Western countries caused an increase in indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the coalition. The findings of this research project reveal that the Houthi retaliation against Saudi Arabia as well as the cutting of external supply lines to the rebels were causal factors leading to the outcome of indiscriminate targeting of civilians. The supply of arms and military equipment to the Saudis from the West, however, did not cause an immediate increase in civilian casualties. Overall, this study went beyond analysing civilian targeting as being irrational and caused by the intensity of battle. Instead, it positioned harm to civilians as driven by strategic developments and power struggle between opponents. Even though the presented findings provide a holistic explanation for the outcome of civilian targeting in Yemen, further research is necessary to examine all causal factors from multiple perspectives.

Keywords: Indiscriminate Targeting of Civilians, Military Coercion, Yemeni Civil War

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List of Abbreviations

UN   United Nations

UNSC   United Nations Security Council

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization

GCC   Gulf Cooperation Council

IHL   International Humanitarian Law

HRW   Human Rights Watch

TMK   Targeted Mass Killings

SIPRI   Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

YDP   Yemen Data Project

ACLED   Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

UCDP   Uppsala Conflict Data Program

CFR   Council on Foreign Relations

ICG   International Crisis Group

OHCHR   United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OCHA   United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

JIAT   Joint Incidents Assessment Team

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1. Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, states have restrained from resorting to full-scale conflicts in order to defeat each other. Instead, war-threatening situations are managed through diplomatic tools, such as persuasion and negotiation. Diplomacy, however, often falls short (Collins, 2019). If non-violent means end up being ineffective, state and non-state actors opt for the use of coercive strategies to achieve their objectives without engaging in a full-scale conflict. The so-called coercive diplomacy is a crisis management strategy that involves the use of limited military force (sticks) combined with assurances (carrots) to persuade an adversary to do something they would prefer not to (Collins, 2019). Coercion in such cases is exercised through different means; political measures, economic sanctions, threats, and military force (de Wijk, 2014). If political and economic instruments of coercion fail or have been rendered obsolete, the coercer is more likely to escalate into using a military coercion strategy than to cease actions (de Wijk, 2014). According to the scholar Thomas Schelling (1966), military coercion is used to compel the adversary to change its behaviour or to influence its choices.

Coercion applied through military instruments often involves the use of air power since strategic air bombing inflicts damage to the adversary without the need for deployment of troops on the ground (Schelling, 1966). Even though crisis management is an essential component of military coercion, strategic air bombing is specifically used as a violent instrument by coercers to stop or undo an action that has already been undertaken by the adversary (Schelling, 1966). In the post-Cold War Era, for example, coercive air power has been used by state actors to stop acts of aggression, development of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs, and support for terrorism (Jakobsen, 2007). The coercive military interventions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Kosovo in 1999 and Libya in 2011 used air power for humanitarian purposes to cease aggression against civilians by the government (Brown, 2019). However, strategic air bombing can have the reverse effect. Besides inflicting considerable collateral damage on the ground, the application of air power can extend beyond combatants and military targets, thus affecting civilians during armed conflicts (Schelling, 1966). If applied indiscriminately, air power can cause harm to populations not participating in hostilities (Schelling, 1966). This way, the use of military coercion in populated areas raises concerns over the devastating impact it can have on the civilian population. One such instance of civilian harm caused through air strikes is the coercive foreign intervention of coalition of forces led by Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni Civil War in 2015. The Saudi-led air campaign resulted in a humanitarian crisis for the Yemeni people and the bombings caused thousands of civilian casualties (United Nations, 2019). The following section will provide a brief overview of the Saudi-

led coalition's involvement in the Yemeni Civil War, in the context of which the problem statement will be analysed.

1.2. Saudi Arabia's Role in the Yemeni Civil War

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily on behalf of the government in Yemen for the purposes of defeating the Houthi movement, a predominantly Zaydi Shiite revivalist, and set the stage for a still ongoing military conflict (Sharp, 2015). The Yemeni Civil War began in 2015 and escalated into a proxy conflict between a coalition of Saudi-led forces and the Houthi rebels, supported by Iran (Crisis Group, 2019). The conflict in Yemen was sparked by a failed transition plan initiated by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the United Nations (UN) (Clausen, 2015). The plan aimed at replacing the Shiite government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh with his Sunni Vice President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi (Serr, 2017). However, in 2014 Houthi militants, opposing the transition plan, took control over the capital Sanaa, forcing Hadi to request military assistance from Saudi Arabia (Galbraith, 2019). The intervention led by the Saudis was authorized as intervention by invitation under UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (Galbraith, 2019). On March 26, the Saudis launched the so-called Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen, which consisted of massive airstrikes, as well as aerial and naval blockade (Shield, 2018). Nine Gulf and Arab states took part in the coalition, and Western countries provided military and logistical support (Shield, 2018). The campaign aimed at restoring the legitimacy of the government of Hadi and deterring the Houthis from spreading their influence and territorial control further (Serr, 2017). Three weeks later, the coalition declared that the first operation had successfully achieved its objectives and launched a second air campaign; Operation Restoring Hope (Crisis Group, 2019). The focus of the second operation was to settle the dispute peacefully, but instead of seeking a political solution, airstrikes resumed immediately after the coalition announced the end of its first operation (Shield, 2018). The coalition intensified its aerial bombardment and airstrikes started hitting civilian infrastructure (Shield, 2018). The coercive air campaign by the Saudi-led coalition caused a humanitarian crisis in Yemen, leaving eighty percent of the population in some need of humanitarian assistance or protection (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). Military coercion against the Houthis has resulted in the seizure of the port of Hodeidah, which serves as an entry point of food supplies and humanitarian aid for the entire population (Galbraith, 2019). The UN estimates that 17 000 strikes from March 2015 through May 2018 have killed more than 10 000 civilians (Crisis Group, 2019). However, the Saudi-led coalition is denying any accusations of intentionally targeting the civilian population in Yemen (Gladstone, 2018).

Figure 1. Map of Yemen. Source: CTC Sentinel, 2018.

2. Problem Statement

As Saudi Arabia launched Operation Restoring Hope in April 2015, the targeting of civilians in conflict areas intensified further (Bachman, 2019). According to the UN, Saudi-led airstrikes have been responsible for over two-thirds of the civilian casualties in Yemen, "including in indiscriminate or targeted attacks on civilian areas, hospitals, schools, markets and civilian industries" (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2016, para.3). Alongside the UN, many nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Saudi Arabia of indiscriminate targeting of civilians and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2019). According to the Yemen Data Project, the Saudi-led coalition has engaged in attacks by intentionally targeting civilian and economic infrastructure, medical facilities and cultural heritage (Bachman, 2019). The resistance of the Houthi movement to restore the government of President Hadi was met with renewed hostilities and the coercive air campaign of the coalition proceeded with bombing entire governorates in Yemen and declaring civilian areas a military target (Gutierrez, Levett, Swann & Torpey, n.d.). The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen accused Saudi Arabia of using victimization of civilians as a bargaining tool and an instrument of war (Bachman, 2019). Military coercion through air power applied by Saudi Arabia has resulted in an indiscriminate targeting of the Yemeni population. The purpose of this academic study therefore is to answer the following research question:

Why did the Saudi-led coalition indiscriminately target civilians in Yemen between 2015 and 2020?

To provide an answer to the above research question, this project will examine the causes of civilian victimization in the context of non-international armed conflicts with foreign involvement. Scholarly writings on civil war and intrastate conflict have generally focused on understanding the causes of a conflict, yet there is very little systematic analysis on the consequences of coercion for civilian populations (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). As the scholar Kalyvas (2000) has observed, the academic literature has either neglected violence against civilians or assumed that it is irrational, driven by the turmoil of battle. Identifying and explaining the causal mechanisms which led to the Saudi-led coalition's targeting of the Yemeni population would provide new insights into the linkage between coercive air strategies and their implementation in order to cause deliberate damage to non-combatants during armed conflicts.

2.1. Academic and Societal Relevance

In order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on indiscriminate targeting of civilians, this research project will analyse the use of military coercion strategies as an instrument for causing violence against civilians in intrastate conflicts. Because of the limited academic literature focusing on the causes of indiscriminate violence against non-combatants (Kalyvas, 2000), the academic value of this research project lies in providing an in-depth understanding of the use of civilian targeting as a tool for achieving strategic and political objectives during armed conflicts. Looking at the causes of civilian victimization is practically relevant as well, as it would provide policy makers and crisis managers with an insight into the implementation of coercive military strategies to harm civilians. In addition, the issue of indiscriminate targeting of civilians is of particular relevance to the field of human rights law and international humanitarian law, due to the systematic failure of combatants to protect civilian populations during armed conflicts (Ghasemzadeh & Heidarpour, 2019). The rationale behind choosing the conflict in Yemen as a case study is because of the complex and often overlooked nature of the dispute (Ardemagni, 2020). In addition, the government of Yemen has restricted access of Western media to conflict areas, which has led to a limited public awareness of the dire humanitarian conditions on the ground (Rodrigues, 2015).

2.2. Scope and Limitations

The time framework of this research project will cover the period from 2015 until mid-2020, since Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Yemen in 2015 and the coalition is still actively present in the country at the time of writing. Even though the research question of this project highlights the role of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, most of the empirical analysis addresses Saudi Arabia as the main actor of the coalition. This is because the government of Saudi Arabia has been overseeing the air campaign of the coalition and is therefore the leading outside supporter for the government of

Yemen (Gopalakrishnan, 2016). Other participants in the coalition include the internationally recognized Government of Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Qatar (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Moreover, the focus of this research project is limited to the participation of the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi insurgency in the conflict. The complex societal structure of Yemen includes other tribal groups and actors relevant for the development of the dispute, however, it would be infeasible to include them for the scope of a Master thesis. Certain ongoing developments are omitted as well, because of the initially defined time framework of the research.

The following sections will outline the theoretical framework, research design, research methodology and the main empirical findings of the research. First, the academic literature on coercive air power and civilian victimization will be discussed. Then, the choice of main methodological approaches will be justified and the operationalization of key variables will be provided. The research project will proceed with an empirical analysis of the case study and will conclude with discussing the main limitations as well as venues for future research.

3. Theory and Hypotheses

3.1. Civilian Victimization

Civilian casualties are often unavoidable during armed conflicts (Lyall, 2019). International humanitarian law (IHL) sets rules and obligations to parties involved in conflicts in order to minimize harm to civilians. According to the four Geneva Conventions, which are international rules that apply in times of armed conflicts, those who are not taking part in hostilities should be protected from targeting (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2014). Even though civilian casualties occur as collateral damage, IHL ensures that civilians are not the deliberate targets of actors involved in a conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2014). Nevertheless, civilians remain an important part of armed conflicts today. Some state and non-state actors use violence against civilians in order to achieve military and political objectives when other means of warfare fail to achieve the desired outcomes (Downes, 2007). Scholars, such as Downes (2007), Kalyvas (2001) and Valentino (2004), have focused on violence against civilians used as a strategy during civil wars. They point to the term 'civilian victimization' as a wartime strategy which targets civilians and kills or attempts to kill non-combatants (Downes, 2007; Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay (2004) define a non-combatant as any person who is not participating in a military group and does not take part in hostilities by seeking to cause physical harm to the enemy (p.378). Victimization of civilians therefore includes attacks on populations not taking part in or providing support to military activities. In his work *"Targeting civilians in war"*, Alexander Downes defines

civilian victimization as a "military strategy chosen by political or military elites that targets and kills non-combatants intentionally or which fails to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants and thus kills large numbers of the latter" (Downes, 2011, p.13). Downes (2011) identifies two components of civilian victimization; a government-sanctioned military strategy that targets civilians on purpose, or operations that will predictably cause large numbers of non-combatant casualties (Downes, 2011). He explains that victimization of civilians is common in civil wars when there is a prolongation of conflict and territorial disputes involved (Downes, 2006). According to Downes, in the twentieth century alone between 50 and 62 percent of all deaths in armed conflicts were civilian casualties, which accounted for approximately 43 to 54 million non-combatants killed as a result of warfare (Downes, 2011, p.1).

       Violence against non-combatants can be either selective or indiscriminate (Donwes, 2007; Kalyvas, 2003). On the one hand, selective violence occurs when the attacks are limited only to people who provide some kind of material support to the enemy in the form of food, supplies or shelter (Downes, 2007). Indiscriminate violence, on the other hand, aims at targeting everyone in a particular area without making an effort to discriminate and define guilt or innocence (Donwes, 2007). Attacks on civilians in this case are based on their proximity to the attack rather than on what they have done (Downes, 2007). For the purposes of this academic project, civilian victimization will be discussed as a form of indiscriminate targeting of non-combatants since there is a lack of empirical evidence for the targeting of Yemeni people in a selective and discriminate manner by the Saudi-led coalition (Amnesty International, 2015). Whereas indiscriminate violence is seen as counterproductive and ineffective in civil wars, it is less costly and easier to implement compared to selective violence against civilians (Downes, 2007). The scope of indiscriminate violence has been determined in different ways by scholars using certain indicators, such as the presence of a clear intent, or the lack thereof, the type of adversary, as well as the nature of conflict among others (Kalyvas, 2001). Civilian victimization includes both direct and indirect methods of killing (Downes, 2011). A direct targeting includes physical harm through bombing, execution, and gassing, whereas indirect targeting can cause deaths through starvation, destruction, exposure, disease or any form of a blockade that obstructs the necessities of life and thus causes civilian casualties (Downes, 2011). The definition of indiscriminate violence posed by Kalyvas (2001) excludes unintentional and nonviolent deaths, arguing that those should be considered unintended collateral damage. Valentino (2004) also discusses intentionality, differentiating between intentional and unintentional casualties based on the nature of the target; whether it is a civilian or a military one. The scholar argues that if the coercer is attacking military targets, then casualties should be defined as collateral damage (Valentino, 2004). Alexander Downes (2011), however, adopts a broader definition for the reason that "excluding these cases also ignores substantial evidence that some attackers simply did not make any attempt to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, did not care that large numbers of civilians were being killed, or sought to capitalize on the fear these deaths created among the enemy population"

(Downes, 2011, p.18). This research project will therefore use Downes' conceptualization of civilian victimization, which extends beyond cases where intent is clearly present. Victimization also occurs when the belligerent fails or is unable to differentiate between combatants and non-combatants, and when due care is not exercised in order to limit the harm to civilians (Downes, 2011).

3.2. Civilian Victimization in Civil Wars

Indiscriminate targeting of civilians is a common consequence of civil wars (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Mass killings are often part of a deliberate strategy of coercers in order to achieve certain policy objectives (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay (2004) argue that intentional killing of civilians occurs in civil wars as a calculated strategy to combat guerrilla insurgencies. The majority of civil wars are fought as irregular, or guerrilla wars, where the two competing parties are the insurgents and the incumbents (Kalyvas, 2001). The incumbents, often being the state actor, usually rely on regular armies, whereas the insurgents avoid direct confrontation and thus often rely on civilian support as part of their operations (Kalyvas, 2001). Scholarly writings suggest that state actors are more likely to consider mass killing of civilians when they are engaged in counterinsurgency warfare (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004; Kalyvas, 2001). This is because guerrilla warfare relies on irregular forces and the bases of military operation of the insurgents are often situated in territories populated with civilians (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). As a result, incumbents often choose to attack the base of support of the guerrillas located in the population (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004).

Wartime strategies of mass killings usually occur when other less violent policies have failed to achieve effectiveness (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). The primary objective of the counterinsurgent forces during civil wars is to halt civilian support to the guerrilla insurgency (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Nevertheless, not all guerrilla groups receive support from the civilian population. Some rely on foreign sources and in such cases, mass killings are associated with incumbent's strategy to cut support to the enemy (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Furthermore, escalation to mass violence against civilians is more likely to appear when the insurgent movement poses a direct threat to the political and military survival of the government forces (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). In such cases, the probability of mass killing increases because "less violent strategies for counterinsurgency have proven at least equally costly and prone to failure" (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004, p.402). The scholars Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay (2004) establish a causal mechanism explaining that guerrillas posing a military and political threat to the government and receiving civilian support could lead to the increased likelihood of mass killings in counterinsurgency warfare. This way, "both the level of civilian support and guerrilla threat variables generate powerful effects on the probability of mass killing" (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004, p.397).

Indiscriminate violence in civil war follows the logic of terrorism (Kalyvas, 2004). According to Kalyvas (2004), violence against civilians becomes an indirect instrument for the achievement of some other goal, namely forcing the adversary to change its behaviour through compliance. Both selective and indiscriminate violence are used as tools to generate compliance of the target (Kalyvas, 2004). Violence can be used with a two-sided purpose; to induce both the adversary and the civilians into compliance (Kalyvas, 2004). "Civilian victimization in guerrilla wars – like punishment strategies in conventional wars – follows the logic of terrorism: violence is used to influence the behaviour of some target group", which is applied as a mean to achieve political objectives (Downes, 2007, p.424). Both Downes (2007) and Kalyvas (2004) argue that victimization of civilians is more likely to occur when there are two factors present; prolongation of a conflict and dispute over territorial control.

Another distinguishing characteristic of civil wars compared to conventional wars is that they are 'triangular' in their nature (Kalyvas, 2001). The main actors are not only the coercer and the adversary, but also the civilians (Kalyvas, 2001). The participation of the civilian population is a crucial factor for the outcome of the conflict, as civilians often participate in military or non-military action (Kalyvas, 2001). Thus, the scholar Kalyvas explains that victimization of civilians is applied through coercive "draining the sea" approach, which embodies the idea that if the civilian population is the sea, then the most effective way to catch the fish, namely the insurgencies, is to drain the sea (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004, p.385). An important instrument for "draining the sea" approach is the intentional bombardment of civilians or the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas (Downes, 2011). The tool of strategic bombing is used when the incumbent seeks to undermine the adversary's ability to fight (Downes, 2011).

3.3. Civilian Victimization and Coercive Airpower

Military coercion theorists have distinguished different types of coercion depending on the policy objectives of the coercer (Jakobsen, 2011). Two main variants on the use of force, namely compellence and deterrence, were introduced by Thomas Schelling (1966) and Alexander George (1994). On the one hand, George argues that military coercion is successful when it deters the adversary through the use of threats or limited force to ensure that the target does not alter its behaviour (Jakobsen, 2011). Schelling (1966), on the other hand, suggests that the purpose of military force is to impose damage or pain so that the target alters its behaviour. Coercion used through compellence seeks to change the behaviour of the adversary without a decisive military victory (Pape, 1990). The main distinction between compellence and deterrence therefore is "one between the active and passive use of force" (Art, 1980, p.8). For the purposes of this academic project, coercion as a compellent use of force will be applied to the case study of the Yemeni Civil War. The reason for

choosing compellence over deterrence is that coercive air power involves the physical deployment of force and is therefore aimed at initiating rather than deterring an action (Art, 1980).

Because of its low risks and relatively low costs for the coercer, air power is often used as a prime tool for military coercion (de Wijk, 2014). There are two main types of coercive air operations; strategic bombing and interdiction (Pape, 1996). Strategic bombing aims at industrial, military or civilian targets, whereas interdiction attacks the main lines of supply of the enemy (Pape, 1996). One of the most prominent scholars on coercive air power is Robert Pape (1996). In his scholarly work "*Bombing to Win*" (1996), Pape examines the use of military coercion as a punishment strategy against civilian populations. According to Pape (1996), there are four main categories of coercive air strategies; punishment, denial, risk and decapitation. Pape defines coercion as efforts to change the behaviour of an opponent by manipulating costs and benefits (Pape, 1996, p.4). The manipulation of risk of punishment for political objectives is related to the compellent use of force, as the coercer seeks to increase the risk of damage so that the opponent is compelled to surrender in order to avoid suffering further losses (Pape, 1996). In his view, punishment strategies against civilians in air operations are rarely effective (Pape, 1996). The scholar explains that most studies on military coercion have focused on the punishment of civilians as an effective use of force (Pape, 1996). Punishment strategies attempt to raise the societal costs of resistance to levels that are too high and therefore overwhelm the opponent's interests to control territory and force them to concede to the demands of the coercer (Pape, 1996). A common characteristic of all punishment strategies is that they use force to inflict pain and suffering to civilians, either directly by bombing civilian infrastructure or indirectly, by damaging the economy of the targeted state (Pape, 1996). Punishment can include bombing entire cities in order to kill or injure inhabitants, imposing naval blockades in order to cut supply of food and water, as well as bombing essential services to deprive citizens of electric power (Pape, 1996).

In his work "*Final solutions: Mass killing and genocide*", Valentino (2004) links the strategic logic of civilian victimization to coercive air power. According to the scholar, the purpose of mass killing through strategic bombing is two-fold; to produce destruction and to incite fear of death (Valentino, 2004). Valentino argues that mass killings are used as a policy of 'final solution' to achieve important political and military objectives (Valentino, 2004, p.174). He makes a distinction between 'dispossessive' and 'coercive' mass killings (Valentino, 2004, p.69). Dispossessive mass killings are used to physically remove a certain group in order to overcome resistance (Valentino, 2004). Coercive mass killings occur when incumbents find conventional military tactics to be too costly or unable to produce the desired results (Valentino, 2004). In this case, civilian victimization is a strategy of later resort because when efforts of the coercer to defeat the adversary are directly frustrated, then resorting to mass killing becomes a powerful incentive (Valentino, 2004). Instead of seeking to exterminate entire populations, the aim of the coercer is to use mass violence as a threat of even greater punishment of populations if the enemy does not surrender (Valentino, 2004). Coercive

mass killings therefore become more likely when the incumbent is capable of killing large numbers of
civilians where the enemy is located, but does not have the military capacity to achieve conventional
victory (Valentino, 2004). Coercive mass killings through air power are often used in counter guerrilla
warfare, because depriving the enemy of its base of support is easier than having to confront guerrillas
directly (Valentino, 2004). Punishment of civilians in this case is a calculated strategy suitable for
achieving larger policy objectives.

Based on the link between coercive mass killing of civilians and strategic bombing though air
power, the following hypothesis is formed:

H1: The more missile attacks of Houthi rebels on Saudi territory, the more the Saudi-led coalition
indiscriminately targeted civilians in Yemen.
The independent variable will be Houthi missile attacks on Saudi Arabia.
The dependent variable will be indiscriminate targeting of civilians.

Even though the power to hurt may seem like a favourable option to the coercer, punishment
is more likely to generate public anger against the punisher than to compel the adversary to surrender
(Pape, 1996). Because of that, Pape argues that it is not the threat to civilians, which he terms
punishment, but the threat of a military failure, which the scholar calls denial, that provides a
successful implementation of military coercion (Pape, 1996). Denial strategies seek to restrict the
opponent's military ability to achieve its political and territorial objectives (Pape, 1996). Compellence
is central for denial since the coercer state aims at preventing the opponent from gaining or holding
territory through compelling a change in behaviour (Pape, 1996). Unlike strategies that counter
civilian populations, coercion by denial makes no specific effort to cause harm to the adversary's
society (Paper, 1996). Rather, it denies the opponent the ability to gain control over disputed
territories (Pape, 1996). As such, denial campaigns focus solely on the strategy of the military target
(Pape, 1996).

Strategic bombing campaigns can apply either a punishment strategy, by harming civilians in
order to influence the behaviour of the adversary, or a denial strategy, by damaging the opponent's
military ability and war economy (Pape, 1996). In practice, however, the use of force will often create
both punishment and denial effects (Pape, 1996). This is specifically the case with coercive air power
since it "almost always inflicts pain while pursuing denial (for example, in bombing enemy war
industry or troops in the field), and usually damages military capabilities when inflicting punishment
(such as bombing civilian infrastructure)" (Pape, 1996, p.47). A combination of punishment and
denial strategies is what Pape calls decapitation (Pape, 1996). Air power in decapitation strategies is
used to strike against vital leadership and telecommunication facilities of the opponent (Pape, 1996).
Pursued as a punishment strategy, decapitation aims to limit the ability of the enemy to form ties with
the local population (Pape, 1996). As a denial strategy, it seeks to identify key military industrial

bases of the opponent, thus reducing military production (Pape, 1996). The effectiveness of
decapitation strategies is highly debatable since little collateral damage is only possible if intelligence
about the targets is precise (Pape, 1996). Thus, Robert Pape (2004) argues that "today's precision
weapons have not increased the coercive effectiveness of these tactics, which has always been limited,
but they have made it possible to destroy similar targets with fewer sorties" (p.119). Decapitation is
frequently used when the coercer seeks to disrupt external lines of supply to the adversary (Pape,
1996). Cutting off military production capabilities and supply chains of the insurgent is crucial for
destroying the adversary's capacity to continue fighting (Downes, 2007). This could be done by
imposing a naval and aerial blockade in order to prevent the supply of military equipment to the
adversary (Downes, 2007). Thus, indiscriminate violence is used through indirection, which means
that the enemy is deprived of the opportunity to gain military support from the outside (Zhukov,
2017). In the case of decapitation, the combatant targets military facilities of the enemy through the
method of 'draining the sea' (Downes, 2007). However, indiscriminate violence is more effective
when lines of supply to rebels come directly from the civilian population (Downes, 2007). If the
insurgents receive support from an external resource, then "draining the domestic sea can only
partially sever the insurgents' ability to obtain supplies and continue to fight" (Downes, 2007, p.439).
Decapitation in cases of external supply chains can only be effective if applied with enough precision
(Pape, 1996). According to Pape, military coercion fails when the strategies do not produce
compliance by the adversary, when the coercer ceases military actions before achieving concessions
by the enemy, or when the coercer achieves its objectives only after a complete military defeat of the
enemy (Pape, 1996).

Following the strategy of civilian victimization through coercive air power used both as
punishment and denial, the following hypothesis is formed:

H2: The more the Houthi rebels accessed external support, the more the Saudi-led coalition
indiscriminately targeted civilians in Yemen.
The independent variable will be access to external support.
The dependent variable will be indiscriminate targeting of civilians.

The most effective instrument for investigating the causes of coercion is air power (Pape,
1996). Strategic air power cases provide variation on both independent and dependent variables, thus
distinguishing among a variety of causes (Pape, 1996). In order to explain the causes for the
indiscriminate targeting of civilians in the case of the Yemeni Civil War, this research project will
apply Robert Pape's coercive air strategies to the case of the foreign intervention of the Saudi-led
coalition in the conflict. Since both Operation Decisive Storm and Operation Restoring Hope were
military campaigns conducted through airstrikes and military blockades, this study focuses
specifically on air power in order to analyse the motivations behind victimization of civilians in

Yemen. As the academic literature points to the linkage between coercive air power and harm to civilians (Downes, 2007; Valentino, 2004; Pape, 1996), the empirical analysis will look at indiscriminate targeting as an instrument of coercion.

3.4. Civilian Victimization and Arms Trade

Studies have shown that irregular civil wars tend to last longer, cause higher levels of battlefield violence and therefore lead to increased rates of civilian victimization compared to other types of conflict (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2014). When a civil war is fought between government forces and insurgent groups, the likelihood of external involvement is greater because of the asymmetrical nature of the conflict and the need for control over the escalation of conflict (Orhan, 2019). Civil wars which attract the involvement of outside powers are often considered internationalized civil wars or proxy conflicts (Jenne & Popovic, 2017). Proxy wars occur when one of the state or non-state actors is a foreign agent that exercises power to protect their interests and influence internal power struggles (Orhan, 2019). Internationalized civil wars are difficult to end because of inability of players to come to a mutual agreement as well as the capacity of actors to intensify the conflict due to external support (Jenne & Popovic, 2017). Furthermore, the academic literature suggests that civilians tend to suffer more when governments are fighting outside of their own territory (Zhukov, 2017). According to a study conducted by Wood, Kathman and Gent (2012), pro-government interventions occur because the outside intervener believes that their participation increases the probability of a victory of the regime over the insurgency.

An important characteristic of internationalized civil wars is the parties' dependence on external sources of support (Zhukov, 2017). As combatants receive military support from external actors, the levels of violence against the civilian population increases (Zhukov, 2017). Although scholars have focused on countries' motivations for selling weapons to other governments, there has been little consideration for the causal claim that arms import in civil wars fuel and intensify conflicts (Mehrl & Thurner, 2020). In fact, empirical considerations on arms transfers in civil wars pose a problem of reverse causality, meaning that arms imports could be a consequence of a conflict, as well as a result from the anticipation of such (Pamp, Rudolph, Thurner, Mehltretter & Primus, 2018). According to Moore (2012), states transfer weapons to governments in order to keep a friendly regime in power. Moreover, the scholar claims that there is a causal relationship between the transfer of major conventional weapons to government forces and the duration and probability of conflict escalation in intrastate wars (Moore, 2012). Both Moore (2012), and Mehrl and Thurner (2020) argue that a causal relationship between arms imports and conflict escalation towards civilians by the government occurs when there is a significant military threat coming from the insurgent. "If rebels are capable of escalating the conflict, it also creates incentives for government forces to crack down and escalate their brutality towards civilian populations" (Moore, 2012, p.332). The relationship between

arms transfers and civilian casualties goes one way as more weapons lead to the strengthening of government forces which in turn results in more deaths of both combatants and non-combatants (Moore, 2012).

The study conducted by Mehrl and Thurner (2020) examines whether and how the import of weapon technology increases the killing of civilians in intrastate conflicts. The results of the study show that in cases where the military capabilities of rebel forces are equal or even superior to the incumbent forces, the import of arms increases the intensity of conflict and thus causes more harm to civilian populations (Mehrl & Thurner, 2020). When initial attempts of coercion by the government fail to achieve compliance by the insurgent, the government uses arms imports to boost its ability to attack the enemy with increased force, which causes high numbers of casualties in return (Mehrl & Thurner, 2020). In addition, since arms transfers to insurgencies are much more secretive than those to governments, the incentive of conflict escalation by the government increases relative to the uncertainty of the rebel's ability to fight (Sawyer, Cunningham & Reed, 2017). The government's acquisition of major conventional weapons is particularly important when it comes to the application of air power (Moore, 2012). For government forces, monopoly of violence through air power is "much more absolute" (Moore, 2012, p.331). Effective air forces could help limit the military options of the insurgent, provide rapid response to rebel attacks and most importantly, its successful implementation can create a sense of hopelessness that the insurgent cannot defeat government air power (Moore, 2012). Thus, increase in arms imports provides military capabilities for governments to control conflict dynamics and escalate their brutality towards non-combatants (Moore, 2012).

Based on the relationship between victimization of civilians and external support to government forces in civil wars, the following hypothesis is formed:

H3: The more Western countries supplied weapons and military equipment to Saudi Arabia, the more the Saudi-led coalition indiscriminately targeted civilians in Yemen.

The independent variable will be the supply of weapons and military equipment to the Saudi-led coalition from the West.

The dependent variable will be indiscriminate targeting of civilians.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Approach

The research objective of this project is to provide a causal explanation for the targeting of civilians during Saudi Arabia's led military intervention in the Yemeni Civil War from 2015 until 2020. In order to provide an answer to the posed research problem, this study will apply qualitative

case study research design. Case study research allows for an "in-depth, context-based understanding of a certain phenomenon or system from multiple perspectives" (Simons, 2014, p.456). A case study design is suitable for the objective of this research because it would examine the phenomenon of indiscriminate targeting of civilians within the real-life context of the conflict in Yemen. According to the scholars George and Benett (2005), most case studies are outcome-oriented and focus on explaining variations in the dependent variable. Because of that, case study is necessary in order to explain the humanitarian crisis in Yemen as an outcome of coercive military strategy. The focus of the case study research approach is on the singular (Simons, 2014). The civil war in Yemen will be used as a single case study since the mechanisms which led to the indiscriminate targeting of civilians are specific to the case of Yemen. The purpose of the single case study is to portray an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon within a specific context (Simons, 2014). It also allows for the development or testing of a certain historical explanation that might be generalizable to other similar cases (George, Bennett, Lynn-Jones & Miller, 2005). Single case studies rely primarily on within-case methods and process tracing methodology, yet they may use congruence or counterfactual analysis as well (George & Benett, 2005). This research project will apply deductive reasoning to test the empirical link between the key variables through within-case analysis and process-tracing methodology. This way, within case analysis will be used to outline the conditions necessary to activate causal mechanisms between variables and to explain the processes which led to the outcome of the Saudi's coercive foreign intervention in Yemen. Single case study design was chosen over comparative case study because civilian victimization in civil wars occurs under processes and conditions which are specific to the conflict under examination (Lyall, 2013). Therefore, comparing cases of indiscriminate targeting of civilians would not provide a single causal explanation for an outcome. Nevertheless, the case study approach will apply a holistic analysis comparing the coercive strategies of Saudi Arabia to those of the Houthi insurgency within the context of the civil war.

4.2. Operationalization

In the following section, the conceptualization of the key variables in the research is provided. The dependent variable of this study is indiscriminate targeting of civilians, which will be explained through the independent variables of Houthi missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, access to external support, and supply of weapons and military equipment to the Saudi-led coalition from the West.

Indiscriminate Targeting of Civilians

The scholar Alexander Downes (2007) defines indiscriminate targeting of civilians as "violence in which people are targeted based not on what they have done, but rather because of their appearance, race, religion, where they live, or their proximity to a rebel attack" (p. 425). Since the Houthi insurgency has situated their military bases within areas of civilian population in Yemen, this

research project suggests that indiscriminate targeting is conceptualized based on the non-combatant's geographical location and proximity to the Houthi military facilities. According to the Targeted Mass Killing (TMK) data set for the study and forecasting of mass atrocities, targeted mass killings is defined as the direct killing of civilians by a "formally organized armed force that results in twenty-five or more deaths in an annual period" (Butcher, Goldsmith, Nanlohy, Sowmya, Muchlinski, 2020, p.5). This research project will therefore use the TMK data set's threshold for civilian casualties. An important distinction between the notions of punishment against civilians and indiscriminate targeting of civilians should be outlined. Even though both concepts are interchangeable in terms of their use to cause pain to civilian populations, the variable of civilian punishment is measured through the use of coercive air power to defeat powerful guerrilla insurgencies (Valentino, 2004). According to Pape (1996), punishment against civilians is a coercive strategy that causes either direct physical harm by bombing civilians or indirect victimization through targeting civilian infrastructures (Pape, 1996). The effectiveness of punishment strategies against civilians is therefore measured in terms of compelling a change in the enemy's behaviour in favour of the coercer. Although both punishment strategies and targeted mass killings of civilians require the use of brute force to cause harm to non-combatants, the definition of targeted mass killings does not require an intent being part of a broader military strategy (Butcher, et al., 2020). For the purposes of this study, indiscriminate targeting of civilians is measured within the context of punishment through coercive air operations by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Within the definition of indiscriminate violence, Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay (2004) provide a distinction between direct methods of killing, such as executions and bombing, and indirect ways to cause victimization of the civilian population, such as blockades and economic sanctions. This research project will apply both direct and indirect indiscriminate targeting of civilians since the Saudi-led coalition used direct bombing of civilians through airstrikes, as well as victimization through aerial and naval blockades on Yemen.

Houthis Missile Attacks on Saudi Arabia

The independent variable of retaliatory attacks by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia will be measured through examining cases of cross-border missile attacks launched by the rebels on Saudi territory. For this purpose, investigations on the ground by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen in 2016, 2018 and 2020 will be used to measure the intensity of attacks compared to targeting of civilians by the coalition in Yemen. The amount and intensity of retaliatory attacks against the Saudis will be compared to subsequent civilian targeting by the coalition in Yemen to test the existence of a causal mechanism. Missile attacks are limited to attacks launched by the Houthis from Yemen and landing on Saudi territory. The intensity and type of attacks varies over time, as the Houthis moved from using short-range ballistic missiles to extended-range ballistic missiles (Samaan, 2020).

Access to External Support

Access to external support varies over space and time depending on the behaviour of the insurgency (Zhukov, 2017). External support to insurgencies is "more nuanced than just intervention or not" and is coming from many sources which makes it subject to quick and unpredictable changes (Sawyer, Cunningham, Reed, 2017, p.1178). The scholar Zhukov (2017) divides external support into type of support and provider of external resources. Type of support includes funding, provision of small arms and light weapons, intelligence, shelter and direct troops, and providers of support could be state or non-state actors (Sawyer, Cunningham, Reed, 2017). This research project will conceptualize access to external support as access of the Houthi rebels to arms and military equipment coming from outside Yemen. The provider of external support is the Islamic Republic of Iran and type of support is major conventional weapons, small arms and light weapons, drones and ballistic missiles. Access is provided through Red Sea ports, such as the port of Hodeidah, and through airports in Yemen, particularly the Sanaa International Airport. For the objectives of this project, access to external support will be restricted to supplies going through sea and air routes, since the Saudi-led coalition imposed aerial and naval blockade on Yemen.

Transfer of arms and military equipment to the Saudi-led coalition from the West

In order to measure the variable of arms transfers in relation to conflict escalation and civilian targeting, this study will be using the arms transfer database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The database is providing statistical data on arms transfers using trend indicator values (TIV), which is measuring the volume of arms imports or exports to a certain country on a yearly basis (SIPRI, 2020). According to SIPRI, major conventional weapons include aircraft, armoured vehicles, air defence systems, artillery and other equipment produced for military use (SIPRI, 2010). This research will be comparing Saudi Arabia's trend indicator values for the period between 2015 and 2020 to the number of attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure for the same time period. This way, an increase in arms imports is expected to be positively correlated to an increase in air strikes against non-combatants and gradual escalation of the conflict. Due to time and space limitations, transfer of military equipment will be restricted to three Western countries; the United States, the United Kingdom and France. As these are the major arms exporters to Saudi Arabia, the empirical evidence on transfers from these countries will be sufficient to confirm or disconfirm the existence of a causal mechanism between arms transfers and civilian victimization.

4.3. Data Collection

To provide an explanation of the targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, this project will be collecting data from both academic and non-academic sources. First of all, quantitative data on types of coercive attacks and numbers of casualties will be collected and compared using different database sources. During the time period between 2015 and 2020, the

Yemen Data Project (YDP) database will be used to gather information on the intensity of air raids conducted by the coalition. This source was chosen because of its up-to-date information on the conflict statistics. Data on civilian casualties will be collected from YDP, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) databases which provide qualitative and quantitative data on organized and political violence in conflict regions. Since precise data on indiscriminate targeting is often difficult to obtain from conflict areas, the use of multiple sources would allow for an objective interpretation of the empirical evidence. Second, a critical evaluation of the Saudi-led intervention will be provided using academic sources. Scientific Journals such as *Journal of Strategic Studies, Journal of Conflict Resolution and International Security* will be used to analyse the strategic objectives of Operation Decisive Storm and Operation Restoring Hope launched by Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, documents published by the United Nations (UN) will be used in order to collect data on violence against civilians and breaches of international humanitarian law by the parties in the conflict. In specific, reports from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the Security Council (SC) in 2016, 2018 and 2020 will serve as empirical evidence of indiscriminate targeting and war crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. UNSC Resolutions will provide data on the role of the international community as a conflict mediator. This project uses sources from the UN database because of the credibility of the organization, as well its extensive and consistent reporting on the war in Yemen. Finally, reports on the humanitarian situation on the ground will be gathered from non-governmental organizations, such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International. Both NGOs have examined the situation in Yemen from the outset of the conflict. Up to date information on civilian casualties and damages on infrastructure will be collected from the Global Conflict Tracker of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) and reports from the International Crisis Group (ICG). Due to the restricted physical access of Western media to the territory of Yemen, there is a limited availability of witness accounts as well as interviews with civilian populations. To overcome this limitation, this study will use reports from various news sources, such as the Guardian and Al Jazeera, and think tanks, such as Brookings Institution and Middle East Institute. Combining both primary and secondary sources, this research project will analyse the historical, social and political complexities of the war in Yemen from multiple perspectives.

4.4 Data Analysis

In order to test the formed hypotheses, this research project will analyse data through process tracing qualitative methodology. Process tracing is a tool used to study causal mechanisms leading to an outcome in a single case study research design (Beach & Pedersen, 2012). It is defined as "systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator" (Collier, 2011, p.823). Process tracing in single cases has

the ability to disprove statements that a single variable is a sufficient or necessary condition for the outcome to occur (George & Benett, 2005). This method of analysis traces and unfolds events over time through the so-called 'causal inference' (Collier, 2011). Causal inference is the process of drawing conclusions from empirical investigations in order to construct causal explanations and interpretations of the case that is being investigated (Blatter & Blume, 2008). Process-tracing could be formed by three types of causal relationships; causal chains, causal conjunctions and causal mechanisms (Beach & Pedersen, 2012). For the purposes of this research project, causal relationships will be described as causal mechanisms, which require a multilevel model of causation. For a causal mechanism to be constructed, three types of social mechanisms must be present; situational mechanism, or the initiating condition/input, action-formation mechanism and transformational mechanism, or the result/output (Beach & Pederson, 2012). This research project will identify the presence or absence of these social mechanisms to test the validity of the suggested hypotheses. In order to prove the relation between a cause and effect, the empirical analysis will trace the situational, action-formation and transformational mechanisms in a chronological sequence of events. Investigating causality through causal mechanisms in process tracing is suitable for explaining civilian victimization in the case of the Yemeni Civil War because it would allow for the tracing of sequence and development of events from the beginning of the conflict in 2015 until present day. This way, process tracing will be used to identify and explain the initiating conditions for the Saudi-led coalition's violence against civilians.

Both scholars Lyall (2013) and Downes (2006) examine the link between process tracing and civil war outcomes. Their studies suggest that the causal mechanisms which lead to a specific outcome in civil war have been largely neglected by scholars (Downes, 2006; Lyall, 2013). Process tracing could be used to build and test theories about dynamics of violence against civilians in civil wars (Lyall, 2013). Civilian victimization is explored on a subnational level and before and after comparison of civilian behaviour is used to identify subsequent patterns of violence (Lyall, 2013). "Process tracing is ideally suited to investigating possible interactions between multiple mechanisms" in order to distinguish variations in civilian victimization (Lyall, 2013, p.18). Since the civil war in Yemen is a multi-layered phenomenon which includes internal grievances as well as major power struggles between proxies in the region, process tracing methodology is suitable for discovering the various factors and intervening variables which influenced the outcome of civilian victimization.

5. Empirical Analysis

The following section will provide a brief background of the complexities of the conflict in Yemen. The causes of conflict will be examined on a local and regional level. Thereafter, an analysis of the coalition's air campaign in Yemen will be presented. This section will provide the context

necessary for understanding the subsequent construction of the hypothesized causal mechanisms of
this project.

5.1. Saudi Arabia's Involvement in Yemen

The high complexity and tribal structure of the society in Yemen has divided the
governance of the country between different groups with various degrees of legitimacy (Salisbury,
2017). The central government has lost authority and control over significant parts of Yemen's
territory, turning it into a 'chaos state' (Salisbury, 2017, p.40). The population of Yemen is divided
between Shia Zaydi Muslims, who have settled in the northern parts of the country, and Sunni
Muslims, who are occupying southern Yemen (Serr, 2017). Before 1990, Yemen was divided between
the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY)
(Serr, 2017). YAR consisted of northern Yemen, whereas PDRY was established in the south of the
country (Serr, 2017). In 1990, the north and south united into the Republic of Yemen, with the ruler of
YAR, Ali Abdullah Saleh, becoming the President of unified Yemen (Serr, 2017). Saleh ruled the
country for the next two decades until the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 spread into Yemen, as
opposition groups revolted against the oppressive regime of the President (Serr, 2017). In the same
year, the UN along with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, established the Gulf Cooperation Council
(GCC) initiative, which aimed at providing grounds for negotiation between the government and the
opposition (Dosari & George, 2020). As GCC failed to bring a diplomatic solution and halt tensions,
new presidential elections were held in 2012 (Serr, 2017). A National Dialogue Conference (NDC)
was convened in order to transfer authority from Saleh to his Saudi-backed Vice President Abed
Rabbo Mansour Hadi (Serr, 2017). The government of Hadi failed to provide a solution to Yemen's
internal divisions and the Houthis took advantage of the emerging instability (Serr, 2017).

The Houthi movement was established in the 1990s as a Zaydi resistance to the corrupted
government of Saleh, and gained support among Yemenis during the 2011 uprisings (Riedel, 2017).
The movement, also religiously referred to as Ansar Allah or Partisans of God, holds their military
base in the governorate of Sadaa and has a trained militia of 20,000-30,000 fighters (Serr, 2017). The
objective of the insurgents is to fight against corruption, marginalization and injustice (Brehony,
2015). The Houthi rebels oppose the American and Israeli influence over the Arab world and view
Saudi Arabia as a neighbouring Sunni rival power that seeks to establish dominance in the region
through interfering in Yemen's internal politics (Riedel, 2017). Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in
Yemen against the Houthis for the first time in 2009 (Mazzetti & Kirkpatrick, 2015). The Kingdom
intervened in support of the former President Saleh, who later turned against the Saudis and joined the
Houthis against the Hadi government (Mazzetti & Kirkpatrick, 2015). Since the 2009 military
intervention, the Saudi-Yemeni border has become a territory of instability and tensions between the
Houthi forces and Saudi Arabia (Mazzetti & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

5.2. Internal Grievances Vs Struggle for Regional Supremacy

Some of the most dominant explanations for the outbreak of the Yemeni Civil War are the presence of internal grievances between tribal groups, historical hostility between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as a regional power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Clausen, 2015). First of all, the lack of central authority in Yemen has turned the country into a fractured state with different centres of power. As the scholar Salisbury (2017) points out, "the country's 'big war', already in reality made up of a series of 'small wars', could splinter further into a series of complex, localized conflicts that are even harder to resolve" (p.8). Yemen's internal struggles for power could be characterized with the presence of three major territorial divisions. The northern part of the country is home to the great majority of the Shiite Zaydi population and is dominated by the Houthi insurgency and tribal alliances (Orkaby, 2017). The south of Yemen is mainly populated with Sunnis and is characterized by a weak tribal structure (Orkaby, 2017). In 2007, a secessionist movement emerged and called itself the Southern Movement (Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2020). The Movement allied with the government of Hadi, however, in spring 2017 it renamed itself into the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and turned against the government forces (Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2020). In 2019, tensions between the internationally recognized Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) and STC escalated and led to an open warfare between the STC forces backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Hadi forces backed by Saudi Arabia (Sharp, 2020). Since the UAE joined the Saudi-led coalition in 2015, the UAE-Saudi rivalry further hindered the effectiveness of the Saudi-led military intervention against the Houthis, creating instability within the pro-government coalition of forces (Sharp, 2020). Finally, the third centre of power is situated in the eastern region, also known as Hadramawt, which is scarcely inhabited and enjoys independence (Orkaby, 2017). Besides the main divisions within Yemen, the situation is further complicated by the presence of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP was formed in 2009 by the unification of the Yemen and Saudi branches of al-Qaeda (Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2020). The terrorist organization controls little territory in the southeast parts of Yemen (Baron, 2019).

Yemen's Front Lines

Territorial control and influence as of February 2020

● Government control   ● Government influence   ● Southern Transitional Council control
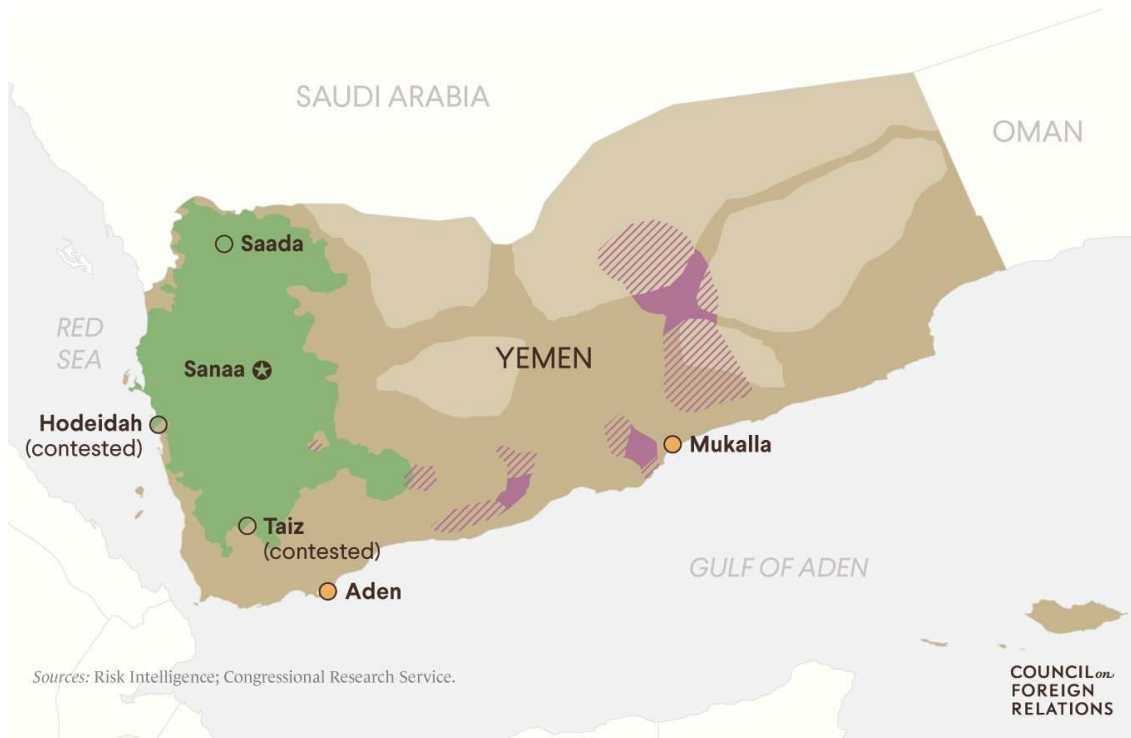● Houthi control   ● Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) control   ⧄ AQAP influence

Figure 2. Map of Yemen. Source: Council on Foreign Relations, 2020.

In addition to the fractured political landscape, Yemen has become an arena for proxy conflict between two major regional powers; Iran and Saudi Arabia (Clausen, 2015). The latter views the Houthis as an Iranian proxy non-state actor and the Saudi-led intervention was motivated by the threat Iran creates in the Saudi's backyard (Clausen, 2015). The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, has openly expressed its commitment to limiting the Iranian influence in Yemen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). In 2017, Saudi Arabia revealed that its strategic interests in Yemen are four-fold; "securing Saudi Arabia's border, stemming Iran's regional expansionist ambitions, combating terrorist threats and safeguarding regional security" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, p.13). According to the Saudis, breaking Iranian support for the Houthis is crucial for bringing long-term peace and stability in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). The Saudi-Iranian rivalry intensified further with the first Houthi missile attack launched on Saudi territory on May 5, 2015 (Hanna, 2019). Saudi Arabia and its allies have attributed these attacks to the Houthi movement, arguing that it is using Iranian-made missiles and weapons to target Saudi critical infrastructure (Juneau, 2016). Even though the United Nations has provided evidence for Iranian-made weapons

used by the Houthis, the influence Iran is exercising in Yemen is likely limited to providing logistical
support and advice to the rebels (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016).

So far, Iran has refused to openly express its direct support for the Houthis, as it has done
with its proxy actors in Iraq and Syria, for example (Juneau, 2016). Furthermore, the Zaydi Shia Islam
professed by the Houthi movement is different from Iran's Twelver Shiism (Hokayem & Roberts,
2016). Scholarly works of both Juneau (2016) and Hokayem and Roberts (2016) argue that the role of
Iran in the Yemen conflict is characterized by opportunities rather than driven by preserving vital
interests in the country. Even though Iran and Hezbollah have provided the Houthis with training and
arms and have supported the Movement with logistics and advice, Iran does not exercise direct
control over the Houthis' decision-making (Juneau, 2016). For instance, in 2014 Iran encouraged the
rebels not to seize the capital Sanaa, however, the Houthis ignored the advice of the Iranian officials
(Juneau, 2016). In 2015, the deputy Foreign Minister of Iran expressed political support for the
Houthis, stating that the rebels have taken steps to restore the unity, peace and stability of Yemen
(Juneau, 2016). Nevertheless, Tehran has publicly denied any involvement in the Houthis' missile
attacks on Saudi territory (Juneau, 2016). Strategically, Iran's role in Yemen has been reactive rather
than proactive since an overt support would risk a direct confrontation with Saudi Arabia, which is an
outcome Iran seeks to avoid (Juneau, 2016). As Juneau (2016) argues, "without Iranian assistance, the
Houthis would remain a dominant actor; without Saudi support, Hadi would be significantly weaker"
(p.662). The Yemeni Civil War is therefore more important geopolitically and strategically for Saudi
Arabia than it is for Iran (Juneau, 2016). While the conflict represents a threat for the security of
Saudi Arabia's territory, Iran views it as an opportunity to exert control and influence over a region
characterized by instability and presence of marginalized actors (Juneau, 2016). Although the armed
conflict is driven primarily by internal grievances, the major power struggle between Iran and Saudi
Arabia prolongs the suffering of civilians and makes it more difficult for the international community
to broker a ceasefire in the war-torn country.

5.3. Saudi Arabian-led Military Intervention in Yemen

In September 2014, the Houthi rebels took over the capital Sanaa, forcing President Hadi to
relocate the government to the southern city of Aden (Associated Press, 2018). Warned by the rapid
territorial advancement of the Houthis, on 26 March 2015 Saudi Arabia launched an offensive air
campaign in Yemen in order to restore the legitimacy of Hadi (Human Rights Council, 2018). The
Saudi-led military intervention began with 'Operation Decisive Storm' which aimed at targeting the
ballistic missile capabilities of the Houthis, their leadership locations, arms arsenal, military camps
and concentration of troops (Human Rights Council, 2018). The Crown Prince and Minister of
Defence of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad Bin Salman, was in charge of the air operations (Darwich,
2020). Initially, the intervention was meant to last only three months, since Bin Salman was confident

in the coalition's ability to quickly reverse the Houthis takeover of Yemen and restore the government of Hadi in the capital Sanaa (Darwich, 2020). However, the first phase of the Saudi-led air campaign failed to achieve the initial objectives (Human Rights Council, 2018). The coalition failed to destroy Yemen's missile stockpiles entirely and to deny the Houthis military capability (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). On the 22nd of April, the coalition announced the launching of 'Operation Restoring Hope' (Human Rights Council, 2018). The Saudi-led coalition stated that the focus of the second operation is finding a political solution to the conflict and limiting military operations in support of the internationally recognized government (Human Rights Council, 2018). According to the Saudi spokesman of the coalition, Brigadier General Ahmed Asiri, the objective of the new operation was "to mark the start of a more limited military campaign aimed at preventing the rebels from operating" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, p.28). Asiri assured in a public statement that heavy airstrikes by the coalition would decrease and the new phase would prevent rebels from targeting the civilian population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). The coalition claimed that this new phase would focus on delivering humanitarian aid and medical supplies to the affected Yemeni people (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). However, evidence on the ground reveals the opposite. According to information collected by the Yemen Data Project (YDP), the Saudi-led coalition carried out about 18.000 raids between 1 March 2015 and 30 June 2018, which shows that the air campaign in fact intensified (Human Rights Council, 2018). The scholars Hokayem and Roberts (2016) argue that the Saudi-led intervention consisted of two phases, both of which could be considered a failure. The first phase of the campaign, which consisted of intense airstrikes and air and naval blockades, failed to destroy the air and coastal defences of Yemen and did not succeed in halting the weapons supply to the rebels (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). The second phase focused on limiting the Houthi mobility by striking roads and infrastructure for fuelling, which widened the targeting scope of the coalition (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). Instead of protecting the civilian population, 'Operation Restoring Hope' caused thousands of civilian casualties and affected millions of people in Yemen (Darwich, 2020).

5.4. Victimization of Civilians in Yemen

5.4.1. Indiscriminate Targeting and Coalition Airstrikes

Scholarly works of Shield (2018), Hokayem & Roberts (2016), and Knights and Almeida, (2015) argue that the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen applied punishment against civilians as part of its coercive air campaign in Yemen. From August 2015 onwards, the coalition's targeting shifted from military and governmental to civilian and economic targets (Mundy, 2018). The Saudi-led forces started targeting roads, transport infrastructure, food production, schools, hospitals, cultural sites, houses and water infrastructure (Mundy, 2018). The number of civilian casualties in the Yemeni

Civil War varies due to the restricted access to outside actors and the inability of the international
community to conduct credible investigations (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
[ACLED], 2020). According to the YDP, by July 2020 the total number of civilian fatalities in Yemen
was 8,712 (Yemen Data Project, 2020). Figure 1 displays a breakdown of civilian casualties per year.
The total number of coalition air raids amounted to 21,046, as 6,421 of them targeted non-military and
7,408 unknown targets (Yemen Data Project, 2020). According to data from the Armed Conflict
Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), an estimated 12,600 civilians have died as a result of
direct targeting by the Saudi-led coalition (ACLED, 2020). Around 67% of the reported civilian
casualties have been caused by coalition airstrikes (ACLED, 2020). Civilian fatalities, however, are
very likely to be significantly higher since data from YDP and ACLED does not include deaths from
collateral damage or the ones from preventable diseases and starvation (Mwatana for Human Rights,
2019). The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen emphasized that the true extent of casualties is unknown
and the official numbers are a gross underestimate (Cumming-Bruce, 2019).

	Total Number of Casualties	Total Number of Killed	Total Number of Injured
2015	8,397	3,876	4,521
2016	4,063	1,785	2,278
2017	2,629	1,421	1,208
2018	2,472	1,186	1,286
2019	785	364	421
2020	132	80	52
Total	**18,478**	**8,712**	**9,766**

Figure 3. Simple table of civilian casualties in the Yemeni Civil War. Data source: Yemen Data
Project, July 2020.

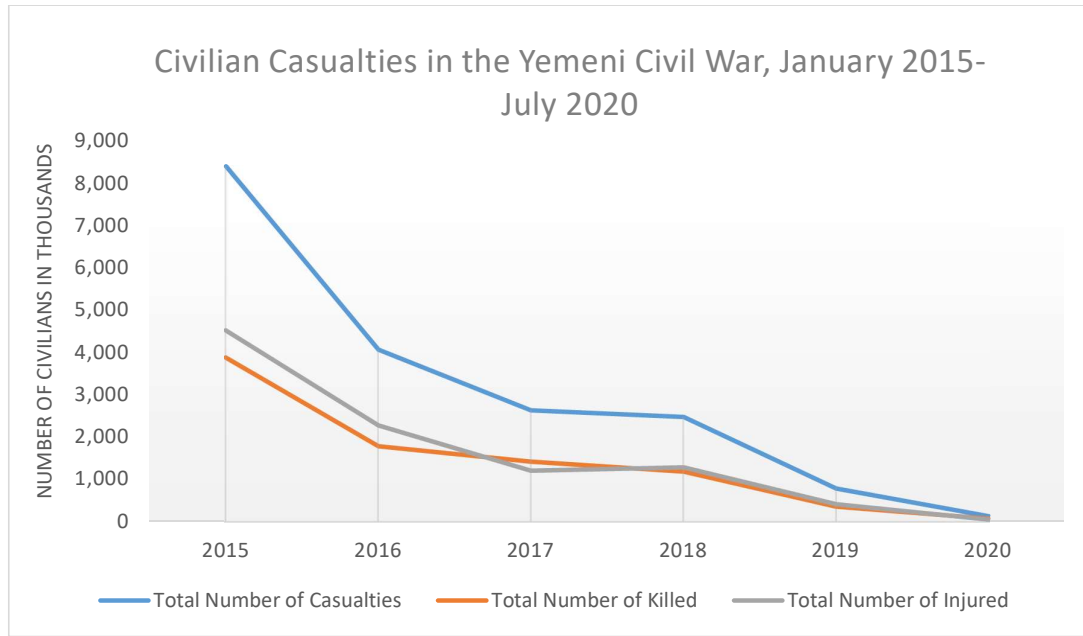Civilian Casualties in the Yemeni Civil War, January 2015-July 2020

Figure 4. Simple line chart of civilian casualties in the Yemeni Civil War. Data source: Yemen Data Project, 2020.

Data gathered from the UN and human rights organizations reveal that the coalition has been systematically and consistently hitting civilian targets (Middle East Monitor, 2020). According to the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, the coalition's attacks on civilian infrastructure has not been accidental - it has been targeting civilians deliberately (Human Rights Council, 2018). The Yemen Data Project analysed 8,600 air raids led by the Saudis for the period between March 2015 and August 2016 (Hiro, 2018). Results show that out of these attacks, 3,577 raids have hit military sites and 3,158 non-military infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, markets and other civilian locations (Hiro, 2018). Most of the civilian casualties since the beginning of the conflict have been caused by the Saudi-led air campaign, as 82% of those killed or injured by coalition airstrikes have been non-combatants (Ruggiero, 2019). The Panel of Experts have accused Saudi Arabia for failing to adequately distinguish between military objects and civilians, this way making the targets indiscriminate by nature, which in turn violates the principles of distinction and proportionality of international humanitarian law (United Nations Security Council, 2016). Data collected from Yemen Data Project (2020), ACLED (2020) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (2020) in Yemen reveals a similar pattern of intensity of coalition air strikes in comparison to casualties of civilians. An increase in air raids in the first few months of the Saudi-led air campaign corresponds to higher numbers of civilian casualties, even though the total rate of civilian fatalities has been decreasing since 2015 (ACLED, 2019). According to data from both Yemen Data Project (2020) and ACLED (2020), 2015 has been the most lethal year with 3,876 civilians killed as a result of the armed conflict. The same year marks the highest number of air raids launched by the Saudis, with 921 air

raids launched in September alone (Yemen Data Project, 2020). In December 2017, air strikes hit 77 military targets compared to 196 non-military ones (Yemen Data Project, 2020). This trend continued into 2018, as violence against civilians increased and more civilians than military targets were reported for the same year (Carboni & d'Hauthuille, 2018). This pattern of civilian victimization could be explained with strategic developments in Yemen, such as the battle of Hodeidah, during which fatalities more than doubled between October and November 2018, from rates of 243 to 509 respectively (Carboni & d'Hauthuille, 2018). As the UN Human Rights Council reported, although the overall number of air strikes by the coalition decreased over time, the pattern of harm to civilians caused by air raids "remained consistent and significant" (Human Rights Council, 2018, p.38).
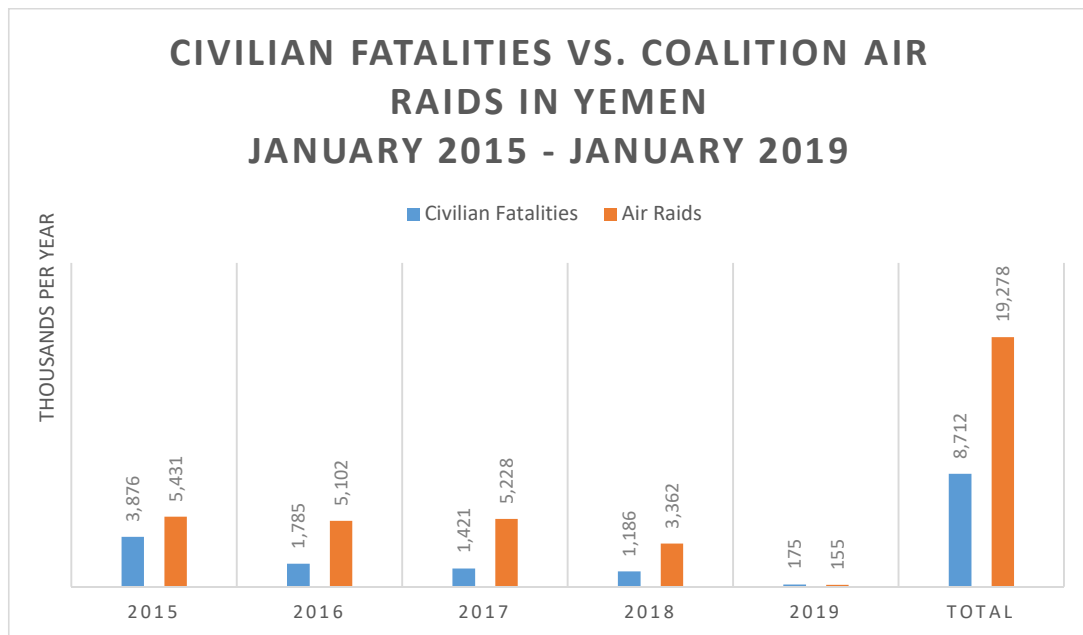

Figure 5. Simple column chart of civilian fatalities compared to coalition air raids. Data sources: Yemen Data Project, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2020. Data is measured in thousands per year.

The decrease of Saudi air strikes could be explained with the increased international pressure on Saudi Arabia due to evidence of human rights abuses and breaches of international humanitarian law by the coalition (ACLED, 2019). This in turn has opened up opportunities for the Houthis to advance further into the territory of Yemen. As the scholar Shield (2018) explains, "massive air strikes had slowed but not reversed the Houthi advance", and the indiscriminate violence against the Yemeni people turned counterproductive during the course of the civil war (p.476). As the coalition air raids declined over the past year, the Houthi attacks on Saudi territory increased, since the reduction of pressure by the coalition allowed the rebels to regain operational mobility and further threaten the security of Saudi Arabia (Almeida & Knights, 2020).

6. Empirical Findings

The following section will describe the main empirical findings of this research project. This
will be done through looking at three possible causal explanations. For each of the explanations, the
constructed causal mechanism is described first. Second, an analysis of the main findings is
illustrated. Finally, an evaluation of the validity of the causal mechanism is presented.

6.1. Indiscriminate Targeting and Houthi Missile Attacks on Saudi Arabia

Causal Mechanism

Five years after the launch of the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, the capital Sanaa,
as well as large parts of northern Yemen, remain under the direct control of the Houthi movement (Al
Jazeera, 2019). Over time, the rebels developed into a highly adaptable and unified military force, and
managed to escalate the fighting with the Saudi-led coalition by launching missile and drone attacks
on Saudi territory (Samaan, 2020). The Houthis have engaged in a strategic "land missile campaign"
against their main rival Saudi Arabia, thus threatening the territory and the civilian population of the
Saudi Kingdom (United Nations Security Council, 2016, p.34). The following section will provide an
analysis of empirical evidence in order to test the causal mechanism that increase of Houthi attacks on
Saudi territory led to an increase of attacks against civilians by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. The
first hypothesis of this research project suggests a causality between the Houthi land missile campaign
and the coalition indiscriminate targeting of civilians. The latter is examined as a cause of the rebels'
coercion on Saudi territory. This section will measure indiscriminate attacks on civilians as caused by
direct targeting through aerial bombardment. Number of casualties will be quantified as resulting
from direct attacks on civilian infrastructure. In order to test the validity of the suggested hypothesis,
the empirical analysis will provide sequence evidence which is "the temporal and spatial chronology
of events that is predicted by a hypothesized causal mechanism" (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p.99).
Instances of Houthi attacks on Saudi territory will be juxtaposed to incidents by the coalition
involving civilians in Yemen. Even though not all of the reported attacks on Saudi territory have been
officially confirmed by the government of Saudi Arabia, sequence evidence will be collected from
investigations by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen in order to establish credibility and objectivity
of the interpretation of events.

Analysis

According to the Panel of Experts, the Houthis are launching missile attacks against Saudi
Arabia for both strategic and retaliatory purposes (United Nations Security Council, 2018). The

insurgency aims to demonstrate the weakness of the Saudi defence capability, show vulnerability of the Saudi civilian population to attacks and counter the claim that the Saudi-led coalition has destroyed the missile stockpiles in Yemen during the 2015 Operation Decisive Storm (United Nations Security Council, 2018). The primary objective of the Houthi retaliation against the Saudis is to hold power and force the coalition to accept the territorial status quo in Yemen (Samaan, 2020). Before the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, there has been no evidence of Houthi missile attacks against their opponents (Samaan, 2020). The first recorded cross-border attack was launched on May 5, 2015 as a response to the military intervention by the coalition (Hanna, 2019). The Houthis used ballistic missiles and explosive drones to target the airport of the Saudi city of Najran (Hanna, 2019). The attack was launched from the north-eastern governorate of Sadaa, which functions as a stronghold for the Houthis (Amnesty International, 2015). The day after the Houthi attack, the coalition carried out 130 air strikes within 24 hours on Yemen territory (Castillo, 2015). On May 8, the Saudi-led coalition of forces declared the governorate of Sadaa a military target, giving the civilian population of around 50,000 inhabitants less than 24 hours to leave the area (Amnesty International, 2015). The human rights organization Amnesty International accused the coalition of violating international humanitarian law, since declaring an entire region a military target fails to discriminate between civilian and military targets (Amnesty International, 2015). Furthermore, the coalition's warning of civilians was not effective as it could not reach all citizens on time (Amnesty International, 2015). A Yemeni citizen told the Centre for Civilians in Conflict that they were ordered to leave immediately, not having enough time to take their identification documents with them (Centre for Civilians in Conflict, 2019). As Amnesty International (2015) argues, although fighting guerrilla insurgency among the civilian population creates certain challenges, the incumbents should always take precautionary measures to limit harm to civilians and weigh the expected collateral damage beforehand. Since the Saudi-led coalition failed to distinguish between military and civilian targets, the air raids on Sadaa governorate can be viewed as a form of collective punishment of civilians (Amnesty International, 2015). In May 2015 alone, a total of 1,171 civilian infrastructures in the city of Sadaa were destroyed (Almeida & Knights, 2020). After the first missile attack by the Houthis on Saudi territory and the subsequent Saudi offensive on Sadaa governorate in Yemen, the pattern of civilian harm in response to the rebels' retaliation continued.

In August 2016, peace negotiations between the pro-government forces and the Houthis collapsed (Human Rights Council, 2018). On August 28, the Houthis fired a rocket on Saudi territory, killing two civilians (Hanna, 2019). The rocket was fired following the collapse of the peace talks (Hanna, 2019). As a result, the coalition imposed a partial aerial and naval blockade on Yemen, and significantly intensified its air campaign against the Houthis in Yemen (Human Rights Council, 2018). According to the United Nations, at least 600 civilians were killed by airstrikes for the period of August until December 2016 (Human Rights Council, 2018). The UN Panel of Experts found no change in the coalition's modus operandi, as airstrikes continued to target civilian infrastructure

(Human Rights Council, 2018). In October 2016, for instance, the coalition targeted a funeral hall in the capital Sanaa, killing at least 137 civilians and causing injuries to 695 civilians (Human Rights Council, 2018). The Houthis responded with launching a ballistic missile at a military base in Saudi Arabia, as well as unsuccessfully targeting the Saudi holy site of Mecca (Hanna, 2019).

In the first two years of their campaign, the Houthis used unscrewed aerial vehicles and short-range land attack cruise missiles to target Saudi Arabia (United Nations Security Council, 2020). However, since 2017 the weapons of the rebels have become more sophisticated and precise, which according to the UN Panel of Experts was due to the transferring of arms and military equipment from a third party to the insurgency (United Nations Security Council, 2020). According to the Panel, by May 2017, the Houthis were using extended-range ballistic missiles, demonstrating the possible deepening of Iranian support to the rebels (Samaan, 2020). On 4 November 2017, the Houthis took responsibility for firing a ballistic missile at the capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh (Associated Press, 2018). Remnants of the missile landed in the area of King Khaled International Airport in the Saudi capital which led to an escalation of regional tensions (United Nations Security Council, 2018). The Saudis intercepted the missile and several days later imposed a complete blockade on Yemen as a cause of the fired missile (Associated Press, 2018). The blockade led to a widespread famine for the civilian population due to restrictions in delivery of food and medical supplies imposed by the coalition (Barrington & McDowall, 2019). Furthermore, coalition airstrikes intensified as a result of the Houthi aggression against the Saudis (Samaan, 2020). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), between July 2017 and June 2018, more than 1,114 civilians have been killed and another 1,002 were injured by Saudi-led airstrikes (Human Rights Council, 2018). Looking at the sequence of events, it can be seen that another peak in coercive airstrikes and civilian casualties occurred following seven missile attacks launched by the rebels against Saudi Arabia in March 2018 (Human Rights Council, 2018). In the following month, according to data collected from Yemen Data Project, the coalition intensified its campaign and launched nearly 400 air raids, which caused at least 200 civilian casualties (Human Rights Council, 2018). Violence against civilians remained high until mid-2018, followed by a decrease in airstrikes targeting non-combatants due to the Stockholm Agreement between Hadi and Houthi forces signed in December 2018 (ACLED, 2019). However, the agreement collapsed soon after and the ceasefire was broken by the rebels (Al Dosari & George, 2020).

In early 2019, the Houthi movement claimed responsibility for launching drone attacks on Saudi territory that struck major oil facilities (Human Rights Council, 2019). The tensions escalated further after the Houthis fired an explosive drone attack at an oil field in the Saudi city of Abqaiq, damaging a processing Aramco facility and temporarily halting half of the Kingdom's daily oil production (Tan, 2019). The attack was launched with a new model of extended-range ballistic missile and the operation was named "Second operation economic deterrence" by the Houthis (United Nations Security Council, 2020). The insurgency claimed that they would cease launching missiles if

the Saudi-led coalition reopened Sanaa airport and the port of Hodeidah for shipping (United Nations
Security Council, 2020). Instead of lifting the blockade, the coalition escalated tensions with
launching indiscriminate attacks on Yemen territory (Kearney, 2019). In August 2019, an airstrike by
the coalition hit a school bus in the capital Sanaa, killing 40 children and injuring dozens of Yemeni
people (Save the Children, 2019). Later that month, a mass civilian casualty event took place in a
prison in Dhamar, where airstrikes by the coalition caused more than 130 civilian casualties (ACLED,
2020). An agreement signed between the parties in November 2019 reduced coalition airstrikes to its
lowest levels since the beginning of the conflict (ACAPS, 2020). However, the Houthis refused to
comply with the demands of the Saudis and negotiations collapsed once again (United Nations
Security Council, 2020). Violence against civilians continued in Yemen as the Houthi movement
gained territorial control over Al-Jawf and Marib governorates (Middle East Monitor, 2020). In June
2020, the rebels claimed to have launched their largest military operation against the Saudis, targeting
a military base and the ministry of defence in the capital Riyadh (Al Jazeera, 2020). The Kingdom
claimed that it has intercepted the missile, yet Houthi-led attacks on Saudi Arabia territory continue to
pose a threat and to increase tensions in the region (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Conclusion

Given the causal sequence of Houthi attacks on Saudi territory and incidents involving
civilian casualties in Yemen, it can be observed that indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the
coalition occurred either immediately after or within a few months following a missile attack
launched on Saudi territory. This way, the three types of social mechanisms for the construction of a
causal mechanism are present in this case; the Houthi missile attacks serve as a situational
mechanism, or the initiating condition, the subsequent Saudi-led coalition airstrikes on Yemen
territory is the action-formation mechanism, and coalition targeting of civilians is the
transformational, or the output mechanism. Given the connection between missile attacks as a cause
and indiscriminate targeting of civilians as an effect, the hypothesis that the Saudi-led coalition
targeted civilians in Yemen as a response to the Houthi attacks on Saudi territory is confirmed.

Situational mechanism
Houthi missile attacks on Saudi territory

Action-formation mechanism
An increase in airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen

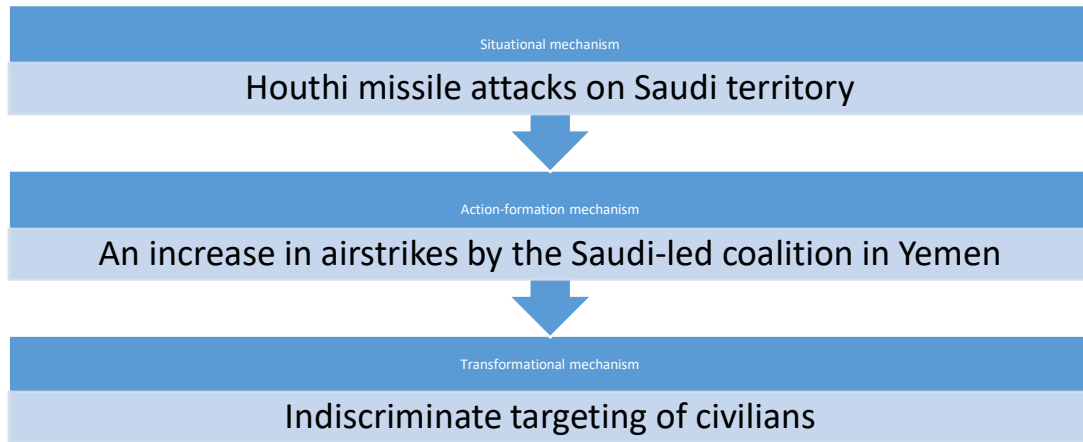| Transformational mechanism |
|:---:|
| Indiscriminate targeting of civilians |

Figure 6. Causal mechanism of hypothesis 1.

As Dr James Kearney from Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) explains, the inability of the
Saudis to win the war in Yemen and the failure of its air campaign has increased civilian casualties
caused by indiscriminate violence (Kearney, 2019). According to Kearney (2019), punishment of
civilians has occurred as a causal outcome of the unsuccessful military intervention: "Increasingly,
Houthi rebels have begun targeting Saudi Arabia itself with missile systems, causing Saudi military to
expand further its air campaign, leading to an ever-increasing loss of civilian life" (para.19). The
missile capability of the rebels reveals the failed strategic objectives of the initial air campaign of the
coalition to destroy the military equipment of the Houthis in Yemen (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). The
traditional coercive mechanisms used by the coalition during the first phase of the intervention also
failed to coerce the Houthis into submission and to reinstate the government of Hadi in Sanaa
(Nuruzzaman, 2015). The Houthi rebels displayed resilience, capability, and strategic and tactical
creativity (Nichols, 2017). Indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the coalition thus aimed to inflict
enough pain and terror on the Yemeni people in order to influence the Houthis to cease their missile
campaign and to come to the negotiating table (Shield, 2018). As Valentino (2004) argues in his work
"Final solutions: Mass killing and genocide", coercive mass killings occur when conventional
military mechanisms fail to produce the desired objectives. In such cases, civilian victimization is
used as a punishment of populations to coerce the enemy to surrender to the demands of the
incumbents (Valentino, 2004). For the Saudis, collective punishment appears to be a conscious focus
of the air campaign, even though coercive strikes and retaliatory operations resulted in a hostile
attitude among the Yemeni population towards the coalition (Knights & Almeida, 2015). A report
published by the UN Human Rights Council on the conflict in Yemen in 2018 reveals that there is a
significant correlation between intensity of airstrikes, civilian casualties, and strategic developments
related to non-compliance of the Houthis to the demands of the coalition (Human Rights Council,
2018). Since the Houthis see themselves as the legitimate authority in Yemen and claim to protect the

Yemeni people from foreign aggression (Al Jazeera, 2020), inflicting pain on the civilian population
is an instrument used by the coalition to force the insurgency into compliance.

6.2 Civilian Victimization through Naval and Aerial Blockade

Causal mechanism

Indiscriminate targeting of civilians can occur through methods other than direct killing
(Valentino, 2004, p.10). Casualties of non-combatants can be caused by indirect suffering through the
targeting of facilities and infrastructure that affects the health of civilians (Downes, 2011, p.8). The
following section will analyse indirect fatalities of Yemeni non-combatants caused by the imposition
of the Saudi-led coalition' blockade which restricted access to food and basic necessities of life to the
population. Empirical evidence will be used to argue for the existence of a causal mechanism between
indiscriminate targeting of civilians and Houthi access to external support. The second hypothesis of
this research project suggests that indiscriminate targeting by the coalition was caused by the
belligerent's coercive strategy to deny access to external supply lines to the rebels. This hypothesis
will be tested relying primarily on account evidence and sequence evidence. United Nations reports
on Iranian-produced weapons used by the Houthis will be analysed as account evidence. In 2015, UN
Resolution 2216 established an arms embargo on Yemen territory (United Nations Security Council,
2016). Sequence evidence will be used to compare documented breaches of the arms embargo by the
Houthis with the imposition of aerial and naval blockade on Yemen by the coalition. In order to test
the suggested hypothesis, a different interpretation of civilian casualties, which excludes the number
of direct killings caused by airstrikes, will be applied. Civilian victimization will be limited to
fatalities caused by widespread disease and starvation as a result of the blockade. Nevertheless, the
exact number of indirect civilian casualties caused by the Saudi-led blockade is difficult to estimate
due to lack of precise data (Cumming-Bruce, 2019). To overcome this limitation, the following
section will measure civilian targeting caused by the coalition-imposed blockade using data on
number of Yemeni people in need of assistance, as well as deaths caused by starvation and disease
due to restrictions on aid. For this purpose, key figures from the UN Office for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will be examined, since OCHA publishes an up-to-date information on
the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Analysis

Yemen's access to the Red Sea has made the poorest country in the Arab world highly reliant
on imports even before the beginning of the conflict (Dunning, 2018). Approximately 90 percent of
Yemen's medical, food and fuel supplies comes from imports, and about 70 percent of those pass
through the port of Hodeidah (Dunning, 2018). However, the proxy rivalry between Saudi Arabia and
Iran on the territory of Yemen has made the Red Sea port of Hodeidah a major instrument for the two

countries to exercise power and influence over the region (Dunning, 2018). Saudi Arabia and the coalition of forces have openly accused Iran of supplying the Houthi movement with weapons and military equipment via sea routes, which then pass through the port of Hodeidah (Saudi Press Agency, 2020). In April 2015, the Iran Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council presented evidence that Iran has been transferring weapons to Yemen since 2009 (Dunning, 2018). As a response to the findings, the internationally recognized Government of Yemen issued a statement on the 10th of April that it would close its territorial waters to all kinds of shipping, including for commercial and humanitarian vessels (Fink, 2017). A few days after the statement, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2216 (2015) that establishes an arms embargo to halt the supply of weapons to the rebels (Fink, 2017). According to paragraph 14 of the Resolution, Member States shall take all necessary measures to stop the direct or indirect supply of arms, military equipment, technical assistance, military training or financial assistance for the benefit of Saleh and the Houthi movement (United Nations Security Council, 2016). Instead of preventing the Hadi government and the coalition of forces from imposing further measures on shipping, the UN Resolution resulted in the enforcement of tighter measures and arms embargo on the territory of Yemen (Fink, 2017).

According to the Saudi-led coalition, a maritime blockade on the Red Sea was necessary since Iran has breached the terms of Resolution 2216 (International Commission of Jurists, 2018). A report published by the UN Panel of Experts in 2016 revealed that even though the origins of weapons delivered to the Houthis could not be determined, there was indisputable evidence that vessels coming to Yemen originated from the Islamic Republic of Iran (United Nations Security Council, 2016). The Panel found unknown quantities of supplies of SCUD-B and ZELZAL-3 weapon systems, which were not in the pre-war stockpile of the Yemeni Armed Forces (United Nations Security Council, 2016). This provided sufficient evidence to consider the supply of these weapons to the Houthis a violation of the targeted arms embargo (United Nations Security Council, 2016). The Panel of Experts identified three maritime trafficking routes; the west coast of Yemen, the Omani transit ports and the south-eastern ports in Yemen (United Nations Security Council, 2016). Some of the assault rifles and cruise missile systems received by the Houthis resembled similar characteristics to military equipment manufactured in Iran (United Nations Security Council, 2016). The relationship between Iran and the Houthis became more apparent after the rebels started launching missiles on Saudi territory, thus manifesting the Iranian involvement in the war against Saudi Arabia (Craig, AL-Rawhani, al Yahya & Tabbara, 2018). Although Tehran sees the Houthis as the legitimate government of Yemen, it has denied the Saudi accusations that it is supplying the rebels with weapons (Bayoumy & Stewart, 2016).

In order to halt the maritime trafficking routes of Iran to the Houthi rebels, the coalition of forces imposed a temporary maritime blockade in the Red Sea in 2015 (Disclose, 2019). The government of Yemen established full control over the territorial waters in the country and coalition naval forces started inspecting every vessel before entering Yemeni ports (Fink, 2017). This resulted

in massive time delays of ships and inability of vessels carrying food and medical supplies to the
population to enter the country (Fink, 2017). By June 2015, only 15 percent of all imports entering
Yemen before the crisis were able to reach the country (Human Rights Council, 2018). In the summer
of 2016, peace talks between the government and the rebels failed and the coalition imposed more
severe restrictions on the port of Hodeidah (Human Rights Council, 2018). The Houthis continued to
launch cross-border attacks near the Saudi city of Najran and refused to comply with the government's
demands to broker a ceasefire (Hanna, 2019). In August 2016, the Houthis used SCUD-B and
ZELZAL-3 ballistic missiles in their attacks on Najran, during which seven Saudi civilians were
killed (United Nations Security Council, 2016). The same missile systems were reported to have been
transferred to the rebels in breach of the UN arms embargo in 2015 (UN Security Council, 2016). As
a result, during the same month the Saudi-led coalition intensified its air campaign and launched air
raids which bombed and destroyed the main bridge connecting Hodeidah and the capital Sanaa
(Dunning, 2018). The bridge served as a route of about 90 percent of food supplies delivered by the
UN World Food Programme (Dunning, 2018). The facility was bombed even though it was part of the
no-strike list provided to the Saudis by the United States (Oakford, 2017).

   Despite the warnings of the international community that an imposed blockade would result
in a widespread starvation of the civilian population, on 9 August 2016, the Saudi-led coalition closed
Sanaa International Airport to commercial and humanitarian traffic (Human Rights Council, 2018). It
did so with the purpose of halting the ballistic missile supply to the Houthis, as the land missile
campaign of the rebels on Saudi territory intensified further (United Nations Security Council, 2016).
The airport is the most crucial point that links Yemen to the rest of the world (Human Rights Council,
2018). Its closure resulted in a cancellation of all commercial flights going to and coming from
Yemen, which in turn prevented thousands of civilians from seeking medical help and assistance
abroad (Human Rights Council, 2018). The closure of the airport caused victimization of civilians in
Yemen**.** As the Norwegian Refugee Council (2017) explains, the closure has killed more civilians in
Yemen than airstrikes launched by the coalition because of inability of people to travel for medical
care abroad. About 10,000 civilians have died because of lack of treatment available in the country
compared to 9,000 non-combatants killed by airstrikes during the same period (Norwegian Refugee
Council, 2017).

   On November 4, 2017, tensions further escalated as the Saudi-led coalition imposed a
complete blockade on the territory of Yemen as a response to the missile attack fired by the Houthi
forces against the Saudi capital Riyadh earlier that year (Human Rights Council, 2018). According to
the coalition, the blockade was necessary because the use of ballistic missiles on Saudi territory by the
Houthis required further enforcement of the arms embargo of UN Resolution 2216 (2015) (Human
Rights Council, 2018). The UN Panel of Experts travelled to Riyadh to inspect remnants of the fired
short-range ballistic missile and found that the reach of the weapon was certainly beyond the ones
stored by the regime of Saleh and was therefore shipped to the rebels after the imposition of the arms

embargo (Samaan, 2020). Despite evidence of previously shipped weapons to the Houthis, at the time of the total blockade, the Panel of Experts found no evidence of ballistic missiles entering Yemen through Red Sea ports (Human Rights Council, 2018). On November 22, the blockade was partially lifted but it failed to prevent the victimization of thousands of civilians in Yemen (Human Rights Council, 2018).

The naval blockade imposed by the coalition worsened the humanitarian situation on the ground, as aid and medical supplies were either delayed or turned away from territorial waters (Oakford, 2017). The screening of ships entering the port of Hodeidah in Yemen has created a "chilling effect" on commercial vessels carrying fuel and food to alleviate the starvation of civilians (Cumming-Bruce, 2018, para.22). According to Human Rights Watch, the coalition has purposefully diverted tankers with fuel headed to the port of Hodeidah and ships were held for a period of over five months (Oakford, 2017). The scholar Oakford (2017) reported that "the embargo has blocked 29 ships - carrying roughly 300,000 metric tons of food and 192,000 metric tons of fuel - from reaching Yemen" (para.6). The restrictions on fuel imports crippled the electricity supply and forced a mass closure of hospitals in the country (Borger, 2015). The coalition-imposed restrictions on humanitarian shipping has left 80 percent of the civilian population in Yemen in dire need of assistance and protection, and caused a widespread famine and cholera outbreak (United Nations, 2019). Between June and November 2017, nearly 2,100 civilians died due to cholera and almost 900,000 were infected with the disease (Associated Press, 2018). According to data form OCHA, by May 2020, 24,3 out of the total 28,5 million people living in Yemen are in need of assistance, 12,2 of those being children (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). Another 3,2 million people are food insecure, 1,4 million are suspected of being infected with cholera and 1,6 thousand civilians have died because of the disease since January 2018 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). In May 2016, the United Nations established the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) in order to speed up the clearance process of commercial and humanitarian vessels, as well as to ensure compliance with Resolution 2216 (2015) (Sharp, 2020). Nevertheless, the coalition maintained its own inspection process and while the UNVIM's clearance took about 28 hours on average, the Saudi-led coalition detained ships with humanitarian supplies for several weeks (Human Rights Council, 2018). Resulting from the blockade, the flow of ships into Yemen in 2015 has decreased with 75% compared to the previous year (Borger, 2015).

According to the UN Panel of Experts, the total blockade imposed on Yemen is a violation of international humanitarian law and the coalition may be responsible for committing war crimes (Human Rights Council, 2018). As part of their investigation, the Experts adopted a definition of indiscriminate attacks beyond the physical use of force and found that the coalition failed to abide by the principles of proportionality and distinction (Human Rights Council, 2018). Given that the population of Yemen relies almost entirely on naval imports for its survival, the Government of

Yemen could have predicted the harmful consequences for civilians and the coalition had an opportunity to revert its coercive actions against non-combatants (Human Rights Council, 2018). The Saudi-led coalition deliberately targeted civilians through destroying food-producing infrastructure and denying access of the population to healthcare (Oxfam International, 2017). This provides evidence for the coalition's use of starvation as a method of combat (International Commission of Jurists, 2018). Even though the initial aim of the blockade was to halt Houthis' supplies of weapons, the harm to the civilian population is excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage of the restrictions (Human Rights Council, 2018).

In January 2018, the Panel of Experts reported that Iran has been producing Burkan-2 and Qiam-1 ballistic missiles for the Houthis which were designed to specifically reach the Saudi capital Riyadh (Knights, 2018). In response to the findings, in June 2018 the coalition launched an offensive on the port city of Hodeidah, which restricted humanitarian access to civilians in need of assistance (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Despite evidence of external supply chains to the Houthis by the UN Panel of Experts, the coalition has failed to publish a list of prohibited items for shipping, thus limiting the effectiveness of the declared military objectives of the blockade (Human Rights Council, 2018). This way, "the blockade is essentially using the threat of starvation as a bargaining tool and an instrument of war" (Bachman, 2019, p.303). Insufficient food supplies as well as increased costs for food and stocks on the market resulted in the victimization of thousands of Yemenis (Human Rights Council, 2019). Because of that, the UN Human Rights Council considered the blockade a "collective punishment" of civilians (Human Rights Council, 2019, p.10). Due to the excessive harm to civilians created by the blockade, the Saudi-led coalition has breached UN Resolution 2216 (2015) which provides that the arms embargo should not impede the delivery of humanitarian aid (International Commission of Jurists, 2018).

The initial objective of the Saudi-led coalition when launching the Hodeidah offensive in 2016 was to establish full control of the port in 30 days (Carboni & d'Hauthuille, 2018). The coalition wanted to exert influence through a blockade in order to coerce the Houthis to come to the negotiating table and cut external supply routes coming from Iran (Carboni & d'Hauthuille, 2018). However, "as of early December, beyond the 30-day deadline, Houthi and allied forces remain in control of Hodeidah" (Carboni & d'Hauthuille, 2018, p.25). Besides having clear strategic objectives, targeting supply lines of guerrilla insurgency requires precise intelligence, since the military base of the rebels is often situated within civilian territory (Pape, 1996). The Saudi-led coalition declared that it would apply "intelligence-led interdiction" against the Houthis in order to halt the supply of weapons from Iran (Borger, 2015, para.5). As the scholar Robert Pape (1996) explains, strategic indirection is applied to destroy the enemy's sources of military supply and to isolate them from external support (Pape, 1996). Naval blockades through indirection require both punishment and denial strategies, which Pape (1996) terms decapitation. The Saudi-led coalition thus applied punishment to civilians as part of its denial strategy against the Houthi movement (Shield, 2018). According to Pape (1996),

however, decapitation strategies rarely succeed. In order for both punishment and denial to be effective in a naval blockade, the incumbents should possess precise air weaponry that could discriminate between military and civilian targets (Pape, 1996). In addition, making a distinction when confronting non-state actors is particularly difficult (Valentino, 2004). Interdiction in counter guerrilla warfare is effective if selective targeting is applied, but in cases where the government does not have the capacity to defeat the insurgency directly, then 'draining the sea' approach appears a better alternative (Valentino, 2004). Due to guerrilla tactics of placing military bases within civilian populations, the incumbent is often targeting dual-use infrastructure, meaning that the targets are facilities with both civilian and military applications (Sowers, Weinthal & Zawahri, 2017). According to the Saudi-led coalition, the Houthi insurgency has turned civilian infrastructure into military facilities and targeting the rebels' base of support resulted in unavoidable collateral damage (Saudi Press Agency, 2015).

A secret report published by the French non-profit organization Disclose, however, reveals significant faults in the Saudi's air strike capabilities and quality of intelligence (Emmons, 2019). According to the report, the purpose of the Saudi blockade on Yemen was to establish control over Houthi strongholds and to halt their territorial advancements (Emmons, 2019). Yet "the Saudis' lack of mobility leaves them highly vulnerable to guerrilla attacks...their strikes are too imprecise to be effective against the nimbler Houthi forces" (Emmons, 2019, para. 30). The interdiction effort of the coalition has therefore failed to coerce the Houthis and isolate Yemen from material support coming from Iran (Shield, 2018). The Saudi-led air campaign and the imposed blockade lacked precise intelligence and the coalition has disregarded the harm caused to civilians by using starvation as a method of warfare (Shield, 2018). It has failed to discriminate between military and civilian objects, and the blockade has used civilians as an instrument of punishment against the Houthis.

Conclusion

Looking at the causal connection between accounts of weapons supply to the Houthis from Iran and the imposition of aerial and naval blockade, it can be argued that the Saudi-led coalition caused victimization of civilians as part of its efforts to cut the external supply lines to the Houthi Movement. Even though evidence of Iranian-made weapons in possession of the rebels has been relatively scarce, the empirical data presented in this section confirms the causality between efforts for the closure of external supply routes to Yemen and indirect indiscriminate targeting of civilians. In terms of the social mechanisms required to establish causality in this case, the situational mechanism is formed by the presence of account evidence of Houthi breaches of the UN arms embargo, the action-formation mechanism is the followed imposition of aerial and naval blockade by the coalition, and the transformational, or output, mechanism is indiscriminate targeting of civilians through using starvation as an instrument of warfare. Given the presence of social mechanisms, the hypothesis that the Saudi-led coalition targeted civilians in Yemen to deny access of the Houthis to external support is
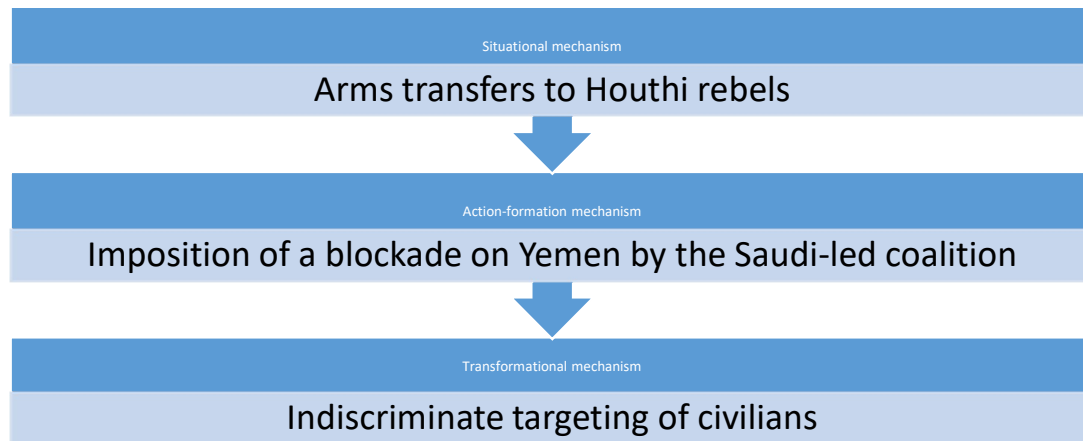
therefore confirmed.

Situational mechanism
Arms transfers to Houthi rebels

Action-formation mechanism
Imposition of a blockade on Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition

Transformational mechanism
Indiscriminate targeting of civilians

Figure 7. Causal mechanism of hypothesis 2.

6.3. Responsibility for Civilian Casualties in Yemen

Despite clear evidence of indiscriminate attacks on civilians presented by human rights organizations, the Saudi-led coalition denies any responsibility for indiscriminately targeting non-combatants as part of its coercive air campaign. Saudi Arabia refused to cooperate with the UN Human Rights Council on creating a panel of experts to investigate violations of international law (Cumming-Bruce, 2019). Instead, in August 2016 the coalition of forces created its own investigative mechanism, the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT). The role of JIAT is to collect evidence on the ground and to investigate facts from coalition airstrikes that have caused harm to civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2019). However, the operational ability of JIAT is deeply flawed since the mechanism does not have an authority to require changes or hold parties accountable; the team is only empowered to make recommendations (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). JIAT has justified the attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the coalition on the grounds of technical error, an accident, a military use of the civilian object, or it has denied the coalition's responsibility for the attack (Human Rights Council, 2018). In many of the cases being investigated, the findings of the Team conflict with clear physical evidence collected by international organizations and human rights organizations on the ground (Human Rights Council, 2019). JIAT has impeded the ability of the UN Panel of Experts to investigate indiscriminate attacks on civilians as it has denied access to information regarding the targeting process of the coalition (Human Rights Council, 2019). Whereas the Team admitted technical and human errors in the targeting process, it did not hold the Saudi-led coalition responsible for violations (Human Rights Council, 2019). The findings of JIAT reveal a clear bias towards protecting the reputation of Saudi Arabia as a major provider of humanitarian assistance for the

Yemeni population. Where civilian casualties are being reported, JIAT concluded that the target posed
an imminent threat to the coalition forces and the act of aggression was thus a lawful and necessary
self-defence (Saudi Press Agency, 2020). In certain cases, JIAT acknowledged that the coalition was
responsible for civilian deaths, but even then the Saudi-led forces did nothing more than to express
deep regret, provide an apology or financial compensation to the relatives of the victims (Ben
Gassem, 2018). Despite clear evidence for the presence of civilians in targeted objects, JIAT found
that they were used for military purposes and were therefore a legitimate military target (Ben Gassem,
2018). This clearly contradicts international legal norms that govern the use of force in armed
conflicts. Furthermore, coalition member states and JIAT have denied any accusations for the
imposition of a total blockade on Yemen, stating that the ports are under Houthi control and the rebels
are obstructing the entry of humanitarian vessels into the country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).
Despite the pressure from the international community on investigating collective punishment of
civilians as a war crime in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the coalition of states have used JIAT to justify
unlawful strikes and to "hide behind the entity of the coalition" to avoid facing public criticism and
taking individual responsibility (Human Rights Watch, 2018, p.52).

6.4. Arms Transfers and Victimization of Civilians in the Yemeni Civil War

The civil war in Yemen could be classified as a non-international armed conflict with foreign
involvement, since both the government forces and the rebels receive logistical and military support
from external actors (International Commission of Jurists, 2018). The role of external support to
parties of the conflict further decreases the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the dispute
(International Commission of Jurists, 2018). In its intervention in Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition has
been heavily reliant on Western countries for the provision of arms and military equipment (Wisotzki,
2018). The extensive support of the West for the coalition has provoked strong condemnation from
human rights groups and international organizations. Major arms exporters, such as the United States
(US), the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and France, have seized the opportunity for making profit
by selling weapons and military equipment to Saudi Arabia in its war against the Houthis (Wisotzki,
2018). According to the database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),
Saudi Arabia has been the major arms importer in the world from 2015 to 2019 (Stockholm
International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2020). Currently, Saudi Arabia holds 12% of the
global share of arms imports, with the US, the UK and France being the main suppliers of arms to the
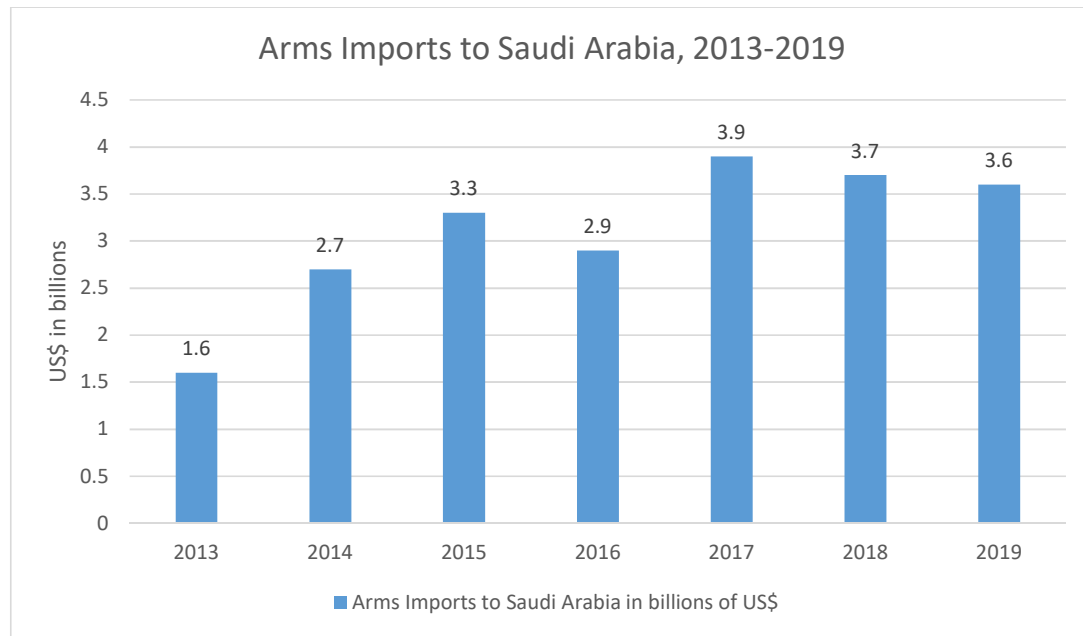Saudi Kingdom (SIPRI, 2020).

Figure 6. Simple column chart of arms imports to Saudi Arabia measured in billions of US$. Data
source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2020.

Causal Mechanism

        The purpose of the following section is to examine the use of Western-made arms and
military equipment by Saudi Arabia and its impact on indiscriminate targeting of civilians during the
Yemeni Civil War. The third hypothesis of this research project suggests that the transfer of arms and
military equipment to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen contributed to the victimization of civilians
during the conflict. This expectation will be tested through comparing data on arms imports to Saudi
Arabia from 2015 until 2019 with the amount of civilian casualties caused by direct targeting of
civilians through coalition airstrikes for the same time period. The comparison of civilian casualties to
the amount of weapons transferred excludes fatalities caused by indirect civilian targeting through
aerial and naval blockades. This is because only direct attacks through aerial bombardment could
provide evidence for the use of Western-made weapons in the targeting process. The hypothesized
causal mechanism at hand is that an increase in arms imports to Saudi Arabia has led to an increase in
attacks involving civilians in Yemen. This way, arms transfers are expected to be a causal factor
contributing to the indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition. In order to measure
the independent variable of supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the following section will make use of
SIPRI's arms transfer database, which uses trend indicator values (TIV) to monitor and quantify the
volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons (SIPRI, 2020). Furthermore, the
volume of TIV will be supplemented by the transfer of weapons measured in billions of dollars in
order to develop a holistic approach to analysing the causal patterns of the mechanism.

Analysis

The international exports of conventional weapons are regulated by provisions embodied in the European Union Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP (EU Common Position) and the UN-adopted Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) (Bryk & Saage-Maab, 2019). International regulations are set in order to establish common standards for the issuing of licenses to arms manufacturers (Bryk & Saage-Maab, 2019). Both the EU Common Position (CP) and the ATT should be incorporated into national policies of arms export countries (Stavrianakis, 2017). The aim of these international regulations is to guarantee that states issuing licences on arms exports are respecting international humanitarian law and human rights standards, especially if arms are being transferred to conflict areas (Council of the European Union, 2008). However, the effectiveness of international mechanisms for monitoring and regulating arms transfers remains limited (Oppenheim, 2019). The EU CP, for example, despite being legally binding, lacks formal mechanisms to enforce its provisions within the EU (Oppenheim, 2019). Similarly, the ATT is binding only to those countries which have ratified the Treaty (Oppenheim, 2019). Because of that, policies on arms exports often remain a national prerogative and it is up to national governments to decide on the legality of arms transfers (Musa, 2017). While the manufacturing of military equipment has become more globalised in recent years, the control over arms exports remains within the power of national authorities (Stavrianakis, 2017). This in turn creates difficulties in regulating exports of weapons which are being used against non-combatants in times of armed conflict, as it can be seen with the case of the Yemeni Civil War. Besides being the major arms importer in the world, Saudi Arabia is the most well-armed country in the Gulf region (Wezeman, 2018). A major part of the imported military equipment by Saudi Arabia from the West is being used on the territory of Yemen, where the Saudi-led coalition is supporting the government of Hadi (Bales & Mutscher, 2019). Investigations by Amnesty International (2015) and Human Rights Watch (2018), for instance, reveal physical evidence for the use of Western-made weapons in attacks on civilians in Yemen. As the scholars Bales and Mutscher (2019) argue, it was the military support from the West for the build-up of arms by the coalition that made the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen possible.

According to SIPRI's data on arms transfers, the United States has been the major provider of arms to Saudi Arabia over the last decade (SIPRI, 2020). Since the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, 73% of the Saudi's arms imports came from the US (SIPRI, 2020). The purpose of the indirect support of the US for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is two-fold; preventing the rise of Iran as a regional hegemon and benefiting economically from the sales of arms and military equipment (Gjoza & Friedman, 2019). The transfer of weapons between the two countries has been evident even before the outbreak of the civil war in Yemen. According to the Centre for International Policy (2018), in 2010 the US arms exports to Saudi Arabia reached $60.9 billion; the country's largest amount of sales to the Saudis to date. From 2009 through 2018, the US sold weapons to Saudi Arabia worth $138.9 billion (Centre for International Policy, 2018). The transfer of weapons increased under

the Trump Administration as in 2017, the US President revealed a $110 billion arms deal with the
Saudis which aimed at modernizing the Saudi Armed Forces over the next ten years (Todd, 2019).
The money will be spent on purchasing military equipment from major US defence contractors;
Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon (Ferro, 2019). The US government has claimed that the
military support to the coalition in Yemen is crucial for reducing civilian casualties on the ground
(Mazzetti & Schmitt, 2016). Since the beginning of the conflict, the US military has provided the
coalition with logistical support, gathering and sharing of intelligence, as well as military training
(Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). An important aspect of the US military role in Yemen is the
provision of mid-air refuelling for Saudi and UAE warplanes (Gjoza & Friedman, 2019). However,
instead of helping in limiting civilian casualties, aerial refuelling allowed Saudi pilots to practice
dynamic targeting, which in turn increased civilian fatalities on the ground (Gjoza & Friedman, 2019).
In November 2018, the US announced that it would stop its refuelling assistance to the Saudi-led
coalition in Yemen (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). However, the US remains a key ally for
Saudi Arabia. In 2019, President Trump vetoed a Congress resolution that would put an end to the US
military involvement in Yemen (Landler & Baker, 2019). This shows that common strategic interests
prevail over concerns for civilian casualties in Yemen, and "profit, it seems, is the core policy of the
US government and US military-industrial complex" (Admin, 2020, para.1).

Besides the United States, two of the biggest suppliers of arms equipment to Saudi Arabia
coming from Europe are France and the United Kingdom (Raducea, 2018). Even though both
countries are obliged to follow regulations under ATT and the EU CP, the decision-making on issuing
arms exports licenses remains on a national level (Raducea, 2018). The governments of Britain and
France argue that arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen are necessary to counter the
influence of Iran in the region, ensure national security and combat terrorism (Mielcarek, 2019). The
United Kingdom has taken a strong stance against imposing an embargo on arms transfers to Saudi
Arabia (Stavrianakis, 2017). About half of the UK arms exports go to Saudi Arabia and together with
the US, the two countries comprise a major part of the weapon imports of the Saudi Kingdom
(Stavriankis, 2017). In April 2015, a humanitarian aid warehouse of the non-governmental
organization Oxfam was bombed by coalition forces in Yemen (Musa, 2017). Right after the UN
Panel of Experts reported that the Saudi-led coalition is not complying with international
humanitarian law in its air campaign, the UK government signed a deal worth £1.7 billion to support
the Saudi Armed Forces (Musa, 2017). In 2017, a case of judicial review was brought against the
British government by Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), however, the case was dismissed due
to insufficient evidence for the indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the coalition of forces in
Yemen (Stavrianakis, 2018).

Likewise, France has been very open about its stance on preserving sovereignty over its
military exports (Mielacerak, 2019). The French government has justified its arms sales to Saudi
Arabia by stating that the country needs to protect its territory from external threats (Mielacerak,

2019). In 2018, for example, the country's arms sales to Saudi Arabia increased with 50% in
comparison to 2017 (Irish, 2015). A year later, the French non-governmental organization Disclose
published classified documents of the French government, revealing the use of French-made weapons
for causing harm to civilians in Yemen (Disclose, 2019). The "Yemen Papers" report found that two
warships made in France took part in the coalition-imposed naval blockade, which caused widespread
starvation and suffering of the civilian population (Disclose, 2019). In 2018, French-made tanks were
used in the battle of Hodeidah, causing the death of at least 55 civilians (Disclose, 2019).
Furthermore, the report revealed that approximately half million Yemenis were said to live close to
French artillery, thus being exposed to the risk of a potential artillery fire (Disclose, 2019). Despite
the findings of the leaked documents, the French government continues to supply weapons to the
Saudi-led coalition in Yemen (Disclose, 2019). It can be seen that the process of arms trade has turned
into a highly politicized issue, as major arms exporters are prioritizing economic benefits over
humanitarian concerns (Raducea, 2018). Some countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands and
Belgium, have ceased issuing licences to Saudi Arabia due to pressure exercised by the European
Union and the United Nations (Raducea, 2018). Nevertheless, there is a clear evidence of weapons
made in the US, the UK and France which are being used to indiscriminately target civilians in the
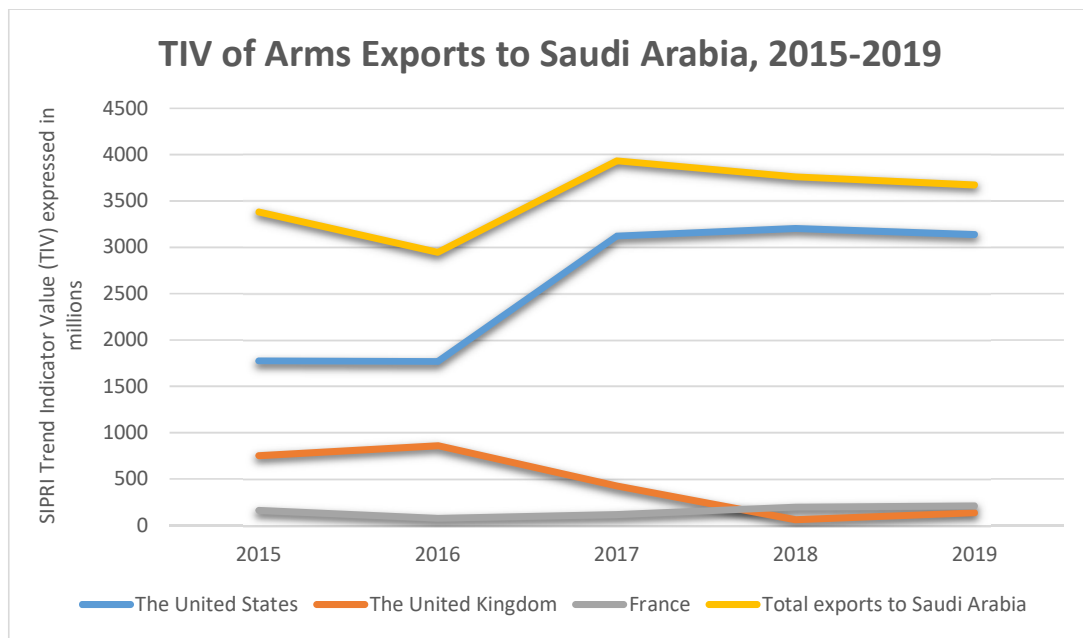Yemeni Civil War (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Figure 5. Simple line chart of arms exports to Saudi Arabia in millions of TIV. Data source:
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2020.

The human rights organizations Amnesty International (2015), Human Rights Watch (2018)
and the Yemeni-based Mwatana for Human Rights (2019) have conducted investigations on the

ground in Yemen in order to identify the presence of Western weaponry in Saudi-led attacks on civilian populations. Out of the twenty-seven attacks analysed by Mwatana for Human Rights (2019), weapons made in the US were found in twenty-five of the cases, and arms manufactured in the UK were found in five of the incidents. The attacks targeted civilian homes, gatherings of civilians, as well as education and health infrastructures (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). Similarly, Human Rights Watch identified munitions of US origin in at least twenty-four unlawful attacks launched by the coalition in Yemen (Human Rights Watch, 2018). On August 9, 2018, the Saudi-led coalition bombed a school bus, causing the death of dozens of children (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). The bomb used was a 227 kilograms' laser-guided MK82 manufactured by Lockheed Martin, one of the leading US defence contractors (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). That same year, the coalition of forces bombed a wedding in Yemen, killing at least 33 civilians (Admin, 2020). Evidence on the ground showed that an American-made bomb was used in the airstrike (Admin, 2020). The bomb was a guided GBU-12 Paveway II manufactured by the US company Raytheon (Admin, 2020). A similar Raytheon laser-guided bomb was used in a Saudi-led attack on a home in the city of Taiz in 2019, killing six civilians, three of them children (Admin, 2020). Despite the clear physical evidence of US-made weapons which caused numerous civilian casualties, the Pentagon has refused any involvement in targeting non-combatants in Yemen (Mazzetti & Schmitt, 2016). "We offer them couching, but ultimately it's their operation", argued a deputy commander of US Marines in the Middle East (Mazzetti & Schmitt, 2016, para.24).

According to the human rights organization Amnesty International, British-made cluster bombs were used by the coalition to target civilians in Yemen; an allegation which British ministers have denied (Wintour, 2016). However, the Saudi-led coalition admitted using UK-made cluster munitions, but it claimed that it has used them while respecting IHL (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). Cluster munitions are banned internationally due to their indiscriminate nature and the humanitarian consequences they inflict on the ground (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). Cluster bombs contain sub munitions which explode and scatter indiscriminately when released mid-air, thus hitting a large area of civilian infrastructure (Amnesty International, 2015). Amnesty International found evidence for the use of cluster bombs by the coalition in the city of Sadaa (Amnesty International, 2015). The Saudi-led coalition used UK-made cluster bombs in five incidents to strike civilian homes, farms, and fishing boats (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019). According to Mwatana for Human Rights (2019), "researchers found no evidence of a military target in any of these cases" (p.108). Through their continuous arms exports to Saudi Arabia, the US, the UK and France have violated their obligations under IHL and have contributed to the unlawful attacks by the coalition on the civilian population in Yemen (Mwatana for Human Rights, 2019).

In order to test the expectation that the use of Western-supplied weapons by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen caused an increase in indiscriminate targeting of civilians, data on Saudi's arms transfers gathered from SIPRI will be compared to evidence of civilian casualties collected from the

Yemen Data Project. The number of civilian fatalities covers the period from 2015 until 2019, whereas data on arms transfers also includes several years prior to the outbreak of the war, from 2010 until 2019. This is because this research project is taking into consideration the possibility that arms transferred prior to conflict can lead to the intensification of civilian targeting (Moore, 2012). Moreover, it is important to note that data on arms supply varies depending on the different indicators used by SIPRI to measure arms imports to Saudi Arabia: volume of TIV, transfers in billions of US$, or number of orders and deliveries made for a certain period (SIPRI, 2020). Nonetheless, a similar trend is observed when looking at arms imports measured by the volume of transfers in TIV and imports in billions of US dollars spent by the Saudis. According to data on both TIV and billions of US$ spent for weapons, there was a significant increase in transfers from the West in 2014, one year prior to the outbreak of the Yemeni Civil War (SIPRI, 2020). Both France and the United States increased their exports in millions of TIV to Saudi Arabia from 53 and 607 in 2013 to 169 and 1426 in 2014 respectively (SIPRI, 2020). A slight increase continued into 2015, followed by a drop in the volume of transfers in the following year (SIPRI, 2020). Another rise in imported weapons to Saudi Arabia from the West occurred in 2017, recording the highest amount of arms imports in TIV to the Saudis (SIPRI, 2020). From 2017 to 2019, the numbers remained consistent with no major fluctuations (SIPRI, 2020).

A different trend, however, could be observed when looking at SIPRI's trade register for Saudi Arabia, indicating deals with deliveries or orders from the West made from 2010 until 2019. Data shows that a major part of deliveries of conventional weapons from France and the US were made prior to the Saudi's military intervention in Yemen in 2015 (SIPRI, 2020). During the outset of the conflict in 2015, for example, France made just two deliveries to Saudi Arabia and the United States completed only three out of its sixty-one deliveries outlined in the SIPRI's register (SIPRI, 2020).

Conclusion

In terms of civilian casualties in Yemen, data from Yemen Data Project reveals that 2015 has been the most lethal year for civilians, with 3,876 fatalities in total (Yemen Data Project, 2020). Afterwards, a tendency of decrease of civilian deaths caused by coalition airstrikes could be observed (Yemen Data Project, 2020). According to ACLED, civilians in 2019 were less likely to be targeted as a result of political violence compared to 2015 (Sulz, 2019). Therefore, looking at the causal relationship between arms transfers to Saudi Arabia and targeting of civilians in Yemen, it can be seen that the empirical evidence does not establish a direct mechanism to prove that arms supply resulted in an immediate increase of attacks against civilians by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Since there was an increase in arms imports in the year prior to the conflict, it can be argued that the supply of weapons from the West enhanced the coalition's ability to launch a military air campaign in Yemen. After the unsuccessful intervention of Saudi Arabia in Yemen in 2009, for example, the Saudi Armed

Forces were modernized with weapons and equipment imported from the US (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). As outlined in the academic literature on arms transfers and intrastate conflict, arms import prior to a conflict increase the belligerent's ability to escalate violence against the adversary (Mehrl & Thurner, 2020; Pamp et al., 2018).

Even though the supply of weapons to Saudi Arabia from the West is not directly related to the increase of civilian casualties in Yemen, the variable of arms imports to the Saudis could be viewed as a causal factor in the overall reported fatalities from the armed conflict. A similar trend is observed in the amount of arms imported to Saudi Arabia compared to the number of overall casualties in Yemen. According to data from ACLED, both military and non-military casualties spiked at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018 (Sulz, 2019). Both ACLED and the UN Humanitarian Data Exchange reported the year of 2018 as the deadliest in the conflict since fatalities increased drastically compared to previous years (Sulz, 2019; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). This trend could be directly related to strategic developments during the conflict. At the beginning of 2018, the Saudi-led coalition launched a deadly offensive on the port city of Hodeidah, during which it used Western-made tanks and weaponry (Disclose, 2019). Therefore, it can be concluded that the increase in imports of weapons to Saudi Arabia in 2017 contributed to the increase in overall fatalities the following year.

Overall, the suggested hypothesis that the more Western countries supplied weapons and military equipment to Saudi Arabia, the more the Saudi-led coalition indiscriminately targeted civilians in Yemen is rejected. This is explained with the lack of a causal mechanism between the amount of arms imported to Saudi Arabia and the number of civilian casualties in Yemen. However, empirical evidence shows that there is a causal relationship between arms transfers and the overall civilian casualties in the conflict. Even though the supply of weapons by the West did not provide incentives for the Saudis to intensify targeting on civilians, it did boost their ability to launch airstrikes and this way to increase the total death toll of the Yemeni Civil War.

7. Conclusion

This research project aimed at answering the following research question: *"Why did the Saudi-led coalition indiscriminately target civilians in Yemen between 2015 and 2020?"* The purpose of this research question was to explain the causal factors which led to the victimization of civilians in the Yemeni Civil War. Providing an answer to this question also adds knowledge to the existing academic gap of the causes of indiscriminate targeting of civilians during armed conflicts. In order to find a causal explanation for the outcome of civilian targeting, this research project tested three hypothesized mechanisms which correspondingly led to three conclusions that could be drawn from the analysis.

First and foremost, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen targeted civilians as a cause of the Houthi missile campaign on Saudi territory. This research found that there is a causal connection between the timing of retaliatory attacks by the Houthis and the subsequent attacks by the coalition involving targeting the civilian population in Yemen. As it can be seen from the empirical evidence, the Houthis launched attacks on Saudi Arabia as a response to the latter's intervention in Yemen. The initial objective of the Saudi-led coalition to destroy the rebel's missile stockpile failed and the next stage of conflict escalation involved inflicting enough punishment on the civilian population so that the Houthis agreed to cease their missile campaign against the Saudis.

Second, the Saudi-led coalition targeted civilians indiscriminately through imposing a blockade on the territory of Yemen. It did so because of evidence presented by the UN Panel of Experts for the illegal transfer of weapons to the Houthis from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The coalition aimed at establishing control over seaports and airports by 'draining the sea' to block access of the Houthis to external support. However, the belligerent's intelligence-led interdiction failed and instead of disarming the adversary, the actions of the Saudi-led coalition provoked strong condemnation from the international community on the imposed blockade and the resulted victimization of civilians.

Finally, this research project concluded that transfer of weapons from Western countries to Saudi Arabia contributed to the overall civilian casualties, but did not cause an increase in indiscriminate targeting of civilians alone. The empirical evidence illustrates that imports of modern and precise weapons to Saudi Arabia increased the ability of the coalition to prevent the complete takeover of Yemen by the Houthis. In addition, the research findings show that the possession of Western-made arms by the coalition was a causal factor when engaging with military targets. This in turn led to an increase in the overall casualties from the conflict.

Although the targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition was caused by strategic developments and retaliation of the Houthis in the course of the civil war, there are factors influencing civilian targeting that go beyond the findings of this thesis. Because the conflict in Yemen is a multi-layered phenomenon, explanations such as the presence of various actors and tribal groups, the role of the international community as a peace mediator, and weaknesses in the Saudi's military capabilities should be taken into account. Nevertheless, the findings of this research point to the conclusion that as long as both the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis refuse to sit at the negotiating table, civilians in Yemen will continue to be indiscriminate targets of hostilities. For as long as elephants continue to fight, the grass will continue to suffer.

8. Discussion

The final chapter of this project will discuss the main research limitations, implications of the findings and venues for future academic research based on the conclusions.

Limitations

Throughout the research process, the author made deliberate choices which created certain limitations on the research depth and the scope of the analysis.

First of all, the research methodology of this project applied within-case analysis, which decreased the external validity of the thesis. This is because the findings outlined in the previous section are not automatically applicable to other cases of indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations during civil wars. Since the extent to which one can make generalizations from a single case study is rather limited (Yin, 2018), this means that the objectives of this research project have been limited in scope to the case of the Yemeni Civil War. Even though this limitation created a low external validity, it increased the internal validity of the findings. This is because a within-case analysis allowed for an in-depth, systematic study of each part of the suggested causal mechanisms. Tracing the existence of the three types of social mechanisms for the construction of a causal mechanism increased the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn from the studied phenomenon. This allowed for an accurate representation of the causal inferences and a detailed examination of the relationship between a cause and effect.

Secondly, the focus of this research project was limited to examining only three aspects as possible explanations for the causes of indiscriminate targeting by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. This way, alternative possible explanations were excluded due to time and space limitations. The scope of the research was further narrowed down by focusing solely on the role of Saudi Arabia in Yemen. This prevented the author from discussing indiscriminate targeting of civilians by the Houthi rebels as well as other factors influencing the strategic and political landscape of the conflict.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the findings of this thesis might have been influenced to some degree by the subjective sources of information used for the construction of the empirical analysis. This is because the author of this project was restricted to using open source information to test the hypothesized mechanisms. The information available from open sources on the Saudi-led process of civilian targeting in Yemen is very limited, thus creating potential limitations on the objectivity of findings on the motivations behind the coalition's actions in Yemen. However, this challenge was overcome by relying on credible sources such as reports from the United Nations and peer-reviewed academic sources.

Implications

The findings of this research project suggest that indiscriminate targeting of civilians can be used as a calculated military strategy to achieve certain political objectives during an armed conflict. Because of the limited academic studies on the causes of indiscriminate violence against civilians

(Kalyvas, 2000), this thesis provides a holistic explanation of why state actors resort to victimization of civilians when facing an insurgent threat. Even though the findings of this project are limited to the case of Saudi Arabia in the war in Yemen, the explanation of the causes of civilian targeting applies to the larger body of literature on mass killings and genocide in armed conflicts.

The first hypothesized mechanism of this project confirmed that the targeting of civilians by the Saudi-led coalition was caused by the Houthi missile campaign on Saudi territory. The coalition responded with retaliatory airstrikes on Yemen, which aimed at destroying the rebels' military capabilities (Samaan, 2020). However, this thesis found that the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure by the coalition did not occur simply as collateral damage. The Saudi-led coalition imposed punishment against the civilian population in order to coerce the Houthis to cease their missile attacks on the territory of Saudi Arabia. Since the coalition failed to destroy the Houthis' missile stockpiles during its initial air campaign in Yemen, the next stage of its coercive foreign intervention involved targeting both military and non-military targets without making a distinction or taking precautionary measures to limit civilian harm. This finding confirms the argument posed by Valentino (2004) in his work *"Final solutions: Mass killing and genocide"*. Valentino (2004) explains that coercive mass killings occur when conventional military operations of the belligerent fail to produce the desired results. Civilian targeting in that sense occurs as a strategy of later resort because imposing punishment on entire populations until the enemy surrenders is easier than confronting a guerrilla insurgency directly (Valentino, 2004). This argument also aligns with the findings of Pape (1996) and de Wijk (2014) who argue that punishment on civilians through air power occurs to compel the rebels to surrender to the demands of the coercer.

The findings of this research project also confirmed the second hypothesis that the Saudi-led coalition targeted civilians to deny access to external support to the rebels. Imposing a complete blockade on Yemen appeared a better alternative than deploying selective targeting which is limited to aiming the supply lines themselves. This finding is an illustration of the "draining the sea" approach described by the scholars Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay (2004). The Saudi-led coalition used starvation as a method of warfare by 'draining' the territory of Yemen in order to cut supply lines of external support to the Houthis. Since empirical evidence showed that the coalition has failed to cease the transfer of weapons to the rebels (United Nations Security Council, 2020), cutting supply lines through indirection is effective only if it is applied selectively and with enough precision (Downes, 2007).

Finally, the results of this thesis did not find a causal mechanism between the amount of weapons transferred to Saudi Arabia from the West and the number of civilian casualties in the conflict in Yemen. Even though Western-made weapons enhanced the coalition's capability of launching airstrikes on Yemen territory, the empirical data proved insufficient causality between arms transfers and civilian victimization. This is an important finding in the light of previous academic research conducted on this topic. Scholars such as Zhukov (2017), Moore (2012) and Mehrl and

Thurner (2020) argue that arms imports to government forces lead to an escalation of violence against the civilian population. The findings of this study illustrate that this is not always the case. In fact, arms imported prior to and not during the conflict in Yemen appear to be a causal factor in the intensification of indiscriminate targeting. Nevertheless, this thesis confirms the findings of Moore (2012) that transfer of weapons to government forces results in more casualties of both combatants and non-combatants.

Future prospects

Due to the limited scope of this research project, further research is necessary to identify and explain the causes of indiscriminate targeting of civilians in Yemen on a local, regional and global level. The purpose of this thesis was to connect the theory of military coercion to the strategy of coercive mass killings in the context of the Yemeni Civil War. Therefore, the findings of this project could be used as a stepping stone towards an in-depth research on the causes of indiscriminate targeting of non-combatants, which would allow for the generalization of results beyond a single case study. In addition, this research project found that there is a limited academic literature on the impact of arms transfers on civilian populations during armed conflicts. Further research applying a cross-case comparison would enable scholars to test and develop causal mechanisms on this particular issue.

Lastly, this Master thesis focused on a case study that happened to be significantly under researched in the academic field of crisis management and international security. Findings of this project could therefore provide venues for future research on the role of the international community in exercising pressure on Saudi Arabia in order to prevent human rights violations in Yemen. The effectiveness of 'naming and shaming' Western countries for the transfer of weapons to the coalition could be further examined. Overall, this study proved that the war in Yemen is a pressing issue that requires attention from both academic scholars and policy makers. For the thousands of civilian lives that could have been saved, this is a problem we can no longer afford to ignore.

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