Is There Anybody Out There?
Unpacking the Discourse Used in the Ignored Yemeni Civil War

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Caricature on Cover Page from “Shiite News”

Abstract

According to Middle Eastern analysts the Houthis—a Yemeni movement fighting its oppressive regime—are the region’s most effective military entity in the fight against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In January 2015, following domestic political turmoil, the Yemeni president fled from the Houthis to Saudi Arabia. Two months later, a Saudi-led coalition launched a military operation to defeat the Houthis and restore the internationally recognized Yemeni president—an operation that is still ongoing. Instead of viewing the Houthis as potential allies against AQAP—the US’ greatest enemy in its War on Terror—the US declared its support to the Saudi-led coalition without providing the public with any explanation concerning its foreign policy. In doing so, the US formed an unintended assistance to AQAP against their new common enemy: the Houthis. How does the US legitimize this seemingly inconsistent foreign policy? The short answer would be ‘national interest’. This research builds on Jutta Weldes’ poststructuralist understanding of the concept, which states that national interest is a social construct that emerges out of an actor’s representation. Therefore, revealing the meaning attributed to the Houthis should explain how attacking the Houthis fits US national interest. A discourse analysis was conducted to disentangle the US narrative surrounding the Houthis. It appears that the US legitimizes its foreign policy by presenting the Houthis as an indirect threat to its survival, by presenting the movement as the cause of Yemen’s instability, allowing AQAP to grow. This research asserts that by drawing on specific linguistic elements when describing the Houthis, and omitting the US’ role in creating the chaos, the Houthis’ contribution is presented as a self-evident threat instead of a social construct, which creates the perception that US interference is appropriate as it aims to eliminate the threat.

Keywords: Yemen, Houthis, United States, Saudi Arabia, AQAP, Sunni-Shiite divide, representation, national interest, legitimization, discourse analysis
Acknowledgement

The research you are about to read is the end product of my Masters in International Relations at Radboud University—the conclusion of my two years in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. This thesis is the result of my personal interest in the Middle East, my frustration with how its forgotten corners are getting neglected in international politics, and the knowledge I accumulated throughout my academic journey.

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Abbreviations

AQAP  al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula
AUMF  Authorization for Use of Military Force
CIA   Central Intelligence Agency
CNN   Cable News Network
IR    International Relations
ISIL  Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS  Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MENA  Middle East and Africa
UK    United Kingdom
UN    United Nations
UNSC  United Nations Security Council
US    United States
USA   United States of America
YPG   *Yekineyen Parastina Gel* (People’s Protection Unites)
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

After nearly four years of war, the Republic of Yemen increasingly came into the spotlight in 2018 when indiscriminate Saudi-led airstrikes killed twenty people at a wedding and forty children on a school bus. Yet, it was the gruesome murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018 that set off a loud uproar about unchecked Saudi aggression, pointing to the Yemeni war and the world’s worst humanitarian crisis it has caused. While some journalists have raised the possibility of a breaking point in Yemeni hostilities as a result of the Saudi crown prince being under international scrutiny for Khashoggi’s murder, real political action has not been taken at the time of this research.

Before 2018, the United Nations (UN) frequently referred to the conflict in Yemen as the largest human-made humanitarian disaster since 1945. However, repeatedly labelling the conflict as “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis” neither increased political debate on this conflict among state leaders, nor did it result in media coverage. Instead, states have ignored the crisis, eventually forgetting the human suffering of the poorest Middle Eastern country altogether. While poverty and poor governance already caused immense misery in Yemen, Amnesty International claims that the conflict following the Arab Spring dramatically exacerbated the situation.

The Yemeni civil war that erupted in March 2015 has its roots in the failure of a political transition that aimed to bring stability to the country after removing authoritarian president Saleh during

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4 Russel-Moyle, “Why is Saudi Arabia under fire over Jamal Khashoggi, but not Yemen?.”
the Arab Spring of 2011. Then vice-president Hadi took over in 2012 when president Saleh was forced to end his term. However, president Hadi struggled to deal with numerous issues—more specifically, different separatist movements in the north and south, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and the continuing loyalty of many military officers to former president Saleh. In light of the multiple actors striving for control in Yemen, Edwards claims that the tension between separatist movements and state officials within the territory clearly presents the conflict between tribalism and republicanism—a unique tension that Yemen has been facing more than its Arab neighbours throughout recent history.

In addition to local tensions, the United States (US) has been an influential foreign actor, because it has been carrying out attacks in Yemen for almost two decades. The US has carried out direct attacks against areas controlled by AQAP in Yemen in pursuit of its War on Terror. This was triggered in 2000, when the USS Cole was attacked by an al-Qaeda suicide bomber. After 9/11, president Bush officially declared the War on Terror and then-president Saleh allowed small groups of US Special Forces troops and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents to assist the fight against AQAP in Yemen. In 2002, the Yemeni government allowed US officials to launch their first missile strike in eastern Yemen, allegedly killing six terrorists. Following the Bush administration, the Obama administration continued to use the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) as a legal basis to justify its continuing attacks against AQAP in Yemen. However, the US interference in Yemen did not continue to be limited to its efforts surrounding its War on Terror, as the Obama administration declared in March 2015 its support to a Saudi-led coalition in its fight against the Houthi movement in Yemen.

In the rise towards the Yemeni civil war, current Sunni president Hadi struggled with accusations of oppressing Shiite minorities, corruption, high unemployment rates, and food insecurity in addition to accusations of lacking authority with respect to local movements, the military, and AQAP. The Houthi movement, a Zaydi Shiite Muslim minority that aims to resist the political...
exclusion and marginalization the Zaydi community in Yemen,\textsuperscript{19} has taken advantage of president Hadi’s weaknesses. Once violent protests re-emerged in 2012 due to frustration with president Hadi, the Houthis took over the capital in 2014, causing the president to escape to Aden and eventually flee to Saudi Arabia. What appeared to be an internal conflict, framed by religious tensions, was eventually presented as a regional proxy war of Iran and a coalition led by Saudi Arabia, both vying for regional domination. In this conflict, the Saudi-led coalition has been receiving logistical and intelligence support from the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and France.\textsuperscript{20} The Western-backed coalition accuses Iran of backing the Houthis and has used this as a justification to start the airstrike campaign—Operation Decisive Storm—in March 2015 to restore internationally recognized president Hadi.\textsuperscript{21} This Saudi-led coalition has been heavily criticized for alleged war crimes and tightening its blockade on Yemen in 2017, which has deprived a large part of the country of necessities such as nutrition and fuel.\textsuperscript{22}

When the US interferences in Yemen pursuant to the War on Terror and the support provided for the Saudi-led coalition are discussed separately, both have explanations and justifications that appear to be self-evident; however, when assessed together, the US involvement in the Yemeni conflict—both directly and indirectly—appears to be contradictory to its Middle Eastern foreign policy in general for the following two reasons.

To begin with, the US appears to be fuelling two opposing sides of the conflict, which creates a hospitable environment for growing terrorist organizations. In addition to attacking AQAP training camps, the US supports the Saudi-led coalition by selling immense arsenal of weapons,\textsuperscript{23} providing intelligence sharing, targeting assistance, advisory and logistical support in fighting the Houthis.\textsuperscript{24} However, it is often ignored that AQAP also attacks the Houthis, which results in an unintended US collaboration with AQAP in their battle against their new common enemy—the Houthis. Attacking the Houthis appears to be inconsistent, as the territorial expansion of al-Qaeda represents a greater threat to Western interest in the region compared to the Houthis.\textsuperscript{25} The Shiite minority has a national agenda

\textsuperscript{20} BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?”.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{22} Jamjoom, “Dengue Fever, Malaria Worsen Yemen Humanitarian Crisis”.  
\textsuperscript{25} Orkaby, “Houthi Who? A History of Unlikely Alliance in an Uncertain Yemen”.
which does not pose a threat to Western powers outside of Yemen.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, one would expect the US to focus on eliminating terrorism in the region instead of also fighting the Houthis, with whom they could combine their forces to eliminate AQAP. Following the infamous intervention in Iraq, the civil war in Syria has created suitable environments for the emergence of ISIL in the region.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, ISIL has become a target for the US in addition to al-Qaeda in its War on Terror in the Middle East. Considering that past interventions have created suitable environments for terrorist organizations, one would expect the US to abstain from creating such an environment additionally in Yemen.

Secondly, the US arms the Kurdish organization People’s Protection Units (\textit{Yekineyen Parastina Gel – YPG}) in its battle against ISIL in Syria;\textsuperscript{28} however, it does not do the same with the Houthi movement against AQAP in Yemen. This inconsistency is relevant because one could compare the Houthis in Yemen to the YPG in Syria, as both are fighting simultaneously their own oppressive leaders and radical Islamist terrorist organizations. Keeping this in mind, one would expect the US to arm the Houthis in order to eliminate terrorism in the region, especially considering the Houthis have emerged as one of the most effective military forces combating the expansion of AQAP in Yemen.\textsuperscript{29} Initially, Undersecretary of Defence Michael Vickers promised a productive informal intelligence cooperation with the Houthis against al-Qaeda,\textsuperscript{30} which makes the unexpected US alliance with the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis all the more puzzling.

In sum, the US directly attacks AQAP, but also forms an unintended \textit{de facto} collaboration with AQAP by supporting the Saudi-led coalition in fighting the Houthis. Moreover, the US supports the YPG in Syria to fight their common enemy ISIL; however, it does not do the same with Houthis in Yemen against AQAP. Overall, the inconsistency seen in the US foreign policy with respect to its motives on the War on Terror, specifically in Yemen, motivates this thesis in seeking to answer the following question:

\begin{quote}
\textit{How did the government of the United States of America rationalize and justify support for the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis to its public, considering that its interference is seemingly inconsistent with its War on Terror?}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} In addition to the expansion of AQAP, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is also increasing its presence in Yemen. ISIL was initially a split-off branch of al-Qaeda but later evolved into a competing separate identity. The conflicts between the two terrorist organizations has led to additional chaos and civilian suffering in Yemen, as it has in the rest of the region (\textit{Ibid}).
\textsuperscript{29} Orkaby, “Houthi Who? A History of Unlikely Alliance in an Uncertain Yemen”.
\textsuperscript{30} Bruce Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?,” Brookings, accessed March 18, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/18/who-are-the-houthis-and-why-are-we-at-war-with-them/.
Relevance

The scientific relevance of this topic revolves around the importance of justifications provided by governments to their public when legitimizing their violation of foreign sovereignty. In the case of liberal democracies, it is crucial to provide the public with legitimate justifications, since such regimes require public support when interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. A foreign policy needs to appear self-evidently appropriate, as such an image implies that the actions taken by the government are fitting and are therefore less likely to be protested by the public of the intervening state. In the Yemeni case, the US public has stayed silent. In order to explain how the US pursues this seemingly inconsistent foreign policy without facing any protests, the analysis will make use of a theoretical framework that allows the assessment of social forces such as legitimacy. Thus, this analysis will be based on Jutta Weldes’ reflectivist approach to ‘national interest’ in order to make sense of the ‘legitimate image’ of the US foreign policy that seems to be inconsistent for the abovementioned reasons.

Legitimacy, the belief that an actor is conducting its practices in line with the values shared by the broader community, is considered crucial to answering the abovementioned research question, as the Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 was a clear example of justifying the violation of territorial sovereignty through wide-spread US support despite the lack of approval from the UN Security Council (UNSC)—a clear breach of international law. Since the US identifies as a liberal democracy, decision-makers appeal to public support when waging wars. Thus, as the government needs public support to legitimate an invasion, it needs to mobilize public support within society. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration clearly fulfilled this, as an Iraq invasion was favoured by 62% of the US population. Once the invasion officially started, public support rose to 72%. However, this support severely dropped once Saddam Hussein was removed from power and the coalition forces failed to find

31 In this context, legitimacy is understood as an authority characterized by its people as having the right and justification to exercise its power the way it does.
35 Lieberfeld, “Theories of Conflict and the Iraq War,” 7.
weapons of mass destruction and links between Saddam and al-Qaeda.39 This failure created the perception that the Bush administration’s representation of the Iraqi regime may have misled the public about the threat it posed to the US public.40 This example hints at how interpretation of threats can influence the perception of interventions. The American people had this experience in the near past, and the UNSC has once again not authorized any interventions in Yemen by the US. Therefore, one would expect the US public to oppose the inconsistent US interferences in Yemen, unless actors in Yemen are successfully posed as a threat vis-à-vis the US. Nonetheless, it appears that a majority of the public is unaware of the US intervention in Yemen altogether.41

The societal relevance lies in the fact that it is unacceptable that the US interference in the “largest human-made humanitarian disaster since 1945”42 is ignored by the US public and the rest of the world. Members of Senate finally objected to the unjustified indirect US intervention in Yemen three years after it started;43 however, this objection did not lead to additional opposition within the Senate nor the US public. Similarly, Khashoggi’s murder has not resulted in any measures to prevent the Yemeni suffering from increasing.44 While Yemeni domestic politics alone has caused much suffering in the past, the Saudi-led coalition supported by the US drastically worsens the suffering by restricting, or at least delaying, imports of essential goods while also openly attacking Yemeni territory. Some argue that this coalition would not be able to take such drastic measures for so long without the support of the most powerful state of the world,45 suggesting that the US is a crucial contributing actor in the Yemeni humanitarian disaster. It is also suggested that because of its world-wide influence, the US has the power to shape how the Yemeni conflict is perceived in the international arena.46

Currently, at least 10,000 civilians—a figure that has not been updated in years and is likely to be significantly higher—have been killed since the civil war started in 2015.47 Due to dramatic food shortages in the import-dependent country, Yemenis are increasingly susceptible to diseases such as

40 Ibid.
43 Al Jazeera, “US senators in bid to end support for Saudi in Yemen war.”
44 Russel-Moyle, “Why is Saudi Arabia under fire over Jamal Khashoggi, but not Yemen?.”
45 Washington Post, “The United States’ role in the crisis in Yemen”.
46 Ibid.
cholera, malaria, dengue, and diphtheria. This drastically increases the number of vulnerable people in need of aid and protection, who are deprived of them as a result of Saudi-led blockades.

It appears the strong alliance between the US and Saudi Arabia precedes the well-being of the Yemeni people, most likely because the poorest Middle Eastern country does not offer any natural resources, nor poses the threat of a refugee wave to the Western world. This was once again re-emphasized by the fact that the current US president Donald Trump seems rather unwilling to jeopardize his close ties—based on arms deals—with the Saudi monarch. Considering that framing can play an important role in how an identity or action is perceived and thus presented, the next section will provide the theory that will guide the research in answering how the US government explains and justifies its intervention in this catastrophic image.

Theoretical Framework

‘National interest’ is generally invoked to legitimize actions in controversial contexts. For such a justification to be effective, the decision made in the self-interest of a nation needs to appear self-evident to the audience. This is essential, because the self-evident nature in which responses are portrayed are more likely to convince the audience that the actions taken are appropriate. But how does a public know that a foreign policy is indeed appropriate?

Weldes states that national interest is, in fact, never self-evident. Instead, she argues that national interest should be understood as a social construct—one that emerges from the representation of an actor. According to Weldes, representation relies on two dimensions, namely articulation and interpellation. The former refers to the process in which meaning is ‘produced out of extant cultural raw materials or linguistic resources’. In this process, a specific meaning is attributed to an action. When successfully repeated, the attributed elements appear self-evident—an objective and observable ‘given’ so to say. State officials create representations by using cultural and linguistic resources, in which they define themselves in relation to the ‘Other’. Irrespective of the accuracy of representations,

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48 Jamjoom, “Dengue Fever, Malaria Worsen Yemen Humanitarian Crisis”.
49 Niarchos, “How the U.S. Is Making the War in Yemen Worse”.
51 Ibid, 284.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid, 285.
55 Ibid.
the meaning given to an actor is produced by using specific linguistic elements that help persuade the audience of a certain—perhaps threatening—perception of a specific Other.56

The second phase of the dual process of representation—interpellation—refers to the process of self-identification with the subject-position constructed in the discourse. This leads the actor to perceive itself as the ‘subject’—the ‘we’—of the relevant discourse.57 Thus, the actor comes to recognize a shared identity provided by the discourse.58 For this to occur, the subject first has to recognize the discourse as an appropriate one it can relate to and endorse.59 Then, the subject must recognize itself as the articulated subject that is part of the discourse.60 This will lead the actor to perceive the Self in relation to the Other’s constructed position. Once the audience perceives the relevant discourse as appropriate and comes to identify with it, the audience intrinsically consents the construction of the relevant representations. Consequently, the consent simultaneously enforces the ‘self-evident’ appearance of the Self’s actions, as these actions appear to be ‘self-evidently’ in the interest of the Self.

In short, in order to create representations in specific settings that entail specific national interest, certain linguistic and cultural resources must be articulated, the audience must believe that it emerges out of an appropriate discourse, and lastly, this audience must come identify with the articulated subject through interpellation, leading the actor to perceive the Self it identifies with vis-à-vis the socially constructed Other.

Methodology

In order to reveal how the Houthis are presented as a self-evident enemy of the US, Chapter 3 will illustrate a poststructuralist tool: a discourse analysis. The analysis will attempt to disentangle the narrative framing of the Houthis, ultimately shedding light on how a legitimate image of the seemingly inconsistent foreign policy emerged.

For this analysis, it is important to know that various social actors contribute to the construction of our perceived reality through discourse. This specific analysis will focus on the role the media had in constructing the Houthi identity with regards to the US and will narrow its analysis to a widely read online media outlet: Cable News Network (CNN). It will cover the period between 2011, when the

56 Ibid, 286.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Houthis were introduced by Western media, and 2015, when the US officially declared its support to the Saudi-led coalition without an explanation. The period is relevant, because the Houthis changed from being potential collaborators to ‘self-evident’ enemies of the US.

The discourse analysis will ideally reflect what kind of ‘appropriate’ image the US public received from CNN with respect to its government’s interferences in Yemen in the given period. The results will be used to assess whether the internal conflict in Yemen was presented in a specific threatening manner to the US public, which may have potentially legitimized US actions.

Before starting the analysis, Chapter 2 will elaborate on the theoretical framework that will guide the research throughout the analysis. Chapter 3 will illustrate how the discourse analysis will be conducted. Chapter 4 will assess the discourse analysis findings in light of Weldes’ assumptions of ‘national interest’ and the context in which the conflict occurs. Lastly, Chapter 5 will conclude the thesis by shedding light on how the self-perception of the US changed vis-à-vis the Houthis between 2011 and 2015 in order to understand how the Houthis changed from being potential collaborators to ‘self-evident’ enemies of the US.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“The cleavage between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is necessary to salve conscience and maintain claims to a lack of culpability, but highly problematic, given that ‘the exclusion ... happens at the level of presumption, as an epistemological condition of political judgement’ and is therefore rarely examined or problematized.”

The research question provided in the previous chapter requires an understanding of how a seemingly inconsistent US foreign policy is conveyed and justified to the public. The answer will shed light on why the foreign policy appears to be appropriate, which may help understand how it is possible that the US public is indifferent/unaware about the US foreign policy in Yemen.

For foreign policies to be carried out without strong public consent, there must be an observable and self-evident threat, so that the response of the country in question seems in its ‘national interest’. The concept of national interest has a prominent place in the discourse surrounding public affairs because it is often used to explain and justify state action. Political actors tend to discuss their goals in terms of national interest, which can effectively mobilize public support in controversial practices. Thus, national interest can act as a legitimizer.

This chapter will first explain what national interest entails and will reflect on its origins. This will preface the realist and liberal approaches, and their respective criticisms. The next section will move towards a reflectivist explanation of national interest, more specifically Weldes’ understanding thereof. Finally, the chapter will conclude by applying Weldes’ understanding of national interest to the Yemeni case-study, which will provide case-specific expectations for the seemingly inconsistent US foreign policy in Yemen.

General Introduction to ‘National Interest’

The different meanings and functions attributed to national interest in various theories of international politics lead to the lack of a generally agreed upon definition, which makes it an elusive

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63 Ibid.
65 Burchill goes so far as to claim that despite being widely used as a legitimation tool, especially within the sphere of national security policy, the concept is largely ‘devoid of substantive meaning and content’. 66 Despite the lack of a single definition, the concept remains central to international relations (IR) theories because of its explanatory burden of state action. 67

Burchill argues that there are both objective and subjective approaches to national interest. Objectivists argue that there are permanent objective criteria under which foreign policies must be evaluated and compared, requiring interests to be constant. 68 On the contrary, subjectivists hold that the priorities and preferences of decision-makers change. Because interests are based on the interpretations of governments, national interest is subject to change over time. 69

The following section will briefly explain the origins of the concept and how it developed over time.

**Historical Developments**

Burchill observes that the historical and intellectual origins of national interest are virtually inseparable from how rulers used to justify their state policy. 70 Claims based on national interest can be found in Italy in the 16th century. 71 The concept is generally traced back to Machiavelli’s work, in which national interest essentially encompassed the interest of monarchs and royal courts. 72 This understanding was challenged by Rousseau in the 18th century when he rejected the idea that the ‘person of the sovereign or the ruling group’ embodies the nation’s interest. 73 Instead, he claimed that ‘sovereignty … [is] no more than the exercise of the general will … and the general will is concerned only with the common interest [of the people]’. 74,75 Thus, once the nation came to be understood as an independent political community, the concept of national interest expanded from encompassing the interest of the monarch to the interest of the entire society, i.e. the people. 76 As of this point, the common interests of political communities was understood as the basis of decision and policy-making, because

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73 *Ibid*.
75 Unfortunately, Rousseau does not elaborate on the content of common interest. He has no doubt that common interest exists and continues that it forms the very basis of legitimate behaviour by political communities. (*Ibid*).
an independent political community was understood as the sole legitimate political unit in international affairs.\textsuperscript{77}

Having covered the origins of the concept, the following section will elaborate on the different functions the vague concept has in different IR theories. This will start off with the realist approach, as national interest is the very foundation of realist and neo-realist theories.\textsuperscript{78}

\section*{An Exogenous and Fixed Approach to ‘National Interest’}

The realist tradition has done more to define and promote national interest than any other IR theory.\textsuperscript{79} In realist approaches, the use of power in pursuit of national interest is praised, while morality, law, and public opinion are criticized for constraining world affairs.\textsuperscript{80} Considering that realism is built on positivist ontology, proponents argue that there is an objective world ‘out there’.\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, realists believe that information can be accessed and processed objectively, which makes a cost-benefit analysis possible. Furthermore, realists understand national interest as static,\textsuperscript{82} which is in line with the objectivist approach to national interest.

In a general sense, realism argues that the main actors of the world stage are legally sovereign, equal, and unitary states.\textsuperscript{83} Within this inter-state framework, there are no actors above these sovereign units. Lacking an overarching authority, these actors find themselves in an anarchic environment, which results in a self-help system—a system in which states can only rely on their own military capacity to achieve the ends they seek.\textsuperscript{84} In this self-help system, states struggle for power among each other and thus oppose each other, which requires foreign policies of nations to refer to their own survival as minimum standards.\textsuperscript{85} Morgenthau expresses this by stating that the fundamental national interest of any state is to ‘protect [its] physical, poetical, and cultural identity against encroachment by other nations’.\textsuperscript{86} Since realists argue that national interest is inferred from the self-help character of the international arena, the concept is understood as exogenous—a given. Additionally, national interest is

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{80} Lawrence S. Wittner, “Pursuing the ‘National Interest’: The Illusion of Realism,” Reviews in American History 13, no. 2 (1985): 282, JSTOR.
\textsuperscript{81} Burchill, The National Interest in International Relations Theory, 196.
\textsuperscript{83} Owens et al., “Introduction: From International Politics to World Politics,” 5.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 5.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
understood as ‘permanent … [and] can be identified as objectives which should determine the conduct of the foreign policy of states’. 87

Liberalism criticizes the realist approach to national interest for understanding the concept as a single, collective interest. Liberals hold that the only national interest that is projected to the public is the national interest of whichever societal preference or bureaucratic organization dominates the decision-making process. 88 Since liberals do not interpret states as unitary actors, it is not feasible to argue that there is a single national interest, as the theory holds that each set of bureaucracy has its own interest inferred from the structure it finds itself in. 89 Additionally, liberals do not see national interest as merely restricted to military terms and also stress the importance of addressing economic, technological, and environmental issues. 90 These can best be achieved through cooperation, which is optimally achieved through international institutions. 91 With respect to the objective-subjective divide, liberals mostly agree that foreign policy goals are objective, i.e. minimal state intervention, free trade, and unfettered commerce. 92 These theorists are highly suspicious of the subjectivity of interests, because subjective interests, caused by changing regimes that introduce different interpretations, merely represent the interests of the change to other dominant groups.

Even though liberal thought moves beyond the realist understanding of national interest and widens its scope, it can still be criticized for also taking an exogenous and static approach to the concept. According to liberalism, the structure of international politics is seen as an order that emerges from multi-level interactions comprised of laws, agreed norms, international regimes, and institutional rules, instead of relying merely on the distribution of powers. Even though the structure the actors find themselves in is understood differently by realism and liberalism, both dictate that the national interest of actors emerges from such structures and that it is static. 93 The reason national interest is understood in different terms is merely because the approaches do not agree on the nature of the structure from which the interests emerge. It is against this backdrop that the reflectivist criticism of these two approaches is directed against.

87 Ibid, 11.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Burchill, The National Interest in International Relations Theory, 150.
Reflectivist Criticism

Despite agreeing on the explanatory burden of national interest, Weldes argues that there are two fundamental problems with the traditional understandings of national interest. Firstly, she argues that defining the concept as the security and survival of a state, or the attainment of economic, political and environmental goals, is rather vague.\(^9\) The deductive determination of national interest—the exogenous nature of national interest—is too vague and ‘all-inclusive’.\(^9\) The realist understanding argues that states should pursue security; however, this explanation in no way implies what exactly the state should do to reach this end.\(^9\) Thus, the conception does not explain the adoption of a particular policy over an alternative one that could reach the same outcome.\(^9\)

According to Weldes, the second problem with the traditional understanding of national interest is that it ignores the crucial role of interpretation.\(^9\) This raises an epistemological concern. According to realism and liberalism, reality is directly observable and accessible, suggesting that national interest can be accurately recognized and measured.\(^9\) This, however, ignores the fact that threats to security are not necessarily self-evident. Instead, according to Weldes, the perception of threats to security heavily rely on the interpretation of foreign policymakers.\(^9\) Since the role of interpretation is ignored, traditional approaches are not able to explain why a particular situation is understood to be a threat to the interest of an actor while another is not. Consequently, these approaches are also not able to explain why certain actions are or are not taken in response to these threats.\(^9\)

The following section will provide a reflectivist approach to national interest with the goal of addressing the abovementioned criticism. This will illustrate that the concept can be understood as endogenous and dynamic once the importance of human agency is incorporated in IR theories.

An Endogenous and Dynamic Approach to ‘National Interest’ – the importance of social interaction

Constructivists understand national interest as a social construct instead of a given.\(^9\) The approach addresses ontology differently from the previous mentioned approaches because it stresses

\(^{94}\) Weldes, “Constructing National Interest,” 278.
\(^{95}\) Ibid.
\(^{96}\) Ibid.
\(^{97}\) Ibid.
\(^{98}\) Ibid.
\(^{99}\) Ibid.
\(^{100}\) Ibid.
\(^{101}\) Ibid.
the role of human agency in international politics.\textsuperscript{103} Therefore, social constructivists argue that there is no \textit{a priori} social world or national interest ‘out there’ to be discovered.\textsuperscript{104} Instead, according to constructivists, actors are produced and reproduced by their environment, while simultaneously shaping it.\textsuperscript{105} Thus, through the process of interaction, actors produce and reproduce the social structure they find themselves in.\textsuperscript{106} Social facts, those that are produced by virtue of all relevant actors agreeing on them,\textsuperscript{107} play a crucial role, as neither actors involved in international politics, nor the structure they act within, can be separated from the context of their normative meaning.\textsuperscript{108} Social facts cause actors to observe reality in certain ways and cause them to define themselves contextually.\textsuperscript{109} Unlike material factors, social ones rely on mutual agreement, which is all too often taken for granted.\textsuperscript{110} However, considering that human agreement is subject to change, it is crucial to understand that social factors that appear self-evident—in this case, national interest—will only last as long as they are collectively agreed upon. In this light, constructivists aim to understand the origins of social constructs aiming to explain \textit{how} it is possible that it appears natural, and \textit{how} this construction changes over time.\textsuperscript{111}

With regards to the objective-subjective divide, social constructivism holds that objectivity of national interest is impossible because actors always interpret their choices. Rejecting the possibility of objective interest moves the understanding of national interest further into the reflectivist direction—into the poststructuralist camp. This view holds that in order to understand the evolution of national interest, the concept must be understood in terms of political discourse.\textsuperscript{112} Having many common characteristics with certain strands of constructivism, poststructuralism is significantly different in that it holds that it is not possible to have direct access to ‘truth’, while certain branches of constructivism claim to have revealed some form of ‘fundamental truth about the world’.\textsuperscript{113} Considering that interests always involve human perception and interpretation, Beard argues that there is an indisputably subjective dimension to the concept.\textsuperscript{114} Therefore, there is no basis for an objective formula that can be applied to the concept and thus ‘there is no such thing as an objective reality called the national

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[104] Burchill, \textit{The National Interest in International Relations Theory}, 196.
\item[105] \textit{Ibid}.
\item[106] \textit{Ibid}.
\item[109] \textit{Ibid}, 146.
\item[111] \textit{Ibid}, 150.
\item[112] Burchill, \textit{The National Interest in International Relations Theory}, 9.
\item[114] \textit{Ibid}, 10.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In order to understand how national interests are interpreted, the relation between identity and interests requires a closer look, which will be introduced next.

The Link between Identity and Interest

On the one hand, identities of actors inform interests, which then determine their actions. On the other hand, shared ideas, beliefs, and values influence state behaviour, which in turn shape identities. Thus, one must study how an actor is constructed in the first place in order to understand how its interest is formed. Fixing the differences between actors establishes the identity of the Self, as it allows to define the Self in terms of the Other. The Others can have a positive or negative identification, which respectively establishes alliances and hostilities. This hints that the Self perceives itself as equal or superior with respect to the Other. Defining the Self in terms of the Other allows to construct the national interest with respect to the Other. Thus, when social interactions are subject to change, they result in a variety of interests.

Because the origin of interest is located within the theoretical account of identity, the concept is considered endogenous. Interpretation helps make sense of which actors are threats to the Self, since threats do not exist independently from the relation between two or more actors. Similarly, identity interpretation helps decision-makers imagine what is possible in international relations. Thus, in order to understand how an identity affects the construction of its interests with respect to another state, one must investigate the social context in which the identities are constructed. Before moving on to Weldes’ reflectivist understanding of national interest, which will explain how representation is constructed and thus leads to the emergence of interest, the following section will briefly reflect on why reflectivism is a suitable approach to guide the discourse analysis in Chapter 4.

117 Ibid.
118 Ibid 196.
119 Ibid, 232.
120 Ibid, 228.
121 Ibid, 227.
122 Ibid, 232.
123 Burchill, The National Interest in International Relations Theory, 196.
126 Ibid, 1.
127 Ibid, 105.
Why Reflectivism

The ability to address and explain change in national interest makes a reflectivist theory the most suitable approach for the Yemeni case. Western media showed interest in the Houthis for the first time during the Arab Spring in 2011. The Obama administration initially implied that it was willing to informally collaborate with the Houthis in their common battle against AQAP. Then, the same administration officially backed the Saudi-led coalition in 2015 against the Houthis. Weldes’ reflectivist understanding of national interest is able to guide the empirical analysis with the aim of shedding light on how the identity of the Houthis changed from potential collaborators to enemies, which in turn implied a change in US national interest between 2011 and 2015.

The second strength of reflectivism with regards to the Yemeni case is that it holds that actors act according to the ‘logic of appropriateness’, not the ‘logic of consequences’. The former suggests that actors make substantive efforts to appear legitimate in the international arena in order to avoid conflicting responses from Others. Thus, according to proponents, the US will try to construct its interference in Yemen as consistent and legitimate in order to avoid confrontation from other states, which would also explain the lack of protest from the US public. Actors strive to be seen as complying with conventions and norms, and try to explain and justify contradictory actions, as greater legitimacy results in more cooperation with others for the implementation of such policies. This re-emphasizes that power is not merely material. Ideational power plays a crucial role, namely in the power of fixing meaning and the construction of identities. This aspect of the theory is crucial for this thesis, as revealing the meaning constructed and fixed for the Houthis will help how US actions in Yemen appear legitimate.

The following section will elaborate further on the previously introduced link between identity and interest by building on Weldes’ work, which will clarify how controversial actions can appear legitimate when constructed in certain ways.

Constructing National Interest – the Importance of Representation

According to Weldes, national interest emerges out of the sense national officials make of their international environment. National interest is created and re-created as ‘a meaningful object, out of shared meanings through the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it’. Since meaning emerges from intersubjective relations between actors, it is crucial to assess how

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130 Ibid,151.
132 Ibid.
actors are represented in specific intersubjective relations. Representations of actors are important because they hint at who ‘our enemies’ are vis-à-vis ‘us’ and consequently the ways in which ‘we’ are threatened by ‘them’ and how ‘we’ need to deal with ‘them’.\textsuperscript{133} In short, representation establishes a specific kind of subject, with a particularly interpreted identity, and an interest that is associated with the interpreted identity. Such a construction is possible due to a wide variety of already existing cultural and linguistic resources used to create representation.\textsuperscript{134} The importance of representation lies in the fact that it able to reflect a particular action or belief appropriate by providing the necessary conditions. These conditions specify what constitutes a threat and what needs to be protected from this threat.\textsuperscript{135}

In order to give more meaning to this explanation, it is crucial to understand what representation exactly entails, especially because representation in itself implies national interest.\textsuperscript{136} Representation itself is constructed by a social process that has two dimensions: articulation and interpellation. The former links linguistic elements with a representation of reality,\textsuperscript{137} and the latter is a process that contributes to the creation of self-evidence, as it results with the self-identification of individuals with the subject-position presented.\textsuperscript{138} More specifically, articulation refers to the process in which meaning is created and fixed temporarily by means of connotations provided by linguistic elements.\textsuperscript{139} Consequently different labels and ideas used in specific discourses create associative chains within a culture.\textsuperscript{140,141} This contributes to the production and reproduction of reality and thus foreign policy discourse.

The process of articulation produces contextually specific representations of a situation.\textsuperscript{142} Once a new meaning is temporarily produced, its repetition is essential for it to appear ‘normal’. The repetition of a specific articulation results in one discourse being popularized over alternative ones.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, the multiplicity of discourses means that meanings can be contested. One must not forget that the associations between the linguistic elements and the phenomenon are socially constructed and history-specific.\textsuperscript{144} Because an association is constructed between linguistics and national interest, articulations are not static and can be ‘uncoupled and then re-articulated’, which is in line with the transformations

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 283.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 282.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 303-304.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 304.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 284.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 284.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 117.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
that reflectivism can explain.\textsuperscript{145} The possibility of transformation and change can be detected once alternative representations in other discourses are made visible. However, as long as specific articulations are successfully repeated, it is harder to see possible excluded alternatives. As a result, representations appear persuasive due to the set of associations that come with them.\textsuperscript{146} In this specific case, it is likely that the repetition of a threatening Houthi articulation dominated alternative articulations of the Houthis that suggest that the movement consists of freedom-fighters. This, in turn, may have created a just perception of attacking the Houthis indirectly by backing the Saudi-led coalition. This expectation emphasizes that national interest is not an external reality that exists outside the human consciousness and instead is socially constructed by the meaning given to it.\textsuperscript{147} Indeed, national interest can mean ‘whatever the user wishes’ it to be.\textsuperscript{148}

The second stage of the dual process, interpellation, is a process in which the created identity or subject-position is ‘hailed’ into the subject. The representation of the Self with respect to a specific Other is essential, because an entity comes to identify with its socially constructed identity.\textsuperscript{149} If entities recognize themselves in the socially constructed identity, it means the articulation appears appropriate to the public. Once an articulation is considered appropriate, it is said to have been ‘naturalized’.\textsuperscript{150} In other words, the socially constructed representation appears self-evident. Here, self-evidentiality makes it appear as if identity and national interest can be objectively observed and measured. Since legitimacy often derives from the unquestioned identification an entity has with its representation, interpellation reveals why some statements made by state officials are accepted,\textsuperscript{151} even when they appear controversial. Additionally, the process of interpellation is assisted by multiple subject-positions. Claims about national interest can appear necessary because the audience is already interpellated into a variety of already existing subject-positions.\textsuperscript{152} Specifically in the case of the US national interest, a classic example is that the US identifies as the ‘protector of individual rights and liberties’.\textsuperscript{153} Thus, it appears self-evident that ‘we, the US’ should free ‘oppressed societies who look to us for leadership’,\textsuperscript{154} even if it requires intervention. Similarly, the US often represents itself as a ‘liberal and multicultural [nation]’, who is ‘the protector of individual rights and beliefs’.\textsuperscript{155} Because of these attributions, it is perceived as ‘peaceful and defensive’.\textsuperscript{156} When the average American comes to identify with this articulated identity, the US intervening abroad in order to bring peace and democracy appears self-

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 286.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 275.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid, 287.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 288.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 126-127.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 126.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
evident, and may be perceived as unproblematic its audience. Therefore, representations that are understood as plausible and persuasive, are likely to be ‘hailed’ into the subject.157

In sum, this section suggests that the dual process of articulation and interpellation creates an unquestioned identity of the Self with respect to the Other in the international arena. The representation of the Self with respect to the Other is crucial, because it implies the national interest of the Self.158 Once the articulation of the Self is successfully repeated, the audience must come to identify with the repeated, specific articulation—it is interpellated. Creating this self-evident representation the audience identifies with simultaneously creates consent, because identifying with something implies that one believes that the representation is appropriate.159 Thus, the interpellated construct receives consent.160 Regardless of how ‘objective and normal’ this national interest may appear, one should not forget that it a social construct.161 It merely appears to be objective truth, because it has been internalized through the dual process of constructing representation. Consequently, while traditional approaches would argue that national interest is deduced from the structure and then endowed with legitimacy, constructivists suggest that legitimacy is achieved during the very process of the construction of national interest.162

The next section will provide case-specific expectations based on Weldes’ understanding of national interest for the Yemeni case, which will be assessed by a discourse analysis in Chapter 4.

**US Foreign Policy in the Republic of Yemen**

Some scholars argue that communism as the ‘Other’ was replaced by Islam after the Cold War.163 Even before 9/11, Islamic activities were interpreted as threats to US national interests.164 Messari argues that the presumptions of US policy-makers about how ‘the Islam really is’ results in Islam being perceived as being incompatible with democracy.165 Due to this self-declared incompatibility, Islam is perceived as inherently threatening to the democratic US.166 Therefore, the negative representation of Islam frames the religion as a threat to ‘the West, its civilizations, and its values’.167 Additionally, Iran has been specifically considered a dangerous Islamic regime because its

159 *Ibid*.
164 *Ibid*.
166 *Ibid*.
similarity to the USSR—its nuclear power—represents a major threat to the existence of the US.\textsuperscript{168} Therefore, even though the Houthis do not directly attack the US, the Yemeni movement is expected to be represented as a threat to US national interests by framing the Other as an extension of the Iranian regime.

Since the US identifies with being a ‘civilized Western’ global leader who ‘will bring peace and stability’ to the Middle East, one would expect that the US would alter its policies in order to be perceived as legitimate when interfering in another Middle Eastern country. This is especially the case because of the widespread agreement on the fact that Operation Iraqi Freedom was retrospectively regarded illegitimate. Thus, it is expected that the US will present its collaboration with sovereign states part of the Saudi-led coalition as in line with international law, thus introducing itself as a legitimate actor. It is also expected that the US will justify its interference with the War on Terror, just like it has in most of its interferences in the Middle East.

For the US foreign policy in Yemen to appear self-evident to the US audience, the Houthis are expected to be represented as threatening actors throughout the dominant discourse. In turn, the US will be represented as the ‘civilized’, ‘the freedom and liberty protector’, ‘Westerner’, who strives to bring peace and stability to Yemen. This stability is mostly likely to be framed as being in its own national interest, as Islamist terrorist organizations, who are perceived as a great threat to the safety and survival of the US, are likely to flourish in failed states.\textsuperscript{169} In doing so, US intervention will most likely be presented as necessary for both the US and Yemen.

Furthermore, according to poststructuralism, the relevant discourse on the matter must produce hierarchical dichotomies such as ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ in which the former is valued as superior to the latter. It is expected that the US will be presented as different and superior to the Houthis. However, the hierarchy is not merely limited to the Self and Houthi Other. Considering that relational differences can be interpreted positively or negatively, in which different identities and interests are produced with respect to different kinds of Otherness,\textsuperscript{170} this research expects to find different representations of the Houthis and the Yemeni government, despite both being Islamic actors. As mentioned above, depending on the construction, certain identities are construed as superior to the others.\textsuperscript{171} While certain Islamic actors can be perceived as aggressive movements toward the US for being anti-Western, in particular

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 237.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 171.
anti-US,\textsuperscript{172} other Islamic actors can be perceived as faithful Western allies.\textsuperscript{173} Thus, certain Islamic regimes may be ‘self-evidently’ supported by drawing on similarities between the Self and Islamic Other.\textsuperscript{174} In this particular case, it is expected that president Hadi will be described as democratically elected, emphasizing the similarities between the Self and Other. Moreover, the US is likely to represent Yemen’s Sunni Islamic beliefs as ‘a positive Islam’\textsuperscript{175} and the Zaydi Shiite Houthis as ‘evil fundamentalist’. Therefore, based on Weldes’ understanding of national interest, it is expected that the US explains and justifies its seemingly inconsistent interference in the Yemeni conflict by presenting itself and its ally—president Hadi—as superior to the Houthis. This creates the following expected hierarchy:

![Hierarchy 1](image)

To see whether these expectations hold in the case of the US foreign policy in Yemen, the following chapter will outline the methodology that will be used for the empirical analysis in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{172} Massari, “Identity and Foreign Policy: The Case of Islam in U.S. Foreign Policy,” in \textit{Foreign Policy in a Constructed World}, 239.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid, 241.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 245.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“Poststructuralism can be used as a method, even if it is considered anti-method by strict ‘non-practitioners’.”\(^{176}\)

Following the theoretical aspects in the previous chapter that allowed to form case-specific expectations, this chapter will set out the necessary methodological approach that will allow to test whether the expectations based on Weldes’ understanding of ‘national interest’ hold in the Yemeni-case.

Before diving into the analysis itself, this chapter will start off by explaining general poststructuralist assumptions about research. The next section will illustrate what a discourse analysis is and how it will be applied in this thesis. This will be followed by an explanation and justification of why a case-study was chosen, and more specifically, why the media coverage of Yemen was chosen as a case-study for this thesis. The following section will answer why CNN was selected to answer the research question. Lastly, the chapter will refer to the limitations of the methodology and will elaborate on how those will be taken into consideration throughout the analysis.

**Poststructuralist Research**

Unlike traditional positivist approaches, poststructuralism does not aim to reveal some directly accessible and observable ‘truth’.\(^{177}\) This is because poststructuralism argues that cultural reality lies behind what we perceive as empirical reality.\(^{178}\) Having a different epistemological basis from positivist approaches, poststructuralism tries to indicate context-specific meaning that emerges from varying discursive practices.\(^{179}\) In doing so, proponents of the approach aim to interrogate and deconstruct the boundaries that are defined and placed around certain forms of knowledge and meaning.\(^{180}\)

In this interrogation, the focus is on the operation of language, the production of meaning, and the ways in which ‘knowledge and power combine to create […] taken-for-granted forms of knowledge and social practices’.\(^{181}\) Here, interrogation requires distancing oneself from current categories of

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\(^{177}\) Fawcett, “Poststructuralism,” 668.


\(^{179}\) Fawcett, “Poststructuralism,” 668.

\(^{180}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{181}\) *Ibid*. 
identities.\textsuperscript{182} Once this is achieved, it is possible to see that the current social practices are fragile and are not universal as they are presented to be.\textsuperscript{183} Therefore, this research expects to find that the meaning given to the Yemeni tribe has changed over the course of time, as the Houthis appeared to be irrelevant to the US before 2011, then appeared to be collaborators before morphing into threats to US interest in 2015.

Deconstruction sheds light on the order of knowledge that is constructed among discourses.\textsuperscript{184} In doing so, it tries to illustrate how ‘truth-claims’ of the dominant discourse create certain policy settings.\textsuperscript{185} Once the invisible discourse that has been suppressed by the dominant discourse is made visible, it is possible to tackle the hierarchy among discourses. In the poststructuralist-sense, deconstruction focuses on taking apart ‘the endless layers that are seen to constitute social reality’.\textsuperscript{186} The goal here is disturbing the categories that appear self-evident in the dominant discourse.\textsuperscript{187} Once these categories are contested, the space of ‘reality’ is loosened and space emerges for new possibilities, ideas, and structures.\textsuperscript{188} Ideally, problematizing the taken-for-granted categories will create space for alternative ways of thinking by challenging what is perceived as objective reality.\textsuperscript{189} While this is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that this ultimately creates space for alternative futures.

The following section will define the concept ‘discourse’ and will explain why a discourse analysis is suitable for answering the research question of this thesis. This will be followed by the illustration of the steps that will be taken in Chapter 4 when applying the analysis to the empirical data collected from CNN.

**Conducting the Discourse**

The term ‘discourse’ lacks a generally agreed-upon definition as its different conceptions are derived from different theoretical traditions and disciplines.\textsuperscript{190} In the most general sense, discourse covers all forms of communication used in society by various actors.\textsuperscript{191} In this analysis, discourse will

\textsuperscript{182} Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as a method,” 816.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} (‘Order of knowledge’ refers to the knowledge that is provided by discourses that find themselves in a hierarchy by dominating alternative forms of knowledge) Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as a method,” 817-818.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Fawcett, “Poststructuralism,” 671.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as a method,” 821.
be defined as communication that allows ‘the flow of knowledge through time’, because linguistic elements are necessary to communicate a message to a recipient. This definition is suitable because it reinforces the argument that language is not merely symbolic, but is constitutive of reality. We communicate by drawing from generally accepted knowledge when making statements to make sense to others. Regardless of challenging or agreeing (and thus reinforcing) knowledge-assumptions, communication contributes to the flow of commonly accepted knowledge over a given period. Thus, our interactions create truths that are presented as ‘out there’. Depending on the ideas that members of a society exchange, reinforcements or challenges in communication cause the flow of knowledge to remain or change over time. Thus, discourse is both a product and producer of reality. This is essential to this research, because discourse also shapes political decisions, which have very real implications. Closely examining language can provide insight into political positions of relevant actors and the rhetoric that informs these actors.

In order to examine language, this research will initially find the relevant CNN discourse on Houthis in order to understand how the Houthi identity and the Yemeni conflict have been framed by CNN. Then, the analysis will examine how the relevant discourse operates, i.e. it will try to interrogate how language is used by the media to subordinate and marginalize alternative discourses, forming the hegemonic discourses of the cultural mainstream. The ultimate goal is to reveal how the power of discourse naturalizes certain knowledge as self-evident, which leads to unquestioned truths.

For the purpose of this study, a diachronic analysis will be employed, because it allows to interrogate the truth-claims framed between 2011 and 2015. Before diving into the CNN discourse covering this period, the analysis will start by establishing the context in which the articles were published. This will allow to interrogate the language context-specifically.

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197 Schneider, “Getting the Hang of Discourse Theory.”
198 Ibid.
200 Schneider, “Video Introduction to Discourse Analysis.”
203 Cheek, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 357.
204 Diachronic analysis is ‘concerned with the way in which something, especially language, has developed and evolved through time’ (‘Diachronic,” English Oxford Living Dictionary, accessed June 14, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/diachronic.)
The data, namely the CNN articles covering the developments about the Houthis, will be collected digitally using LexisNexis Academic. When organizing the data that will be analysed, the researcher will take out all articles that do not cover the Houthis as its main topic, because the goal of this research is to see how CNN represents the movement. Next, the articles will be explored for the distribution of codes across the data, to understand how they relate to each other. The articles will be coded, because applying categories to the articles and ordering them accordingly will be the most efficient manner to collect data. The creation of the coding categories will rely on Mayring’s idea of ‘evolutionary coding’, which is a mixture of inductive and deductive approaches. The categories will evolve from theoretical expectations from the previous chapter into a list updated after processing the data for the first time. The contextual background information in the beginning of the next chapter will also allow to predict what might be said. The following will be used as a starting point with regards to the narrative of the Houthis:

“Islamist extremism, Iranian proxies, evil, destruction, uncivilized, cruelty, brutality, barbaric, traitors, threaten peace and justice, hungry for power/success”

The following are expected to be used for the narrative of the US vis-à-vis the Houthis:

“War on Terror, 9/11, democracy, civilization, provider of humanitarian aid, diplomacy, negotiation, cooperation, respect to rule of law, liberator, universal values, US responsibility, respect for human rights and dignity, ally of democratically elected president Hadi, pursuit for freedom, ally of Saudi Arabia”

The data is likely to include themes that were not among the above mentioned expected terms, which will allow the researcher to revise the list of coding categories. This process will be repeated until a final list of coding categories is established.

Once the coding categories are finalized, the researcher will take a step back and will first observe the structural features of the CNN articles. This requires an analysis of the layout of the article, i.e. the titles and the role the conclusions play in the overall tone of the article.

Once the initial impression has been assessed, the researcher will collect and examine truth-claims. These will be statements that will help map out what the truth is about the Houthis according

206 Ibid.
207 Buja, “The Discourse Analysis of a Newspaper Article,” 263.
208 Schneider, “How to Do a Discourse Analysis.”
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
to CNN. The research will then continue to identify linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms.²¹¹ For this research, this will include word groups, intertextualities, grammatical features, and imagery.²¹² The first linguistic element, namely word groups, will be assessed to see whether the word choice in the news article has its roots in a common jargon, as this jargon can inform the implicit meaning conveyed behind the usage of a particular phrase.²¹³

Secondly, when addressing the function of intertextuality, the data will be checked for external references, which play a crucial role in meaning formation, as this linguistic element draws on mutually agreed-upon meanings from other discourses. If these connections between texts appear coherent, the knowledge will appear self-evident and will less likely be questioned. In addition to trying to understand how the references contribute to the construction or re-construction meaning, the context in which the references were initially made will be assessed. This will allow to see whether CNN used the knowledge the same way the original discourse portrayed the context-specific meaning.

Thirdly, the news articles will be checked for grammatical features, as these can be strategic. The most obvious example would be detecting the use of pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘them’, as it reflects the perceived distance between the Self and Other. Moreover, the analysis requires to see whether evidentialities—grammatical elements that indicate self-evidence—accompany facts. Here it is crucial to see whether the text outlines information in an assured fashion by using terms like ‘of course’, ‘obviously’, or ‘as everyone knows’, or if it reports factuality by actively demonstrating other sources.²¹⁴

Fourthly, truth-claims will be assessed for imagery, including metaphors, similes, proverbs, and other literary tools that evoke visual images for the reader.²¹⁵ Such tools can be effective in legitimizing certain kinds of politics, as they invite the audience to visualize certain associations that appear self-evident.²¹⁶

Finally, once the detected truth-claims have been assessed for their linguistic features, the last section will require an analysis of the omissions made by the CNN discourse. This step will reveal which discourses with alternative representations of the Houthis have been marginalized and dominated by the meaning fixed by CNN. Omissions will be determined based on the contextual information provided in the background section.

²¹¹ Schneider, “How to Do a Discourse Analysis.”
²¹² Ibid.
²¹³ Ibid.
²¹⁴ Ibid.
²¹⁶ Schneider, “How to Do a Discourse Analysis.”
After the step-by-step analysis set out above, the researcher will move on to interpreting the findings. At this stage, the accumulated data will be interpreted in light of Weldes’ understanding of national interest and the Yemeni context in which the discourse took place. The researcher will examine how the discourse historically emerged to frame the Houthis as enemies of the US while initially appearing to be possible collaborators in the combat against AQAP.

The following section will defend why a case-study was chosen to answer the research question provided in Chapter 1 and more importantly, why Yemen was chosen as a case-study.

**Case Study: why the Republic of Yemen**

A case study is suitable for this research, as it consists of a variety of methods, which is in line with poststructuralism—a theory that resists a standardized methodological approach. Moreover, case studies align with poststructuralism because, unlike cross-case analyses, they explore a phenomenon in depth and put great emphasis on contextuality. A case study allows flexibility and comprehensiveness in methodology, which is crucial when exploring the power-knowledge relations that can shape the perception of the audience. In order to understand power, knowledge, and discourse, which can together constitute legitimacy, it is crucial to use a method that facilitates a deeper understanding of the social, political, and historical circumstances that lead to a phenomenon. This is important in this research because Yemen lacks a great deal of academic attention. In light of this blind spot in academic literature, it is beneficial to make use of a case study’s explanatory nature, as it facilitates the investigation of complex relationships and patterns that are present in the context-specific data.

When it comes to case selection, Gerring argues that it should be based on the representation and causal leverage of the chosen case, because a single case study is supposed to be a single example of a larger phenomenon. However, one must keep in mind that this is not in line with poststructuralist

217 Ibid.
219 Mohammed et al., “Rethinking Case Study Methodology in Poststructural Research,” 102-103.
220 Gerring defines depth as ‘detail, richness, completeness, wholeness or the degree of variance in an outcome that is accounted for by an explanation’. In other words, case studies are known for being analyses with ‘thick descriptions’. (John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29)
221 Mohammed et al., “Rethinking Case Study Methodology in Poststructural Research,” 12.
222 Ibid, 99.
223 Mohammed et al., “Rethinking Case Study Methodology in Poststructural Research,” 103.
224 It is worth mentioning here that poststructuralism does not treat theories as tools of analysis, but treats theories as an object of analysis. Its proponents argue that theories contribute to the structuring of reality by privileging great Western powers over non-Western countries (Barnett, “Social constructivism,” 210).
225 Ibid, 42.
epistemology, because the theory dictates that no ‘objective truth’ exists for causal mechanisms to be detected and be generalized to an entire population. According to poststructuralism, meaning is context-specific and is subject to change. Thus, there is no pattern to generalize. Instead, poststructuralism tries to access subjective knowledge, which is also in line with one of the strengths of case studies, namely internal validity. Case-study research is more preoccupied with intra-case consistency that provides an explanation for a specific context rather than reaching across-the-board conclusions from cross-case analyses. Secondly, poststructuralism does not try to detect specific patterns and make assured predictions—it does not try to make assumptions about the broader population in the traditional sense.

Since knowledge is context-specific in the poststructuralist sense, it is not possible to speak of a typical or deviant case. While the Yemeni case would fall within the scope of an outlier case, it would be illogical to consider every single case of a population an outlier. When we look at all the countries the US has intervened in based on the War on Terror, Yemen is the only one in which the US collaborates with al-Qaeda in practice. According to Gerring, there are ‘lightbulb moments’ and sceptical moments in social science research, in which the case of Yemen fits the latter category. Thus, since the case of Yemen casts doubt upon the consistency of the War on Terror, the case will be considered an influential case. Hereby it will provide an example of the exploitation of the motives justified by the self-declared War on Terror to intervene in the internal affairs of a foreign country. When assessed in greater detail, it is clear that the US has collaborated with national governments or against them in the past for the sake of eliminating its greatest security threat; al-Qaeda. However, in none of these scenarios did this interference benefit the terrorist organization other than creating a suitable environment for it to grow in. In the case of Yemen, the US’ indirect interference by supporting the Saudi-led coalition, in which the Houthis are targeted, AQAP is strengthened as the attacks eliminate the common enemy of the US and AQAP—the Houthis. In doing so, the US defeats the goals of War on Terror since it is in US interest to protect itself from its greatest security threat. Lastly, this case is remarkable because the US public has either approved or disapproved of previous War on Terror targets; however, it has remained silent on the Yemeni interference. This raises the question of how the US foreign policy is presented to its public. The outcome of this particular analysis will ideally shed light on how a country is able to pursue foreign policy that seems inconsistent by stressing the importance of media discourse in forming legitimacy for a public.

227 Gerring, Case Study Research: Principles and Practices, 43.
228 Ibid, 29.
Why the Media?

This thesis researches the role of the media because it is frequently considered the fourth pillar of democracy, because it observes political process. This observation can be understood as a check on possible exploitations of the democratic system. Within the scope of this research, the core of democracy is considered the ‘right to participate in decision-making’. Therefore, it is essential to analyse the sources on which this right is exercised. By sharing its observations, the media makes it possible for citizens to check statements made by state officials and base their political decisions on the information provided by the media. Thus, the media plays an essential role in the outcome of political issues. Similarly, Weldes agrees that media is a crucial site for the ‘production, circulation, and sometimes the contestations, of meanings’.

The US identifies as a liberal democracy and seeks to spread this ideology to the Middle East to fight terrorism and restore peace in the region. As a liberal democracy, the US decision-makers appeal for public support when interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, especially when the action lacks approval from the UNSC. Considering that the Operation Iraqi Freedom was legitimized in part through media involvement, the media clearly plays an important role in creating consensus. Thus, it is crucial to analyse how the conveyed information can shape the perception of the US public regarding the notion of spreading democracy.

The following section will illustrate what kind of data will be used throughout this Yemeni case-study and will justify the particular choice of CNN.

Data Selection

This discourse analysis focuses on the contribution of the news industry when analysing how a legitimate image was constructed for the seemingly inconsistent US foreign policy in Yemen. More specifically, the data will be drawn from a single online news outlet—CNN—between January 2011 and March 2015.

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233 Lieberfeld, “Theories of Conflict and the Iraq War,” 7.
235 Not to be confused with the international sister channel CNN international.
An analysis conducted by Pew Research Center in 2010 illustrates that the US-based news channel was among the top three news sources in the US.\(^{236}\) Statistics from 2017 show that CNN maintained a popular choice to obtain online news in the US.\(^{237}\) In addition to being widely popular in the US, this network used to have a relatively neutral reputation for international matters because its partisan bias is relatively subtle compared to that of other stations.\(^{238}\) Therefore, CNN coverage is less likely to be questioned by its audience.\(^{239}\) Since individuals are more likely to question the objectivity of sources that have a noticeable partisan bias due to more active framing, a seemingly ‘objective’ source was chosen. This is in line with the goal of poststructuralism, namely revealing that communication that appears to be neutral is in fact socially constructed and carries a bias. Communication assigns particular meanings between communicators and the audience according to the specific context in which the language is used.\(^{240}\) This is also in line with the criticism CNN has received. The controversies have primarily been about CNN having a partisan bias in specific periods, as the news agency has shed more negative light on Republican candidates compared to Democrat candidates during presidential elections.\(^{241}\) Conservative-leaning media groups have claimed that CNN’s coverage contains liberal editorializing within stories and also omits important facts.\(^{242}\) This is crucial to keep in mind during the discourse analysis, as then-president Obama is a Democrat, which leads to the expectation that CNN has significantly contributed to creating a legitimate image for the US foreign policy initiated by the Obama administration. However, because CNN has a relatively ‘neutral’ reputation for international coverage, the construction is likely to be subtle, which will be reflected upon throughout the analysis.

The research will cover the period between 2011 and 2015, because the Houthis gained widespread international attention for the first time in Western media in 2011, thus also from CNN.\(^{243}\) During the Arab Spring of 2011, the Houthi movement was one of the largest national groups rising up against


\(^{239}\) CNN controversies were widely revealed after the analysed period of this research, which is why this analysis will approach it as a news station with a relatively neutral perspective on international matters.

\(^{240}\) Cheek, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 359.

\(^{241}\) “The Invisible Primary – Invisible No Longer: A First Look at Coverage of the 2008 Presidential Campaign,” Joan Shorenstein Center (2007); 23. JSTOR.

\(^{242}\) Ibid.

\(^{243}\) The Houthi movement was founded in 1992; however, CNN mentioned it for the first time in August 2009. From this initial mention until the Arab Spring of 2011, the Houthis were referred to in 8 CNN articles. This increased significantly after the protests spread throughout the MENA region, resulting in the movement being referred to in 72 articles until Operation Decisive Storm was launched on March 25, 2018 (Numbers were obtained in LexisNexis Academic search engine).
then-president Saleh.\textsuperscript{244} At the time, the US Undersecretary of Defence noted that the US had an informal intelligence relationship with the Houthis against AQAP.\textsuperscript{245} On March 25, 2015, the Saudi-led coalition initiated Operation Decisive Storm in order to restore internationally recognized president Hadi.\textsuperscript{246} The Obama administration surprisingly decided to back the Saudi-coalition and abandoned its informal ties with the Houthis.\textsuperscript{247} Based on the collected data, the analysis will shed light on how the representation of Houthis has changed in CNN from 2011 to 2015 and what helped legitimize the seemingly inconsistent shift in US foreign policy.

Before moving on to the discourse analysis in Chapter 4, the following section will introduce the limitations to poststructuralist research which will have to be reflected upon throughout the analysis to obtain valid data.

\textbf{Limitations to Poststructuralist Research}

Poststructuralism offers a powerful approach for analysing communication because its methodological pluralism draws attention to different context-specific linguistic details and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of socially constructed reality. Nonetheless, poststructuralist research has limitations that should not be neglect.

Opponents of poststructuralism argue that a crucial limitation is that the research heavily relies on interpretation, which allegedly diminishes the validity of findings. This criticism refers to the fact that a single interpretation of a news article is impossible. For those who favour causal analysis, this obstacle diminishes the findings. However, one should not forget that poststructuralism opposes causality and argues that interpretation plays an essential role in how we perceive the world we live in. With respect to the problems that interpretation could cause, proponents of poststructuralism suggest that the researcher must continuously reflect on his or her personal assumptions about the topic.\textsuperscript{248} If this awareness does not exist, the researcher is likely to impose meaning to the data.\textsuperscript{249} This is essential because researchers are also producers of discourses.\textsuperscript{250} Thus, the findings must constantly be validated through comparison with different sources. Therefore, the background information section will not be based on any information from CNN.

\textsuperscript{244} Bruce Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?,” Brookings, accessed March 18, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/12/18/who-are-the-houthis-and-why-are-we-at-war-with-them/.
\textsuperscript{245} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{247} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{248} Mohammed et al., “Rethinking Case Study Methodology in Poststructural Research,” 110.
\textsuperscript{249} Cheek, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 359.
\textsuperscript{250} Cheek, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 359.
Another common criticism is that poststructuralist findings are not generalizable.\textsuperscript{251} One poststructuralist response to this is that generalizability in itself is a ‘discursive construct that draw[s] on particular understandings of what it means to generalize’.\textsuperscript{252} Furthermore, as mentioned above, making generalizable predictions is not the goal of poststructuralist research, since it aims to reveal that such generalizations are problematic in themselves.\textsuperscript{253} According to poststructuralism, predictive orientations merely ‘skim the surface’ of reality, while poststructuralism goes into deeper detail.\textsuperscript{254} Instead of predicting particular scenarios, the approach is more concerned with opening up the present and the past in order to create the possibility of alternative futures.\textsuperscript{255} This allows to understand how certain discourses have become hegemonic and how specific terms have changed over time.\textsuperscript{256}

Specifically, with regards to the medium of communication, online articles do not have the same impact that printed newspapers have.\textsuperscript{257} For instance, the layout of a printed newspaper article and its position in the total collection of articles play an important role in interpreting the urgency of an event. Moreover, online sources tend to be read less carefully, as our eyes grow fatigue, leading to online sources being skimmed.\textsuperscript{258} Despite its shortcomings, CNN articles will be analysed because they are widely read and because the articles will still leave a mark about the identities of the Houthis, even when merely skimmed.\textsuperscript{259}

Lastly, arguing that there is a single discourse that will be analysed in a source is an oversimplification. On the contrary, there is a multitude of potentially relevant discourse structures that could also be examined;\textsuperscript{260} however, due to time restriction and the limit to the word count of this thesis, it will unfortunately be impossible to conduct a full analysis on all relevant discourses.

Having illustrated the methodological steps required to conduct a discourse analysis in Chapter 3, the next chapter will discuss the empirical findings from CNN’s coverage of the seemingly inconsistent US foreign policy in Yemen, aiming to assess whether or not the expectations from Chapter 2 hold.

\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{253} Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as a method,” 816.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid, 815.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, 815.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, 818.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid.
CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

“When you have coverage which doesn’t really provide context or a proper understanding of the key actors in a conflict and also the role of our own governments, publics are left with a sense of a confused conflict where it’s not clear who’s right or wrong, it’s not clear whether or not we’re involved in it.” 261

In order to assess whether the perception of the US, and thus its national interest, changed vis-à-vis the Houthis, the following section will first provide the historical backdrop of Yemen in order to understand how the conflict came about, how the US became involved in Yemen, and when the US changed its position with respect to the Houthis. Then, the US-backed Saudi-led coalition’s justifications made to intervene in Yemen will be elaborated upon. After that, the findings from the discourse analysis will be interpreted in light of Weldes’ assumptions and the context in which the conflict occurs. This will ideally reveal whether the theoretical assumptions from Chapter 2 hold in the Yemeni case.

A Timeline of the Yemeni Conflict and US Involvement (See Annex)

The Birth of the Houthi Movement and the Commencement of US Interference in Yemen

Houthis, members of one of the predominant tribal movements in Yemen, are located in northern Yemen, close to the Saudi border. The movement, officially called Ansar Allah (“Helpers/Supporters of God”), takes its name from its founder Hussein al-Houthi.262 Initially a member of the political party al-Haqq,263 al-Houthi founded the movement in 1992 as a resistance against then-president Saleh—a Zaydi Shiite leader who came to power after the 1978 military coup.264 Although both president Saleh and the Houthis are Zaydi, the resistance toward the leader was due to the persistent exclusion and marginalization of the Zaydi community from political participation.265 Additional

262 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?,”
265 Ibid.
domestic goals of the movement were fighting corruption, providing more extensive and inclusive social services, and promoting Zaydi belief in a prevalent Sunni country.\textsuperscript{266}

In addition to the domestic agenda, Houthis criticized president Saleh’s foreign policy against AQAP. Although the initial Houthi-disapproval was not the fighting against AQAP \textit{per se}, the movement heavily criticized president Saleh’s decision to include the US in Yemen’s battle against the terrorist organization. This cooperation started after 2000, when the marine ship USS Cole was attacked by an al-Qaeda suicide bomber while refuelling in Aden and seventeen US sailors were killed.\textsuperscript{267} Following the attack, it initially appeared that president Saleh was not willing to cooperate with the US, because he refused to extradite two suspects of the attack to the US.\textsuperscript{268} However, limited cooperation between the US and Yemen was initiated after 9/11 when it became evident that AQAP was seemingly interested in waging war against the Yemeni regime.\textsuperscript{269} Even though the regime had autocratic tendencies and appeared to lack effective control over the Yemeni territory, there did not seem to be a serious alternative to president Saleh’s regime in the fight against terrorism in the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, the Yemeni president garnered the support of the US, the UK, and Saudi Arabia in the fight against AQAP.\textsuperscript{270} The greatest obstacle to a stronger cooperation between the US and Yemen in this regard was the constant distrust of Yemeni politicians and public towards US actions and motives in Yemen. This distrust stemmed from the firm belief that the US does not have the best interest of the Arab world in mind.\textsuperscript{271}

In November 2002, despite the lack of support from the Yemeni public for US interference—who at the same time opposed the possible US invasion of Iraq—president Saleh permitted the Bush administration to launch its first Predator drone attack in eastern Yemen and to boost collaboration in intelligence and security forces with the US against AQAP.\textsuperscript{272} Throughout this cooperation, the US assisted Yemen in developing the Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Yemeni Central Security Forces and other Yemeni Interior Ministry Departments; it also helped create a coast guard monitor in the Bab al-Mandab strait.\textsuperscript{273} Due to its location, the creation of this coast guard was crucial for the US’ War on Terror—it not only connects the Arabian Peninsula to Africa, but also links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and

\textsuperscript{266} Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid, 66.
\textsuperscript{271} Terril, “The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National security,” xi.
\textsuperscript{272} Salisbury, “Yemen and the Saudi-Iranian ‘Cold War’,” 5.
\textsuperscript{273} Peter Alsis \textit{et. al}, “US and Iranian Strategic Competition in the Gulf States and Yemen,” Center for Strategic & International Studies (2011): 34, JSTOR.
the Indian Ocean. The agreed-upon role of this coast guard is to prevent further attacks on US marine ships by terrorists, rebels, or pirates based in Yemen.

Following Operation Iraqi Freedom led by the US army in 2003, the Yemeni public, including the Houthis, were even more opposed to US interference. Both challenged president Saleh’s legitimacy by suggesting it was a sign of weakness on his part to support the US in its War on Terror against fellow Arabs. The Houthi criticism gave rise to the Iranian-inspired slogan ‘God is great, death to the US, death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory for Islam’. Nonetheless, the anti-US sentiment was largely unrecognized outside Yemen.

Onset of the Armed Conflict between President Saleh and the Houthi Movement

At the time of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, president Saleh launched a series of military campaigns to destroy the Houthi movement in northern Yemen. During this conflict, Hussein al-Houthi was killed in 2004 and was succeeded by his brother Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. At the same time, Yemeni security forces also fought AQAP in collaboration with the US. However, an AQAP jailbreak in Yemen in 2006 introduced distrust from the Bush administration towards the Yemeni regime. The jailbreak appeared to happen with little effort, raising questions about the genuine motives of the Yemeni government with respect to AQAP.

In 2009, the conflict took on a regional dimension when Saudi Arabia officially declared that it would back the Yemeni government in its internal conflict against the Houthis, because the conflict spilled over the border into neighbouring Saudi Arabia. In addition to violating its own sovereignty, Saudi Arabia had two justifications for its involvement: firstly, combatting the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda that merged in Yemen in 2009, when Saudi members of al-Qaeda fled to Yemen to rebuild their organization. Secondly, Saudi Arabia claimed that both Hezbollah and Iran were backing the Houthis in their fight against the Yemeni regime. Saudi Arabia frequently criticized Iran’s support, even though there was no tangible evidence of Iranian involvement at the time. Similar to Saudi Arabia, the Yemeni government also accused Iran of providing military, economic, and

275 Schmitz, “The rise of Yemen’s Houthi rebels.”
276 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
277 Ibid.
278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
284 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
political support to the Houthis, while there was only visible evidence of political support.\textsuperscript{285} In January, the conflict returned to an internal one when Saudi forces withdrew from Yemeni territory, because the Houthis were pushed back over the border into Yemen.\textsuperscript{286}

In the beginning of 2010, the Obama administration planned a significant increase in aid to support counterterrorism efforts in Yemen. This support primarily consisted of increasing intelligence support, improving weapons and equipment, and training Yemeni security forces.\textsuperscript{287} Once US drone strikes increased, the Houthis accused the US of supporting Yemeni troops in their battle against the Houthis, instead of merely attacking AQAP. To this accusation, president Obama stated that the airstrikes were only targeting AQAP as a continuation of president Bush’s declared War on Terror.\textsuperscript{288}

Towards the end of 2010, the US held over one hundred Yemenis for terrorism-related offenses in Guantanamo Bay. The US administration refused to extradite alleged AQAP members because it believed that the Yemeni regime was not truly cooperating in the fight against al-Qaeda.\textsuperscript{289} This distrust stemmed from the 2006 AQAP jailbreak and an additional AQAP jailbreak that occurred earlier in 2010 in Yemen.\textsuperscript{290} Believing that the Yemeni officials did too little to prevent and solve this problem, some US policy-makers went so far as to label the Yemeni security policy as ‘catch and release for dangerous radicals’.\textsuperscript{291} Consequently, the Obama administration argued that such jailbreaks would be prevented by keeping the suspects in Guantanamo Bay.

\textit{The Arab Spring and its Aftermath}

Recalling the tension between president Saleh and the Houthis, it is not surprising that the Houthis were part of the wide national uprising against president Saleh during the Arab Spring of 2011. While the majority of the people protested their oppression, the Houthis also heavily criticized the regime’s close ties with Saudi Arabia and the US.\textsuperscript{292} The movement’s power grew from the common anti-US sentiment and resentment felt towards the authoritative president by the general Yemeni public and the Houthis.\textsuperscript{293}

Following a year of large-scale protests, the US saw the need to revise its support for president Saleh due to his excessive use of force against protestors.\textsuperscript{294} Seeing that protests did not diminish, Saudi

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{285} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?”
\item \textsuperscript{287} Terril, “The Conflicts in Yemen and U.S. National Security,” 70-71.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{289} Ibid, 73.
\item \textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{291} Ibid, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{292} Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?”
\item \textsuperscript{293} Schmitz, “The rise of Yemen’s Houthi rebels.”
\item \textsuperscript{294} Alsis \textit{et. al}, “US and Iranian Strategic Competition in the Gulf States and Yemen,” 34.
\end{itemize}
Arabia and the US suggested that president Saleh had to step down from power, which he refused. Instead, president Saleh accused the US of not helping his forces fight extremists, to which the Obama administration responded that the US was not willing to be drawn into the local conflict, and that it had withdrawn military trainers and other consultants because the information the US provided to Yemeni forces was used against protestors. However, this did not stop the US from continuing to fire drones against AQAP targets in Yemen.

On November 24, 2011, president Saleh was forced to step down after ruling Yemen for 33 years, leading Sunni vice-president Hadi to ascend to presidency. His election was widely agreed to be democratic, even though he was the only candidate to replace president Saleh. Because the new president promised a more inclusive parliament, his election stopped the Houthis from attacking the Yemeni government until 2012. In 2012, the UN-sponsored National Dialogue was instituted to discuss the future of the republic with the aims of drafting a new, more inclusive constitution. While initially promising Houthi-representation in the process, the draft was completed without Houthi-participation, suggesting a federal state with six provinces with limited autonomy. The Zaydi-dominated north of the country was promised two landlocked entities in this plan, which the Houthis claimed was a clear manipulation of boundaries. New fighting broke out between president Hadi and the Houthis, who had not benefitted from president Hadi’s rule as hoped. During the escalation of the domestic conflict, US drone strikes against AQAP increased immensely. This increase in US interference gathered sympathy for AQAP among anti-US tribes, leading certain local tribes, other than the Houthis, to align with AQAP.
An Unexpected Alliance between Former Enemies: Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis

Surprisingly, former president Saleh, and a majority of the security forces that remained loyal to him, allied with the Houthis in 2014 in their common fight against president Hadi. Lacking overall support in Yemen, president Hadi struggled with trying to protect the territory from AQAP attacks, separatist movements both in the north and south, and the lack of military loyalty, as well as high unemployment and food insecurity problems. With president Hadi lacking a cohesive army, the Saleh-backed Houthis became an even stronger and capable military force.

On September 21, 2014 the Saleh-Houthi alliance took advantage of president Hadi’s weaknesses and captured Sana’a, the capital of Yemen. In the aftermath of the takeover, AQAP benefitted from the chaos and continued gaining control in Yemen. In January 2015, AQAP increasingly threatened the US embassy personnel, which resulted in its shutdown in Sana’a. Next, the Houthis attacked the Presidential Palace. Following the attack, president Hadi fled to Aden. Within a month, president Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia. According to BBC, president Hadi fleeing to Saudi Arabia was perceived as an accomplishment of the Houthis, which gave rise to wider support to the movement from the general Yemeni public. On the contrary, Arabian Peninsula analyst Alley claimed that president Hadi fleeing increased resentment against Houthis, causing certain Sunni tribes to ally with AQAP against the Houthis.

307 There is no clear enlightenment as to why this alliance was formed between former enemies, as many Middle Eastern analysts have rival explanations. The most likely and simple explanation would be ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ mentality, in which both wanted to replace president Hadi. Thus the two were ‘united by what [president Hadi] they oppose, not in their prescriptive aims [what is to happen if president Hadi is removed]’ (April L. Alley, “Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen’s War,” International Crisis Group, accessed September 12, 2018, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/collapse-houthi-saleh-alliance-and-future-yemens-war.)

308 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?.”

309 Laub, “Who Are Yemen’s Houthis: an Interview with April Longley Alley.”

310 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?.”


312 Ibid.


314 Ibid.

315 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?.”

316 Laub, “Who Are Yemen’s Houthis: an Interview with April Longley Alley.”
Yet Again a Regional Conflict

In January 2015, US Undersecretary of Defense Michael Vickers claimed that Washington had ‘a productive informal intelligence relationship with the Houthis against al-Qaeda’, which he suggested would continue. Nonetheless, the White House announced on March 25, 2015 that it would be backing the Saudi-coalition in Operation Decisive Storm against the Houthis. The operation, aiming to restore internationally recognized president Hadi, was joined by eight Arab countries that declared their allegiance to Saudi Arabia. The US, the UK, and France announced that they would provide the coalition with logistical and intelligence support. Again, justifications were based on claims made about Iran, who allegedly backed the Houthi movement both financially and militarily.

Since the Saudi-led invasion in northern Yemen in 2009, the Houthis have had important victories against AQAP when the Yemeni government was not capable to. Nonetheless, AQAP and rival affiliates of ISIL took advantage of the chaos. This was predictable, considering the developments in prior War on Terror target examples such as Iraq and Syria. The terrorist organizations have been carrying out deadly attacks and have been seizing territory in southern Yemen. Thus, some believe that the chaos created by the Saudi-led coalition created an even more suitable environment for the breeding of Islamist militancy in Yemen. These developments actually threaten the West, especially the US, a clear target of AQAP. The al-Qaeda branch started to grow from the support it received from local groups both in its fight against the US and the Houthis. Instead of recognizing the changing nature of threats made by AQAP in Yemen and responding accordingly, it appears the fight against the Houthis has distracted both the US and its key Gulf partners from fighting the US’ greatest security threat: AQAP.

317 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?:”
318 Ibid.
319 Ibid.
320 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?:”
321 Ibid.
322 Ibid.
323 Laub, “Who Are Yemen’s Houthis: an Interview with April Longley Alley:”
324 Ibid.
325 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?:”
326 Ibid.
Justifications of Interfering in Yemen

Allegations on Iranian Involvement in Yemen

Saudi Arabia’s justifications for both its 2009 and 2015 interferences are heavily based on allegations of Iran having ties with the Houthis. However, according to Vaughan et al., Houthis are autonomous actors who often act in accordance with their own interest, while merely being provided with Iranian arms. Therefore, perceiving the Houthi movement in the Iranian orbit is an oversimplification, as neither Iran can order the Houthis to commit certain acts nor do the Houthis perceive their achievements as a ‘product of Iranian intervention’.

Furthermore, the Houthis do not hide their political relations with Iran. The movement openly states that it admires certain traits of the Iranian political system, especially its resistance towards the West and more specifically the US. However, Saudi Arabia insists on portraying the Houthis as ‘Iranian puppets’ because both practice Shiism. This appears to be an oversimplification, since the Iranian version of Shiism (Twelvers) is fundamentally different from Zaydi Shiism, both in terms of practice and ideology. Because of these fundamental differences, Iranian Shiites often do not even consider Zaydis as Shiite. Thus, the fact that the believes of both Iranians and Houthis stem from Shiism does not prove Iranian involvement in Yemen via the Houthis. This was actually clarified, but then largely ignored, when US intelligence officials stated in 2014 that Iran was trying to discourage the Houthis from seizing the capital. This example weakens the justification of attacking the Houthis for being backed by Iran, nonetheless continues to be ignored.

National Interest of the US

Given the 9/11 attacks and the perception of al-Qaeda as the US’ greatest security threat, it flows naturally that the US foreign policy should be preoccupied with a country that houses the most dangerous branch of al-Qaeda. From a US perspective, Yemen is considered a ‘safe haven’ for AQAP, because many members of the organization regroup and reorganize themselves in Yemen.

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329 Ibid.
330 Ibid.
331 Ibid.
332 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
333 Alsis et. al., “US and Iranian Strategic Competition in the Gulf States and Yemen,” 34.
334 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
335 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?.”
336 Ibid. 65.
after suffering setbacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Terrill argues that AQAP’s increasing strength damages US interest because of Yemen’s strategic location, dominating one of the region’s key waters—the Bab al-Mandeb strait. Consequently, because Yemen is home to the most dangerous branch of al-Qaeda and because of its strategic location, the country’s stability is seen as being in US national interest.

Nonetheless, there is no explanation as to why the US backed the Saudi-coalition in the fight against the Houthis, who also fight AQAP. Considering that Vickers stated that Washington had an informal intelligence relationship with the Houthis against AQAP, it seems inconsistent to attack the non-state actor that could be an effective ally against AQAP. While Vickers suggested that this cooperation could continue, it is puzzling why the US did the exact opposite and is thus under the risk of contributing to an environment in which AQAP is likely to fester even more. More important for this research, the Obama administration backed the Saudi-led war against the Houthis without providing any explanations to the US public concerning why the Houthis were suddenly perceived as enemies of the US. So how does the US government explain and justify its backing of the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis?

In order to answer this question, the following section will provide a discussion of the findings of the discourse analysis, which will attempt to shed light on why the US is part of the Saudi-led coalition according to CNN coverage. These findings will be interpreted in light of Weldes’ understanding of ‘national interest’ and the chronological developments provided in the above section.

**Discourse Analysis Findings: how the Houthi-identity changed in CNN Coverage**

In order to answer how the US presented its 2015 involvement in Yemen as legitimate to its own public, this research conducted a discourse analysis of CNN covering the relevant developments between 2011 and 2015, tracing the change in Houthi representation. As stated before, CNN was specifically analysed, because of its popularity among the US public.

The analysis was conducted over two sub-periods: between February 2011 and September 2014, in which the discourse portrayed the conflict as domestic and between September 2014 and March 2015, in which the discourse evolved into a regional conflict, ending with the Saudi-led coalition

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337 Ibid. x.
338 Ibid, 75.
339 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?”
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid.
launching its first airstrike on March 25. Both discourses were first assessed for their structural features, analysing how identity and interests were constructed in the titles of the articles and the lingering feeling left in their conclusions, and how these influenced the legitimation of US foreign policy. Next, linguistic elements used in both discourses—word groups, intertextuality, grammatical features, and imagery—were assessed in detail. The following section will not elaborate on the contributions of grammatical features, as those appear to be less significant according to the discourse findings. Lastly, each discourse was assessed for what has been omitted by deducing these omissions from the context provided in the beginning of this chapter. The following section will discuss these discourse findings of the two periods.

Frame A: Domestic Conflict (February 21, 2011 – September 21, 2014)

Until president Saleh resigned, the Houthis were mostly referred to as ‘anti-government protesters’. While also seldomly being referred to as ‘tribes’ and ‘rebels’ or as ‘led by spiritual leader al-Houthi’, the use of ‘rebel’ appears to have been used more frequently after president Saleh was forced to resign in November 2011. By increasingly using ‘rebel’ instead of referring to the Houthis as anti-government protesters or a movement, a certain relation between the Self and Other was re-constructed. In order to assess whether the term ‘rebel’ has a positive or negative connotation, which can help elucidate the relation between Houthis and the US, one must discuss the structural and linguistic elements accompanying the construction of the Houthis.

Keeping in mind that the Self identifies as a liberal democracy—one that respects public opinion—the Self is likely to identify with the created portrayal of the Houthi-led public protests throughout the Arab Spring and perceive the actions against the Yemeni presidents as appropriate in the domestic discourse. Therefore, this period is expected to present similarities between the Houthi-supported Yemeni public and the US public, in which the Yemeni public is presented as a collection of

individuals who strive to live in a society where their freedoms are respected. By creating a seemingly similar identity, the interests of these two societies also appear to be similar—respect for rights and liberties. Nonetheless, the domestic conflict discourse within the given period, in no way hints at US responsibility or right to intervene in the strive for freedom, maintaining a strictly domestic conflict frame. After president Saleh’s resignation, it is expected that differences between the Houthis and the Yemeni public will be articulated, leading to the notion that the if the US public is to be similar to the Yemeni public, and the Houthis are diverging from the Yemeni public, then the differences of the Houthis are presented as a self-evident threat.

**Structural Features**

*Titles*

The discourse analysis started by taking a closer look at article titles to assess how CNN’s initial impression of the Houthis guided its identity construction throughout the discourse. It was expected that the titles would introduce the reader to local actors who are perceived to be the relevant ones, which would allow to portray the conflict as an internal one. In doing so, the first impression of the audience would be that there is no foreign, especially US, involvement in the Yemeni conflict. To test whether this expectation holds, the findings primarily assessed which actors were listed in the titles and whether they were accompanied by any particular adjectives or actions that could imply a value judgment on CNN’s part.

As expected, the titles covering the conflict introduce the reader to a domestic conflict discourse by primarily referring to local actors, i.e. the Yemeni president, Yemeni security forces and government officials, tribes, and the Houthis. Until president Saleh was forced to resign, the audience is presented with a Yemeni regime with oppressive tendencies. Following the president’s resignation in November 2011, the titles introduce the audience to local tribes battling for control, causing suffering among the public. The only outlier to this pattern was a title that referred to Iran’s potential involvement. Other than that, no references were made to foreign actors, including the US, in which the initial impression strengthened the domestic conflict discourse and guided the reader to a conflict far away it does not quite identify with.

Throughout most of 2011, the titles introduce a leader with authoritarian tendencies intolerant towards opposition—“Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’” or “Protesters killed in

344 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,” ; Almasmari, “Protesters killed in Yemen in raid attempt on ministerial cabinet.”

345 Almasmari, “Rebels overrun tribal stronghold in Yemens.”

346 Starr, “Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says.”

347 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’.”
Titles as such construct an oppressive, barbaric Other, which the democratic Self does not identify with. This suggests a hierarchy among the Others, namely an unreasonable regime that is morally inferior to the Yemeni public struggling for freedom. The latter is an actor the Self can identify with and thus perceives as closer. Moreover, the Self perceives itself as superior to the Other regime as it identifies as a peaceful and democratic one (See Fig. 2).

Following president Saleh’s resignation in November 2011, CNN mostly made use of titles that referred to local actors: ‘rebels’, ‘tribes’ and ‘militants’. Considering the oppressive leader left office, the lack of repetition of a ‘barbaric’ president resulted in the reconstruction of the Yemeni regime. The relations of the new regime with other local entities also allowed to re-construct their identities. Introducing events as ‘rebels, tribesmen battle for control of key Yemeni region’, ‘rebels overrun tribal stronghold in Yemen’, ‘Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens’ or ‘sectarian fighting kills dozens’, recreates a lawless environment, articulating actors that the Self cannot identify with. Considering that tribes and sectarian violence are not part of the Self’s current reality, there is an implicit creation of meaning about the Other being uncivilized for bearing a community form which Western civilizations have abandoned. This creates an implicit hierarchy between the Self and Other, in which the prior is perceived as superior to the latter. The repetition of these kind of titles results in a dominant discourse that presents local actors as barbaric, striving for power, disregarding non-violent alternatives to conflict resolution.

In addition to the unidentifiable actors, the omission of foreign actors in titles, especially the US as was expected, distances the reader from the Yemeni conflict. Together with the implicit hierarchy suggesting that the Other is inferior to the Self, the urgency of the domestic conflict is minimized. Thus, due to the gap between the Self and Other, the stability of the Other is not illustrated as being in the interest of the Self. The only article that deviates from this general pattern is the one that hints at Iranian involvement: ‘Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran’. While mentioning Iran suggests a regional

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348 Jamjoom, Almasmari, “Yemen: Sectarian fighting kills dozens,”; Almasmari, “Protesters killed in Yemen in raid attempt on ministerial cabinet.”.
349 Almasmari, “Rebels overrun tribal stronghold in Yemen,”.
350 Jamjoom, Hakim, “Yemen: Sectarian fighting kills dozens.”.
351 Starr, “Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says.”.
conflict discourse and hints at potential US interest, this is regarded an outlier case due to its lack of repetition. Thus, the mentioned Yemeni actors and their ‘barbaric’ actions distance the readers from the events occurring between the Others—the Houthis, tribes, and Yemeni officials, none presented as being in US interest (See Fig.3).

Conclusions

Concluding paragraphs of articles play an important role in identity construction, as they leave the reader with a particular impression about events. In this research, it was expected that the conclusions would repeat articulations made throughout the article in order to fix the meaning given to the Houthis. In order to test this expectation, the analysis took note of what kind of information was repeated in the concluding paragraphs concerning the created Houthi identity.

Unlike expected, instead of repeating certain Houthi features or actions that were mentioned in the main section of the articles, the majority of the concluding paragraphs either appear to provide oversimplifications or deviate from the topic discussed by the titles by introducing additional facts about Yemen. Some articles ‘randomly’ mentioned the presence of AQAP in Yemen, when the articles themselves focused on the protests taking place against President Saleh. Similarly, the cooperation between the ‘joint operation between US and Yemeni officials against AQAP’ is the conclusion of an article that discusses the conflict between Sunni and Shiite tribes in Yemen. In another article, the author concludes that kidnapping has ‘long been a problem in Yemen, with tribes often using foreign nationals as bargaining chips in their dealings with the central government’, while the article primarily discusses a sectarian conflict among Yemeni tribes. Statements as such leave the reader with a threatening image of non-state Others from the intersubjective relation between Yemeni tribes and foreign nationals. The abrupt introduction of foreign interest is what stays with the reader since it is introduced in the last paragraph, distracting the reader from the main points of the article and thus minimizing the national conflict’s urgency.

352 Ibid; Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,.”
353 Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,”.
354 Almasmari, “Rebels overrun tribal stronghold in Yemens,”.
Thus, unlike expected, the concluding paragraphs do not function as a reinforcing section of the Houthi representation. Instead, the conclusions leave the readers with the idea that there is a self-evident interest in Yemen that requires no elaboration.

**Linguistic Features**

**Word groups**

The jargon of the discourse was specifically evaluated to assess whether the articles use vocabulary that have a ‘common contextual background’, because if so, this can strengthen the notion of an ‘inherent’ coherence when constructing identities. In this regard, it was expected that the conflict would be portrayed as a sectarian one by making use of religious terms. Considering that most of the justifications made for invading Yemen are based on Iranian involvement, it was expected that articles would frequently refer to the common Shiism of the Houthis and Iran. This was tested by indicating how frequently sects such as Sunni, Shiite, Zaydi, Salafi were used to label the local groups when explaining their dynamics.

As expected, CNN indeed referred to various Islamic sects that oppose each other in the conflict throughout the domestic discourse. The Houthis are introduced as Shiites, a clear oversimplification of differences among Shiite beliefs, and opposing tribes and the majority of Yemen are mostly presented as Sunnis. Even though the Sunni-Shiite divide is not explicitly explained, the Muslim divide is often implied by labelling actors according to their sects and stating that these groups oppose each other. This presented the domestic conflicts as religious ones, i.e. conflicts that exists due to the disagreement ‘over which religious sect will control the area’. Yet, unlike expected, the common Shiite belief of the Houthis and the Iranian regime was not stressed frequently. A possible explanation for this can be the fact that only one article referred to Iran throughout the discourse. Thus, this commonality did not have opportunities to appear in the discourse. In addition to the Muslim sectarian jargon throughout the discourse, the article referring to the potential Iranian involvement can be singled out once again for its use of technical jargon about weaponry. By using specific terms, Iran’s threatening identity is reinforced.

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357 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,“.

358 Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,”.
By repeatedly listing the sectarian background of actors, the conflict is framed as though sectarian difference is the causes of the domestic conflict. Considering that the link between religion and conflicts is contextual, such labelling oversimplifies the domestic conflict and constructs it as an Islamic conflict. This oversimplification ignores the struggle over economic and political factors among the actors. Repeatedly framing the conflict as an Islamic sectarian conflict creates a barbaric scenario—one the Self does not empathize with, which distances the Self from the Other. While the Self could identify with rebel actors based on the contextual meaning given to them, ‘Shiite rebels’ are unidentifiable for the audience. Moreover, mentioning that certain tribes have called ‘a jihad against Houthis’, perpetuates the image of violence surrounding Islam, feeding from the expected foundation that Islam is incompatible with democracy.

As expected, this religious oversimplification allows to link the proxy dimension of the Middle East between Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, this was not repeated as frequently as was expected. Iran was explicitly labelled as Shiite in one article and Saudi Arabia not even mentioned. However, arguing that other Middle Eastern countries ‘face similar sectarian clashes’, is a strong oversimplification that makes the proxy dimension of the Sunni-Shiite divide appear inherently present.

It was not foreseen in the expectations that al-Houthi’s military capacity and non-religious aims would be undermined. An example of this would be that the leader is referred to as a ‘spiritual leader’ at numerous occasions. In one of the articles, the Houthis are articulated as individuals who ‘are ready to obey commands from [their] spiritual leader’. Not mentioning that these commands are based on the Houthis’ resistance against exclusion and marginalization of the Zaydi community, portrays the Houthis as a brainwashed cult that obediently follows its clerk—an irrational collection of individuals. This image is in contrast with the self-perception of the Self as a rational actor in domestic and international issues, which exemplifies the hierarchy in which the Self perceives itself as superior to the irrational Other.

Lastly, the outlier case lists all the weapons found on a boat twice when accusing Iranian of involvement. Instead of merely stating that weapons were found, the article listed the weapons: ‘anti-aircraft missiles, C4 military-grade explosives, ammunition and bomb-making equipment such as circuits, triggers and various handheld explosives’. This clinches the notion that Iran is a serious military threat to the Self. Moreover, stating that seizing the suspect boat was a ‘joint operation’ of the US and Yemen implies an identity similarity between the US and Yemeni regime with a common set

359 Starr, “Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says,”.
360 Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,” ; Almasmari, “Yemeni lawmaker killed, envoy reportedly fired upon in separate attacks,”.
361 Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,”.
362 Starr, “‘Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says,”.
of goals in stopping Iran—a common interest.\textsuperscript{363} Lastly, referring to the cooperative nature of the relation between the US and Hadi regime by stating that the ‘USS Farragut was working with Yemeni authorities’\textsuperscript{364} and that it was a ‘joint operation [because] … US forces joined Yemeni counterparts in boarding the suspect boat’ suggests that US presence in Yemen is due to the collaboration with the recognized regime and thus legitimate, even though the US justifies its presence in Yemen with combating AQAP in other articles.

\textit{Intertextualities}

Intertextuality was addressed in this research as references to previous meanings can create an ‘unquestioned seemingly objective truth’ in the eyes of the audience. If coherent, the interconnectivity may aid in presenting the information as observable and thus self-evident. When this is the case, legitimacy can come from this ‘unquestionable’ truth, interpelling the subject position. In this regard, it was expected that the articles would frequently refer to past and present ties between the Houthis and Iran, along with 9/11 and the war on terror to justify US presence in Yemen. To test whether these expectations held, the research took note of how often these topics were referred to.

The findings suggest that both expectations did not hold for the domestic conflict discourse. Instead, within the given discourse, the articles primarily refer to Yemeni sources to support current developments. References to other events are merely made in conclusions without explaining the link between those events and the Yemeni conflict. Most truth-claims appear to have been collected from local experts in relevant fields, e.g. medics, the Yemeni Scholar Committee, Abaad Research Center, and NGOs. The articles also refer to the Houthis spokespersons, state-run media, officials from various Yemeni ministries and opposition members, and televised speeches made by the president and al-Houthi. Despite the variety in sources, the most frequently cited sources are anonymous witnesses.\textsuperscript{365}

While experts, such as medics or government officials, are presented as trustworthy sources, since they are considered respectable professions in the West, the data used for this research stumbles upon certain ambiguity. Even though the profession of the expert is explicitly stated, names are often omitted. It appears this is tried to be compensated for by adding that multiple people of the said stature corroborate each other’s findings, e.g. claiming that ‘three senior interior ministry officials’\textsuperscript{366} or ‘two medics’\textsuperscript{367} provided a fact. However, increasing the number of anonymous sources does not improve the lack of traceability of the statements. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the articles inconsistently

\textsuperscript{363} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{364} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{365} Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,” ; Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,” ; Jamjoom, Almasmari, “Yemen: Sectarian fighting kills dozens,”.
\textsuperscript{366} Almasmari, “Rebels overrun tribal stronghold in Yemens.”.
\textsuperscript{367} Starr, “Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says.
comment on the anonymity of sources. While the names of individuals are rarely provided, it is at times explicitly stated that an individual ‘told CNN on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to talk to the media’ or that the official ‘declined to be identified because of the sensitive nature of the information’. Such mentions mostly occurred during president Saleh’s reign and serves to perpetuate the oppressive image of the leader, suggesting that it is ‘normal’ that anonymity is desired. This supports the hierarchy in which the president Saleh is perceived morally inferior to the Self.

While the inability to trace hinders the reliability of the truth-claims, this set up of anonymous references also has an influence on the identity creation of the Yemeni public as well as the Yemeni government. It is questionable why anonymous sources provide information such as ‘two people were killed’ or that ‘three army planes flew over the crowd and attacked the protestors’, while traceable sources, such as media outlets, NGOs or activists, could provide information as such. While anonymity is expected under president Saleh’s oppressive regime, the continuing anonymity of sources suggest that there are no capable actors that can obtain and provide reliable information or that there is an unspoken ongoing fear regardless of who the president is. The capability is discussed in one of the articles, in which CNN openly compares the death toll provided by eyewitnesses as ‘at least one’, hospital and government officials as ‘six people have been killed’, and local human rights NGO claims ‘the number of deaths [is] as high as 12’. This chaos of information is concluded with ‘the Human Rights Watch also said 12 people had died’ (emphasis added). This hints at a hierarchy, in which the Yemeni sources need to be confirmed by superior Western sources. This, in turn, implies that the information provided by Western sources is reliable and that CNN takes its research seriously in teasing out objective information. Thus, the validity of the information provided by CNN is less likely to be questioned by the audience, as it appears as objective and self-evident.

Finally, while a variety of experts are referred to, which could suggest objectivity, the findings suggest that there is an asymmetry in which sides of the conflict are published after November 2011. After president Saleh’s resignation, government officials and other tribe leaders are quoted or paraphrased in articles, while the Houthi perspective is often omitted. While there is a relative symmetry

368 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,”; Almasmari, “Protesters killed in Yemen in raid attempt on ministerial cabinet,”; Starr, “Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says,”.
369 Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,”.
370 Ibid.
371 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,”.
372 Ibid.
373 Ibid.
prior to November 2011, the asymmetry following the resignation suggests a certain bias as to whom CNN is prioritizing for interpreting as more reliable once president Hadi came to power in 2012. Consequently, identity construction, and thus interest, heavily rely on non-Houthi bias.

**Imagery**

Rhetorical and literary figures can help visualize certain associations in the minds of the reader and help reinforce certain relations and categories. This, in turn, helps reinforcing meaning. This research expected the presentation of the Houthi-supported protesters against president Saleh, which are regarded as protesters with a just goal by the Self for demanding freedom, to be more romanticized. This expectation relies on Spencer’s explanation that describing actors in romantic and emotional terms helps legitimize their actions within a discourse. More specifically, characterising rebels as the brave underdog fighting an oppressive regime for an ideal such as freedom can help legitimize their actions. In order to test this expectation, any descriptions of the venue of the protests and whether diversity among protesters was mentioned were specifically scrutinized.

As expected, the scene of protests was indeed portrayed in a romantic fashion; however, the romantic setting is not particular to the Houthis, but referred to the Yemeni public in general. An unforeseen finding of the research was that one article compared president Saleh after his resignation to ‘three other leaders’ who were forced to step down during the Arab Spring. By presenting the cases as similar, suggesting some form of comparison, the reader is left with the idea that the entire region went through the same process. By generalizing a trend of resigning oppressive leaders to the entire MENA region, the developments are sketched as ‘normal’ to the region. This reinforces the image of a barbaric Other leader.

The description of the settings in which protests took place contribute to how they are interpreted by the reader. During the Houthi-supported public protests against president Saleh, the articles add that the demonstrations took place ‘around Sanaa University’ and that some were conducted in ‘sit-in demonstrations’. The article lists that the protests included ‘students, women, tribesmen and members of the opposition’ instead of merely stating that many people joined. Thus, the Houthi-backed public comes across as inclusive, educated, and idealistic. As Spencer explains,
idealism creates a romantic setting, which in turn implies legitimacy. The diverse group of people are portrayed as a brave public resisting a brutal and oppressive regime in the name of freedom. While the tribesmen are very different from the daily reality of the Self, ‘students, women, and members of the opposition’ are an identifiable variety for the Self, implying a similarity between the Self and Yemeni public. This is used to reinforce the moral hierarchy between the Houthi-supported public and the Saleh regime.

Following president Saleh’s resignation, CNN states that he ‘became the fourth leader to leave office as a result of the Arab Spring in the Arab world’ that year. This statement oversimplifies the outcomes of the protests that occurred in the region, since the president of Tunisia fled to Saudi Arabia, the president of Egypt was tried on multiple charges after resigning, and the president of Libya was killed by rebels. Despite having similar elements, this oversimplification suggests a broad generalization of what the protests entailed and what their outcomes were. Oversimplifications as such allow generalizations to take root in the minds of the reader and reduce the MENA reality to a general sectarian power struggle.

Omissions

Omissions can significantly contribute to hierarchical dichotomies, serving to marginalize truth-claims or perspectives that are not mentioned. This becomes particularly effective when accompanied with the repetition of another discourse over a given period. The more rigid the hierarchy, the more challenging it becomes to make the suppressed discourse visible. This research expected US presence in Yemen to be omitted throughout the domestic discourse, as it would not be constructing the Self as an involved actor, thus reducing its responsibility in Yemen. Prior to reading the articles, a detailed timeline of the events that took place in Yemen and each article was placed within the chronology. Thus, by comparing the two, it was possible to reveal which information was left out of the articles.

Indeed, as expected, the articles largely omit US involvement in the Yemeni conflict. However, the discourse also omits the rationale behind US presence in Yemen to begin with, what the US exactly does in Yemen in its battle against AQAP, and the implications of its actions on the domestic conflict. Additionally, the Houthi agenda is ignored. Thus, it is unclear to CNN’s audience why Houthis react

381 Almasmari, “Medics: Militants raid Yemen town, killing dozens,”.
the way they do. Such omissions construct the entity as one that irrationally resorts to force without trying alternative conflict resolutions.

While AQAP is frequently mentioned, US counterterrorist actions do not accompany this information, even though the US cooperated with Yemeni authorities on eliminating the terrorist organization in Yemen since 2002. Only two articles refer to US presence in Yemen: the first refers to the US ‘crackdown on al Qaeda’ and the second refers to the US seizing a suspect boat. Neither article mentions the exact motives, legal basis, or the specific actions such as drone strikes the US takes. This omission decreases the perception of the US as being heavily involved in Yemen and thus the responsibility it has in the conflict. The background information states that the increased number of drone strikes aimed at AQAP in Yemen, killing both AQAP members and civilians, increased the overall anti-US sentiment in Yemen. Similarly, the fact that increased anti-US sentiment caused local tribes to align with AQAP has also not been mentioned. While it was expected that Saudi Arabian and Iranian involvement would be hinted at, their involvement are also generally omitted, except for the one article that mentioned the seizure of an allegedly Iranian boat. This in effect completely ignores the external influence of the foreign actors on the seemingly domestic conflict. Thus, by omitting foreign actors and their perception of both Yemeni presidents, the frame of the conflict is reinforced as being domestic and disregarding the international elements involved.

Secondly, it is not mentioned why the Yemeni public protested president Saleh and why the Houthis supported these demonstrations. Only one article refers to the goal of ‘protecting [the Zaydi] community from government discrimination’. By failing to mention the motives of both the public and Houthis, it is not clear to CNN’s audience why these groups have a common interest in president Saleh’s resignation. In this backdrop, it is further surprising and unclear for the audience why the Houthis started a protest against newly elected president Hadi, when the public stopped demonstrating.

By only mentioning that the Houthis strived for Zaydi equality, it appears as though they have no additional agenda. Yet, as was suggested in the background information, it appears that the Houthis objected to the new constitution drafted without their input and the manipulation of their borders. More importantly, these articles failed to mention that president Hadi was the only candidate during the 2012 elections, overlooking the possibility that the Houthis questioned the new leader’s legitimacy. Omitting this information portrays the Houthis as unreasonable for not recognizing the power transfer to the seemingly democratic president Hadi. On a broader scale, CNN also does not mention why there are inter-tribe conflicts, such as with the Houthis and the Salafi Hashid tribe, allowing them to also be perceived as lacking an agenda with regards to the Yemeni regime. By solely declaring that the conflict

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384 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’,”.
385 Starr, “Weapons seized off Yemen point to Iran, U.S. official says,”.
386 Jamjoom, Almasmari, “Yemen: Sectarian fighting kills dozens.”.
is sectarian, and not elaborating on further motives of the parties, the Houthis are portrayed as irrational, fundamentalist actors the Self cannot identify with. Due to the lack of similarities, especially after November 2011, there appears to be no common interest, especially because it is never mentioned that both perceive AQAP as a serious threat to their self-interest.

Summary of Frame A

The above discussion suggests that CNN interpreted and thus presented the Houthis as similar to the Self when the movement was supporting the anti-Saleh protests in 2011. However, the Houthi identity was slightly re-constructed after president Saleh resigned in November 2011. While the conflict was presented as a domestic conflict, the discourse to describe the battle evolved from a fight for democracy to a sectarian conflict. The overall increase in the labelling of actors as solely members of their sects and oversimplifications of local dimensions presented in conclusions illustrates internal dynamics within Yemen that the Self does not identify with. Thus, there is a paradigm shift from focus on similarities between the Self and Houthis to differences after November 2011. With the similarities between the Self and Houthis disappearing, it is seen that there is an irreconcilable gap between the identification of the Self and the Others, which implies a hierarchy in which the civilized Self is superior to the barbaric Others. This is further supported by omitting US presence and responsibility in the conflict.

Frame B: Towards a Regional Conflict (September 21, 2014 – March 25, 2015)

The September 2014 Houthi takeover of Sana’a appears to evolve the discourse to a regional conflict where the alleged Houthi-Iran ties were expressed more frequently. The ‘random’ introduction of Western and US interests provided in the conclusions of the previous discourse allow for this transition to flow naturally. The discourse re-creates the Houthis as the cause of Yemen’s instability. Since AQAP benefits from the chaos, the Houthis are scapegoated for AQAP’s growing power. In the next discourse, this growth is presented as a threat to the embassy personnel of various Western nations in Yemen. Considering that Yemen was unstable before the Houthi takeover, but that no explicit reason was given for why the Houthis are presented as the cause of the chaos, the following discussion will try to make sense of how the Houthi-identity was re-created with respect to the Self and thus explain how the collaboration with the Houthis in eliminating AQAP broke down.
Structural Features

Title

Since this discourse ended with the US declaring its support for the Saudi-led coalition, it was expected that the Houthis would be introduced as aggressive actors after taking over Sana’a, implying a threat to the US. Additionally, since justifications for the invasion were made on the grounds of Iranian involvement, it was expected that Iran would be mentioned in the titles. Similar to the previous discourse, the analysis assessed which actors were referred to in the titles and whether the Houthis were accompanied by particular adjectives or actions.

As expected, the Houthis were indeed introduced generally as more dangerous actors in this discourse; however, they were portrayed as a direct threat towards the US only once. AQAP was frequently referred to in the titles, which implied US interest. However, instead of implying US involvement, the US was presented as an indirect victim of the chaos created by the aggressive Houthis due to the fact that AQAP was benefitting from this environment of chaos. While Iran was expected to be mentioned frequently, it did not take place in any title. Thus, the titles undermined the contribution of foreign actors to the chaos.

Following the Houthi takeover of the capital, the titles increasingly introduce the Houthis as aggressive and threatening actors. At first, the audience may feel sympathy towards the Houthis, because a ‘blast kills 47 at Houthi protest’ or ‘deadly blast targets Houthi gathering’, both in which Houthis are targeted brutally and the word choice of ‘protest’ and ‘gathering’ can have peaceful connotations. Yet, in the following titles, the Houthis are re-created as threatening actors, namely because they ‘abduct[ed] Yemeni President’s chief of staff’ and ‘Houthis [took] US vehicles [and] weapons’. By positioning the Houthis as aggressors instead of victims and by articulating the movement as dangerous, the new articulation allows for a transformation of Houthi identity. As a result, the similarities between the Self and Houthis diminish, and so does the common interest. Simultaneously, the Hadi regime is increasingly presented as the weaker side of the conflict through titles such as ‘Yemen’s President ‘has no control’ as Houthi rebels storm palace’ and ‘Protests support Hakim Almasmari, Jason Hanna, “Blast kills 47 at Houthi protest in Yemen, officials say,” CNN, accessed March 16, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/09/world/meast/yemen-violence/index.html.
388 CNN, “Deadly blast targets Houthi gathering in Yemen.”
Yemeni President escapes house arrest”. The act of ‘fleeing’ a ‘house arrest’ portrays a weak president. Because the Hadi regime is presented as a weak one, the Self is presented as being stronger than the Yemeni regime that requires its assistance.

With regards to foreign actors being mentioned in titles, US presence in Yemen is openly mentioned in numerous titles; however, it is not mentioned in the context of the Houthi conflict. Instead, titles position the US in a victim position such as ‘Pentagon in position to evacuate US Embassy in Yemen’; and ‘US pulls remaining forces out of Yemen’; Such titles create a threatened Self that needs to flee an unknown danger, signalling the underlying right to self-defence. The only article that clarifies who targets the US is ‘Houthis tak[ing] U.S. vehicles’; Despite being the only time between 2011 and 2015 that the Houthis were interpreted and presented as a direct threat to the Self, this perception distances the Self from the Houthis, re-creating them as threatening rebels instead of the underdog that was once resisting oppressive president Saleh. Although it is only mentioned once, the fact that the Self is openly referred to as being threatened has an impact that is not comparable to other outlier cases. The remaining titles referring to the US directly connect it to AQAP presence, creating a direct legitimizing reason for the US to target Yemen with drones, e.g. ‘AQAP confirms links to underwear bomber’. Especially titles that emphasize victories against AQAP suggest that the actions taken in Yemen are appropriate, e.g. ‘drone strikes kill[ed] al-Qaeda militants’ and ‘US forces [are] out in Yemen’. Such articulations create a strong and capable Self vis-à-vis AQAP, clarifying that national interest will be met by eliminating the enemy. Nonetheless, these titles do not clarify the position of the Self with respect to the Houthis.

Unlike the previous discourse, this one refers to AQAP in its titles, increasing the urgency of the predicament for the audience, since they are familiar with AQAP. It appears that AQAP benefits

395 Payne, “U.S., UK and France pull embassy staffs out of Yemen.”
from what is coined as the ‘sectarian spiral’ caused by the Houthis: ‘Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral: al Qaeda set to benefit’. Such articulations portray an uncontrollable threat to the Self, as AQAP is its greatest security threat. A potential similarity between the Houthis and US is implied only in one title that indicates a common enemy for the two, which states that “Al Qaeda car bombs target Houthi fighters in Yemeni port city”. This could have resulted in a common interest: AQAP’s elimination. Nonetheless, none of the titles refer back to this potential common interest, marginalizing this alternative discourse vis-à-vis the dominant discourse in which Houthis are increasingly interpreted as threatening.

**Conclusion**

It was expected that the conclusions would repeat threatening articulations made about the Houthis throughout the article to fix the new meaning given to the movement’s identity. Fixing such a meaning could allow for a natural transition from the previously milder discourse to attacking the Houthis, as they are increasingly perceived as dangerous. To test this expectation, the analysis took note of what kind of information was repeated in the concluding paragraphs concerning the created Houthi identity.

Even though the expected sort of conclusions were found less frequently than expected, certain conclusions indeed underlined the uncooperative and irrational nature of the Houthis. However, the majority of articles appear to touch upon US interest in Yemen in concluding paragraphs, which, towards the end of the period, is accompanied by stressing the strength and military capabilities of the Self, leaving the reader more reassured.

While some conclusions do not repeat a clear opinion about the Houthis, certain conclusions relay the notion that Houthis are perceived as irrational and uncooperative actors. For example, an article that discusses the actions of AQAP, concludes with ‘though a ceasefire deal was signed, Houthis continued protesting’ or ‘one month after signing the ceasefire deal, Houthis took control of the capital’. The latter is repeated in other contexts where the main issue is not the ceasefire, so the notion

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402 CNN, “Yemen bombing kills 7 near hospital.”

403 CNN, “Deadly blast targets Houthi gathering in Yemen.”
of the Houthis’ irrationality is perpetuated.\textsuperscript{404} Such a repetition reinforces how the Houthis are perceived by the Self.

The unforeseen pattern spotted in the conclusions was the information provided about US interest in Yemen’s stability. The articles at the beginning of the discourse in this time frame concluded articles by stating that AQAP is present in Yemen and that the US-Yemen alliance has countered their expansion ‘for long’,\textsuperscript{405} that Yemen’s descent into a conflict is the worst-case scenario for Washington,\textsuperscript{406} and that Yemen occupies ‘strategic real estate’.\textsuperscript{407} Following the US embassy evacuation of January 2015—four months after the Houthi takeover—numerous articles end with the following verbatim conclusion:

\begin{quote}
‘it’s not clear what Houthis’ takeover of Sanaa means for US anti-terrorism efforts, but the drone program there still appears to be active. A US drone strike killed senior AQAP cleric Harith bin Ghazi al-Nadhari’.
\end{quote}

The repetition of this conclusion provides the message that despite the chaos, the US will continue to ensure its national interest with its advanced drone program, as it has by killing a seemingly important AQAP cleric. Thus, the repetition leaves the reader with the impression that the US is taking appropriate steps to ensure safety and is thus acting legitimately. It is crucial that this perception concludes some articles, as the identity construct is what stays with the readers. The reinforcement of the appropriate image of the Self interpellates the subject position. Considering that this is what stays with the reader, this perception of the Self also dominates alternative meanings of the Self. By repeating at the end that the Self is acting appropriately, it is forgotten that the only legal grounds of US intervention, namely its War on Terror, does not constitute the legal basis for attacking the Houthis.


\textsuperscript{405} Almasmari, Jason Hanna, “Blast kills 47 at Houthi protest in Yemen, officials say.” ; Payne, “U.S., UK and France pull embassy staffers out of Yemen.”

\textsuperscript{406} CNN, “Surge in fighting threatens Yemen’s survival.”

\textsuperscript{407} Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit.”

Linguistic Features

Word Groups

It was expected that the conflict would be increasingly portrayed as a sectarian one in order to prove that there are strong ties between the Houthis and Iran. This would allow to portray the conflict as a regional one. As in the previous discourse, this expectation was tested by assessing how often different sect names accompanied actors when explaining oppositions and more specifically, how often Shiism was mentioned as a common characteristic of the Houthis and Iran.

As expected, the regional conflict discourse continues to refer to the Shiite-Sunni divide in an overly simplistic manner; however, it adds an additional dimension in that it includes AQAP as another sectarian actor, whereas AQAP’s sectarian affiliation was previously not mentioned. There were also two unforeseen patterns. Firstly, the biological jargon used in certain articles downplays the involvement of foreign actors in Yemen’s suffering. Secondly, the articles use a language that emphasizes the US’ strong military capacity and the fact that the US will not shy away from exerting control in the region if it is necessary to ensure its national interests. The US national interest is often accompanied by its alliance with president Hadi, which portrays US actions and presence in Yemen as legitimate.

The discourse reinforces the notion that the Yemeni conflict is a sectarian one, in which a Shiite minority is fighting a Sunni majority. The repetition of this jargon from 2011 to 2015, portrays a conflict where Muslims kill each other to spread their own sectarian ideology. The scope of the regional conflict discourse is widened by including AQAP, introduced as either Sunni Muslim terrorists,’ ‘Sunni extremist group’, or ‘anti-Shia’. Repeatedly stating that the actors attack each other for sectarian reasons oversimplifies their motives and excludes possible additional motives, such as economic and political factors. Considering that the Self’s reality does not entail Islamic sectarian clashes, the repetition distances the Self further from the Yemeni conflict. It also implies that the parties of this sectarian divide in Yemen are all similar to each other, in that they all strive for the domination of the sect they identify with. In light of this oversimplification, one would assume that the Sunni Yemeni regime and Sunni AQAP would cooperate; however, it is not explained why this is not the case.

409 Almasmari; Hanna, “Blast kills 47 at Houthi protest in Yemen, officials say.”
411 CNN, “Deadly blast targets Houthi gathering in Yemen.”; CNN, “Yemen’s Houthi rebels show willingness to negotiate, cut rough deal.”
412 Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit.”
413 Almasmari, Brumfield, “Yemen's Houthi rebels show willingness to negotiate, cut rough deal.”; Almasmari, Hanna, “Yemen's deposed president flees house arrest, plans to withdraw resignation.”
While the Shiite-Sunni divide continues to be perpetuated by stating which actor identifies with which sect, some articles explicitly oversimplify the dimensions at stake, arguing that ‘Houthis are followers of a sect of Shia Islam. Iran is predominantly Shiite’, \(^{414}\) that ‘Houthis are being trained and advised by Shia Hezbollah’, \(^{415}\) or that ‘Iran has spent years spreading its influence throughout the region its wider proxy battle with its rival Saudi Arabia’. \(^{416}\) Despite these examples, the so-called obvious Shiite connection between the Houthis and Iran is not repeated as often as was expected.

The biological jargon introduced in this discourse minimizes interferences made by foreign actors. Truth-claims such as ‘violence flares’ \(^{417}\) portrays the conflict as the consequence of a natural disaster. By drawing on biological terms, the fact that we are faced with a human-made disaster is downplayed. Additionally, labelling the Yemeni situation as a ‘chronic instability’ \(^{418}\) or stating that ‘fighting has plagued Yemen’ \(^{419}\) portrays the conflict as a disease. The word choice of chronic additionally presents the situation of Yemen as always having been problematic, as if it would not be expected to be any different. Similarly, stating that the Yemeni government is ‘paralyzed’ \(^{420}\) or that Yemen is a place where ‘al Qaeda incubates quickly’ \(^{421}\) portrays the conflict as an inevitable disease out of the control of the actors involved, thus downplaying the contribution of states to the chaos in which AQAP grows.

By using military jargon when discussing the US presence in Yemen, the articles use words that create the image of a powerful and capable Self. When stating that the US will evacuate its embassy for security reasons, the articles also state that ‘[a] V-22 aircraft, helicopters, two ships, detailed military planning for various options’ \(^{422}\) will still remain in Yemen and that ‘if necessary [these] will be used’. \(^{423}\) Similarly it states that the US military ‘remains active in Yemen’. \(^{424}\) These possessions are mentioned

\(^{414}\) CNN, “Surge in fighting threatens Yemen’s survival.” ; CNN, “Blast outside Iranian ambassador’s residence in Yemen kills 6.”

\(^{415}\) Lister, Cruickshank, “Al Qaeda resurgent in Yemen amid political turmoil.”


\(^{417}\) CNN, “Ceasefire research in Yemen after day of heavy fighting, officials say.”


\(^{419}\) Almasmari, Scoichet, Roth, “Houthi rebels seize airport; U.N. envoy warns Yemen at ‘edge of civil war’.”


\(^{421}\) Lister, Cruickshank, “Al Qaeda resurgent in Yemen amid political turmoil,” ; Ibid.


\(^{423}\) Pearson, “U.S., British forces out in Yemen, raising terror fears.”

\(^{424}\) Payne, “U.S., UK and France pull embassy staffers out of Yemen.”
in a context in which Yemen itself is portrayed as a weak state that requires international assistance for its survival, reinforcing the hierarchy of the Self assisting the Other.

To justify the US’ extraterritorial military presence, CNN also emphasizes the legitimacy of its ally: president Hadi. Articles first refer to the Yemeni authorities as a ‘key ally’. However, this alliance was never referred to as being a ‘key’ one prior to the Houthi takeover of Sana’a. The legitimate image is further supported by the fact that president Hadi is referred to as the ‘constitutional president’, elected president or by directly stating that the US ‘considers Hadi to be Yemen’s legitimate President’. Identifying as a liberal democracy, the Self identifies with this label and perceives the leadership of an elected, constitutional leader as appropriate, thus legitimate. Nonetheless, these labels fail to reveal that president Hadi was the only candidate of the 2012 elections. Nonetheless, these labels fail to reveal that president Hadi was the only candidate of the 2012 elections.

While portraying the Hadi regime as legitimate, the articles make use of word choices that downplay the fervour of the Houthi resistance, by frequently stating that the Houthis ‘feel’, ‘claim’ or ‘complain about’ being marginalized as a Shiite minority in a predominantly Sunni country. It is noteworthy that prior to the Houthi takeover of Sana’a, the articles stated confidently that ‘Houthis are

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427 Almasmari, Scoichet, Roth, “Houthi rebels seize airport; U.N. envoy warns Yemen at ‘edge of civil war’.”


429 Al Jazeera, “Yemen election ends Saleh’s 33-year rule.”


431 Almasmari, “U.S. drone strikes kill al Qaeda militants, Yemen officials say.”

432 CNN, “Surge in fighting threatens Yemen’s survival.”
marginalized’, instead of stating that they ‘feel’ marginalized. Stating that the Houthis continue resisting the elected president for how they feel, omitting that the Houthis accuse him of manipulating the borders of the Zaydi community, portrays that Houthis as irrational actors driven by emotion rather than logic, perpetuating the notion that they are inferior to the constitutional Yemeni president—the Self’s key ally.

Intertextualities

The research expected to find references to past and present ties between the Houthis and Iran, along with 9/11 and the War on Terror to justify US presence in Yemen. To test whether these expectations held, the research took note of whether these topics were referred to.

As expected, the articles frequently referred to AQAP and its past threats to both the US directly, and the Western civilization as a whole, to justify US presence in Yemen. Instead of referring to the expected 9/11 attacks, the discourse frequently refers to the ‘2009 Underwear Bomber’ and ‘2015 Hebdo slaughtering’, both highlighting the threats AQAP has posed to the Western world. Unlike expected, the discourse barely made any references to political, economic or military ties between the Houthis and Iran. Unforeseen findings of the research include the reconstruction of the Houthis as a growing threat by frequently referring to the Houthi takeover of the capital in September 2014 and the fact that the Houthis have always breached ceasefires. Lastly, there is a continuing asymmetry in news sources, favouring the perspective of the Hadi regime over the Houthi stance, and continuing to present Western sources as more reliable compared to Yemeni ones. As a result, the Hadi regime-bias and Western sources primarily guided the construction of identities.

To justify US presence and action in Yemen, the articles frequently refer to the US-Yemen alliance against AQAP. By frequently repeating that the relation between the Self and the Yemeni authorities

433 Jamjoom, Theodorou, “Yemen’s president compares protests to ‘influenza’.”
434 Almasmari, “U.S. drone strikes kill al Qaeda militants, Yemen officials say.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President, Cabinet resign.” ; Payne, “U.S., UK and France pull embassy staffers out of Yemen.” ; Levs, Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.”
435 The underwear bomber refers to the failed attempt of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to blow up an airline approaching Detroit in 2009 with explosives hidden in his underwear (Shane, “Inside Al Qaeda’s Plot to Blow Up an American Airliner.”)
436 Cruickshank, Lister, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula confirms links to underwear bomber.” ; Levs, Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, Shoichet, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.” ; Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit,” ; Collinson, “Yemen chaos threatens White House anti-terror campaign.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President, Cabinet resign.” ; Almasmari, Hanna, Mullen, “Yemen: Jet strikes palace grounds in deposed President's stronghold.”
437 Ibid.
438 Almasmari, “U.S. drone strikes kill al Qaeda militants, Yemen officials say.” ; Cruickshank, Lister, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula confirms links to underwear bomber.” ; Acosta, Liptak, “Yemen unrest throws wrench in Obama's terror message.” ; Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian
is cooperative, the actions taken by the Self appear to respect international law as they are based on the consent of both nation leaders, thus appearing appropriate. The Self’s active presence in Yemen is also legitimized by frequently referring to the AQAP-claimed ‘2009 Underwear Bomber’ and ‘2015 Hebdo slaughtering’, both highlighting the threats AQAP poses to the Western world. Highlighting past threats to the Self’s interest presents actions taken to protect the Self as appropriate as they rely on the notion of self-defence. While the discourses appear inherently connected, drawing on the two threats distracts the reader from the fact that the mentioned threats do not stem from the Houthis but AQAP. Thus the justifications do not cover indirect attacks on the Houthis.

To compensate for this gap between the Houthi actions and the threat the US perceives from them, articles frequently refer to past threatening acts of the Houthis. Even though the Houthis have not been described as direct threats to US interest, the movement is still presented as an actor that creates a hostile environment for the Self. For example, many articles repeat that ‘Western nations were stunned [by the Houthi takeover] and pulled out their staff’, however, one must keep in mind that such statements were not made right after the Houthi takeover but were only repeated four months after the Houthis took over the capital. In retrospect, the takeover is often presented as the reason for the embassy evacuation in January 2015. While the evacuation indeed took place due to security concerns, the takeover itself was not the main reason. However, referring to the closing of Western countries’ embassies as a result of the takeover creates the impression that the Houthis were the main threat posed at US national interest, leading it to recall its civilian staff. It is later clarified that this is not actually the case in an article stating that ‘the US believes the Houthis are not targeting Americans’. However, the lack of repetition marginalizes the alternative description of the US-Houthi relation.

In addition to the constructed dangerous image, the Houthis are also reconstructed as unreliable actors, as articles frequently refer to the fact that ceasefires made prior to the takeover did not last.

439 The underwear bomber refers to the failed attempt of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to blow up an airline approaching Detroit in 2009 with explosives hidden in his underwear (Shane, “Inside Al Qaeda’s Plot to Blow Up an American Airliner.”)

440 Cruickshank, Lister, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula confirms links to underwear bomber.” ; Levs, Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen’s President has no control’ as Houthi rebels storm palace.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, Shoichet, “Yemen’s President has no control’ as Houthi rebels storm palace.” ; Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit,” ; Collinson, “Yemen chaos threatens White House anti-terror campaign.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen’s President, Cabinet resign.” ; Almasmari, Hanna, Mullen, “Yemen: Jet strikes palace grounds in deposed President's stronghold.”

441 Ibid.

442 Almasmari, Hanna, “Yemen's deposed president flees house arrest, plans to withdraw resignation.” ; Almasmari, “Protests support Yemeni President after he escapes house arrest.” ; Almasmari, Hanna, Mullen, “Yemen: Jet strikes palace grounds in deposed President's stronghold.”

443 Starr, “Pentagon in position to evacuate U.S. Embassy in Yemen.”
because of the Houthis. The articles frequently refer to the movement agreeing to a ceasefire with the government in 2014, but that they ‘swept into the capital, sparking battles that left more than 300 dead in a month’ and since ‘installed themselves in key positions in the government and financial institutions’. This reference fails to inform the reader with regards to the fact that president Hadi manipulated the territories promised to the Zaydi community and tried to adopt a new constitution without Houthi participation. Consequently, it creates the impression that the Houthis were the sole party responsible for the 300-people casualty and attributes no responsibility to the regime’s military forces that fought the Houthis, since they are not mentioned. This impression reinforces the brutal characteristics of the Houthi identity, which is seen as inferior to the Yemeni regime.

Concerning the bias on which the CNN perspective builds, the discourse tends to reflect more of the statements made by Yemeni civil servants than any other source, which it also did in the second half of the previous discourse. Unlike the discourse in the previous time frame, which made use of many anonymous witnesses, the current one draws more on the interpretations of anonymous officials from various ministries. As in the previous discourse, to compensate for the inability to trace the anonymous sources, it appears as though CNN is trying to make assertions of facts more reliable by quantifying that multiple civil servants corroborate each other’s findings, i.e. ‘two’ or ‘three’ officials provided the same information. The Houthi perspective is often ignored and the lack of perspective continues to guide the construction of the Houthis according to the bias of the US’ key ally, the Hadi regime.

An additional pattern spotted in the previous time frame, that is also spotted here, is the hierarchy in which the sources are presented. In cases where there are contradicting views on the consequences

444 Almasmar, Botelho, “Al Qaeda car bombs target Houthi fighters in Yemeni port city.” ; Walsh, Martinez, Hanna, “Shiite rebels abduct Yemeni President's chief of staff.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, Shoichet, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.” ; Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President, Cabinet resign.” ; Almasmi,Hanna, “Yemen's deposed president flees house arrest, plans to withdraw resignation.” ; Almasmari, “Protests support Yemeni President after he escapes house arrest.” ; Almasmari, “Ousted Yemeni President picks up support from Gulf countries.”
446 Walsh, Smith-Spark, Shoichet, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.”
447 Ellis, Thompson, “As violence flares, 7 things to know about Yemen.” ; Walsh, Martinez, Hanna, “Shiite rebels abduct Yemeni President's chief of staff.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, Shoichet, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.” ; Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President, Cabinet resign.”
448 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
451 Almasmari, “Ousted Yemeni President picks up support from Gulf countries.”
of attacks, a Western media analyst,\textsuperscript{452} a US official ‘with direct knowledge’,\textsuperscript{453} or American ‘sources familiar with the situation’\textsuperscript{454} confirm local sources, or a Western diplomat ‘explains the complexity of events’.\textsuperscript{455} This reinforces the perceived hierarchy in the reliability of the sources seen in the previous discourse, as it appears as though Western, especially American, sources are viewed as providing reliable facts that do not need further corroboration and are instead used to confirm certain truth-claims made by Yemeni sources. However, there have been instances where Western sources have misrepresented facts, e.g. an American source was cited as saying that “the Houthis have not objected to [US] drones”\textsuperscript{456} whereas the background information suggests that the Houthis have been critical of US interferences since 9/11.\textsuperscript{457} Yet, someone who is not aware of the Houthis’ anti-US sentiment would not question this information, as the statements are made in confident tones and fit in the overall hierarchy in which Western sources are presented as more reliable.

In addition to the recurring references and asymmetry in sources, there is a particular outlier that provides a potential alternative discourse. In January 2015, an article refers to an American expert on Yemen, who claims that the ‘coup against Hadi was a mixed bag for the United States’ and that ‘the fact that al Qaeda is a common enemy of Washington and the Houthis raises the intriguing suggestions of possible cooperation’.\textsuperscript{458} He elaborates with the following possibility:

\begin{quote}
The Houthis are virulently anti-al Qaeda. They have gone far after al Qaeda like no one has before. There is a certain coincidence of interest with the U.S. with the Houthis against al Qaeda. The Houthis have done nothing to even slightly irritate the Americans.
They have been very careful not to do anything like that. The Americans are very much leaving the door open.\textsuperscript{459}
\end{quote}

This quote provides an alternative discourse, which briefly attempts to re-create the Houthi identity, in which it is perceived as a potential, effective collaborator against AQAP, hinting at the similarities between the two actors. Nonetheless, the lack of repetition results in the brutal, aggressive Houthi identity, which has been repeated throughout the discourse since the Houthi takeover, to be the

\textsuperscript{452} Ralph Ellis, Nick Thompson, “As violence flares, 7 things to know about Yemen,” CNN, accessed March 16, 2018, \url{https://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/19/asia/yemen-explainer/index.html}.
\textsuperscript{453} Lister, Cruickshank, “Al Qaeda resurgent in Yemen amid political turmoil.” ; Starr, “Pentagon in position to evacuate U.S. Embassy in Yemen.” ; Almasmari, Scoichet, Roth, “Houthi rebels seize airport; U.N. envoy warns Yemen at 'edge of civil war.'”
\textsuperscript{455} CNN, “Ceasefire research in Yemen after day of heavy fighting, officials say.”
\textsuperscript{456} Almasmari, “U.S. drone strikes kill al Qaeda militants, Yemen officials say.”
\textsuperscript{457} Schmitz, “The rise of Yemen’s Houthi rebels.”
\textsuperscript{458} Collinson, “Yemen chaos threatens White House anti-terror campaign.”
\textsuperscript{459} Ibid.
prevailing identity. Thus, while this outlier suggests similarity, the dominant discourse continues to present the Houthis as a threat to the Self.

Imagery

This research expected the presentation of the Houthis as increasingly more aggressive and immoral throughout the discourse, as its actions have culminated in the Saudi-led coalition’s invasion. More specifically, it was expected that the casualties of Houthi attacks would be described in detail. To test for this expectation, the research looked out for lists of victims the Self can identify with, e.g. mothers and children who were injured or died. Similarly, it looked for civilian locations for the attacks that would be regarded as especially despicable by the Self, i.e. schools, parks, mosques, hospitals and homes.

While the Houthis were presented as aggressive actors throughout the discourse, the expected emphasis on the consequences of Houthi actions on victims and the locations were not found. Instead, other unforeseen imagery was used to construct the Houthi identity as immoral. Specifically, in the regional conflict discourse, CNN used the terms ‘rebel’ and ‘militant’ interchangeably for the Houthis. On top of this, AQAP was also defined as a militant group, putting both the Houthis and AQAP in the same category. Furthermore, the Houthi takeover of the capital is frequently referred to as a ‘coup’, which creates the image that the Houthi identity is an undemocratic military non-state actor (See Fig.4). Western interest as a whole was repeatedly emphasized by referring to the 2015 AQAP-claimed Charlie Hebdo shooting, drawing on a grotesque setting in a country that has common values with the Self. The Western interest was also emphasized through describing Yemen as a failed state, which prepares the audience for the justification to intervene to further prevent the growth of AQAP. Lastly, an outlier article illustrates a victimized position for the Houthis, contradicting the brutal identity presented throughout the discourse. However, the lack of repetition marginalized the alternative Houthi identity.
Following the Houthi takeover, the movement that was previously referred to as ‘rebels’ or ‘protestors’ is increasingly labelled ‘militia’. Unlike expected, both the Houthis and AQAP are described as a secessionist, uprising movement. One would expect AQAP to be explicitly and regularly labelled as a terrorist organization following 9/11, which, if applied, would suggest a moral hierarchy in which the Houthis would be superior to AQAP. Instead, both actors are labelled as militants and are framed in sectarian terms. The only difference is that AQAP is a Sunni group ‘that espouses extreme versions of Islam and violent opposition to the West,’ while the Houthis are merely Shiites whose views on the US are omitted. By reducing both non-state actors to sectarian militants, the discourse eliminates the nuances at play. This overly simplistic comparison increases the distance between the Self and the Houthis, reinforcing the hierarchy in which the Self is perceived superior. Moreover, lumping AQAP and the Houthis together under the same category allows to draw on the justification of having to intervene to eliminate the spread of the threat, under the broader justification of the War on Terror.

The brutal, dangerous identity of the Houthis is reinforced by comparing the Sana’a takeover to a coup throughout the discourse. While the Yemeni Minister of Communication—a source with a pro-government slant—was the first person to be quoted as referring to the takeover as such, subsequent articles also refer to the takeover as a coup, without mentioning that this was the opinion of an official. This imagery clashes with the self-identification of the Self as a liberal democracy that opposes undemocratic seizure of power and reinforces the Self’s perceived superiority.

US interest in its War on Terror is supported by repeatedly bringing up the AQAP-claimed Charlie Hebdo shooting in 2015. Instead of referring to the event as an attack or shooting, the discourse repeatedly refers to it as ‘the slaughter at [the] French magazine’. The word choice of slaughter, normally used in the context of killing animals, constructs a blood-thirsty, barbaric identity that threatens the interest of the Self. This imagery reinforces a clear hierarchy in which the Self is superior to the immoral AQAP. In this context, by repeating the created brutal identity, interfering in Yemen seems an appropriate response by the US, as the imagery presents an environment in which the Self with its strong military capacity has the perceived right and duty to intervene to eliminate terrorism.

460 CNN, “Yemeni government, rebels reach tentative agreement, source says.”; CNN, “Ceasefire research in Yemen after day of heavy fighting, officials say.”; Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President, Cabinet resign.”; CNN, “Surge in fighting threatens Yemen’s survival.”

461 Almasmari, Hanna, “Yemen: Bombs kill 137 at mosques; ISIS purportedly lays claim.”

462 Levs, Walsh, Smith-Spark, “Yemen's President 'has no control' as Houthi rebels storm palace.”; Walsh, Martinez, Hanna, “Shiite rebels abduct Yemeni President's chief of staff.”; Acosta, Liptak, “Yemen unrest throws wrench in Obama's terror message.”; Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit.”; Almasmari, “Protests support Yemeni President after he escapes house arrest.”; Almasmari, “Ousted Yemeni President picks up support from Gulf countries.”

Once again, this repetition only justifies US presence against AQAP and does not provide legitimacy for an attack against the Houthis. Yet, because the Self is more likely to identify with the Hebdo attack—a clear attack on freedom of expression, which is a tenet of the Self’s identity—than the Houthi conflict, the reader is likely to be preoccupied by the act that it perceives as threatening towards the Self.

The justification to intervene is additionally strengthened by the comparison of Yemen to Syria and Afghanistan. The three are perceived as failed states, thus dangerous environments in which terrorist organizations can flourish. It appears consistent and appropriate to interfere in Yemen with the goals of War on Terror. Thus, by presenting the three as similar, the interventions appear consistent and legitimate.

Lastly, the outlier of the discourse concerns an ISIL attack on the Houthis, who gathered to celebrate prophet Muhammad’s birthday in a ‘local cultural centre’. In this example, the Houthis are presented in an innocent setting, celebrating at a public venue and are victimized by a terrorist organization. This setting draws on similarities between the Houthis and Self where both have been victimized by a terrorist organization. The repetition of such an illustration could bridge the gap between Self and Other, allowing to draw on similarities, but because it was only portrayed once throughout the entire discourse, it does not counter-balance the dominant construction of the Houthi identity as aggressive and barbaric.

Omissions

Similar to the previous discourse, it was expected that references to the US presence in Yemen would be omitted, as it would not construct the Self as involved and thus reduce its contribution to and accountability in the conflict. It was also expected that the agenda of the Houthis would continue to be omitted, as it makes it possible to reinforce the Houthi identity as irrational. Each article was placed within the detailed timeline of the events that took place in Yemen in order to reveal which information was left out by CNN.

The first expectation only partially held up, as the US presence and actions in Yemen against AQAP were addressed on numerous occasions; however, the US position was omitted vis-à-vis the Houthis. Although president Obama was quoted on numerous occasions as stating that US actions in Yemen provide a model for counterterrorism in the entire MENA region, the articles fail to explain what the perceived success these actions brought was. Similarly, articles did not reflect the negative implications of US involvement, failing to mention civilian casualties caused by the US, and the overall

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464 Lister, Cruickshank, “Yemen takeover threatens downward sectarian spiral; al Qaeda set to benefit.”; Collinson, “Yemen chaos threatens White House anti-terror campaign.”
465 CNN, “Deadly blast targets Houthi gathering in Yemen.”
increasing anti-US sentiment in Yemen as a result of these casualties. Another unforeseen pattern was that the Houthis’ achievements in their effective battle against the proliferation of AQAP was also not mentioned.\textsuperscript{466} Leaving the movement’s military capabilities and achievements out of the discourse inhibits the possibility of CNN’s audience from perceiving the Houthis as a viable collaborator in fighting the Self’s greatest security threat. The expectation about the Houthi agenda not being presented was also met in the regional conflict discourse. The neglect of the Houthi agenda throughout the discourse made the rationales behind the AQAP-Houthi conflict and the Houthis protesting Hadi unclear. Lastly, there was a certain level of ambiguity in the declaration of Operation Decisive Storm: the motives of the Saudi-led coalition were not listed and while Arab coalition members were explicitly listed, the US, UK, and French contributions were omitted.

From January 2015 onwards, CNN articles repeatedly quote president Obama’s statements on Yemen being a ‘model for conducting successful counterterrorism’;\textsuperscript{467} which he wishes to implement in further target nations. Despite this repetition, there are no examples about what the US has exactly succeeding to do so far in the fight against AQAP. The reader is distracted from this omission because the articles tend to list military possessions of the US in light of AQAP’s presence, reinforcing the perception of a strong and capable Self, successfully eliminating the threatening Other when its interests are jeopardized. Leaving failures out, leads to the presumption that the US involvement has been successful. Similarly, the ‘side-effects’, i.e. ‘local casualties’ of US actions in Yemen are also omitted, which reduce the perception of the magnitude of the US involvement and its negative impact on local lives. Claiming that the US is evacuating its embassy in Yemen for being targeted by local forces, but not listing the consequences of its own actions, minimizes US responsibility in escalating the conflict. The articles also do not reveal that overall anti-US sentiment is increasing among the public and tribes. As a result, the reader is left with the idea that the tribes joining AQAP against the US are irrational, instead of viewing it as an attempt to chase the US out of Yemen. Thus, the Others allying with AQAP are presented as being inferior to the Self, because they are now clearly on the side of AQAP, with which there is neither a common identity nor a common interest.

Another point missing concerning the fight against AQAP is the Houthi perspective and its achievements against AQAP. By leaving this information out, it does not become clear for CNN’s audience that the Houthis and Self have a common interest in eliminating AQAP. Two outlier articles actually hint at discussions within the Obama administration about possible collaboration with the Houthis;\textsuperscript{468} yet, do not explain the outcome of these discussions or why the collaboration, in the end,

\textsuperscript{466} Orkaby, “Houthi Who? A History of Unlikely Alliance in an Uncertain Yemen”.
\textsuperscript{467} Acosta, Liptak, “Yemen unrest throws wrench in Obama's terror message.” CNN ; Acosta, Liptak, “Yemen unrest throws wrench in Obama's terror message.” CNN ; CNN, “Obama’s anti-terror strategy suffers setback in Yemen.”
\textsuperscript{468} CNN, “Yemen bombing kills 7 near hospital.” ; Payne, “U.S., UK and France pull embassy staffers out of Yemen.”
did not occur. The informal intelligence cooperation stated by Undersecretary of Defence Vickers is also never mentioned by CNN. Since the possibility of a collaboration is not repeated throughout the discourse, it does not become part of the dominant discourse, instead remains a marginalized alternative.

In addition to its motives towards AQAP, the Houthi agenda in general is ignored. It is not explained why the Houthis took over the capital and the Presidential Palace and continue resisting president Hadi, which actually happened in light of the drafting of a new constitution without the presence of Houthis as representatives of the Zaydi community and the manipulation of their boundaries. Even though president Hadi is presented as a democratically elected leader who is widely supported by the public, the background information suggests that he was facing resistance from a separatist movement in the south, high unemployment, and food insecurity leading to a wave of new protests, none of which are mentioned by CNN. This means that CNN fails to show that president Hadi does not have as wide of a support as is made out to be. Thus, the Houthis are not just irrational actors who are protesting the Hadi regime without an agenda.

Lastly, on March 25, 2015, CNN reports that Saudi Arabia declared Operation Decisive Storm; however, fails to mention the Saudi-led coalition’s aim. It is merely stated that the coalition aims to ‘protect the legitimate government’, closing off any discussion on what alternative methods may be employed to achieve this aim. Omitting alternative possibilities results in the domination of the idea that a military invasion is the only self-evident response and is thus appropriate. Finally, omitting the intelligence and logistical support of the US, UK, and France, results in a shift of blame, where conflict is framed as a regional one, far away from the Self, which minimizes its responsibility. Consequently, the conflict is not presented as emerging into an international conflict but continues to be framed as a regional one.

Summary of Frame B

The above discussion of Frame B suggests that CNN presented the Houthis as significantly different and thus different from the Self after the Sana’a takeover. While a paradigm shift from focus on similarities between the Self and Houthis to differences had already occurred in Frame A, the latter discourse reinforced this shift in identity construction. This allowed to reinforce the hierarchy in which the Self is perceived as superior to the threatening and barbaric Houthi identity. The latter discourse also allowed to clarify the Self’s perception of the Hadi regime—one that is morally superior to the

469 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
470 Riedel, “Who are the Houthis, and why are we at war with them?.”
471 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?.”
472 Almasy, Hanna, “Saudi Arabia launches airstrikes in Yemen.”
473 Ibid.
474 BBC, “Yemen crisis: Who is fighting whom?”.
Houthis as it is led by a seemingly democratically elected president, but militarily weaker compared to the Self. This constructed an Other that requires the assistance of the strong and capable Self to combat the threatening Houthis. When all perceptions of Others with respect to the Self are taken into consideration, the following hierarchy emerges:

![Hierarchy 5](image)

With no other alternatives presented to achieve stability in Yemen, the discourse presented the Self’s resort to military intervention in the growing instability in Yemen as self-evident. By presenting the Houthis as the cause of the chaos in Yemen, and repeating throughout the discourse that AQAP benefits from the seemingly Houthi-caused chaos, CNN’s audience was presented with the impression that US intervention in Yemen was appropriate in March 2015.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

“People don’t realise how involved our governments are in creating this catastrophe in Yemen. It’s construed as something that just is happening somewhere to people who are fighting each other – casting it as a sectarian war, and more often as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran which is completely misguided.”

This chapter will first recapitulate the previous chapters. This will be followed by an assessment of the case-specific expectations regarding the Yemeni conflict and will attempt to answer the research question raised in Chapter 1. Next, the chapter will elaborate on the theoretical implications of the findings. Lastly, the validity of the findings will be assessed, and recommendations will be made for further research.

Summary

The previously barely covered Yemeni conflict officially evolved into a regional when Operation Decisive Storm was initiated in March 2015, which according to the UN made it ‘the world’s worst humanitarian crisis’ since the Second World War. The US has been an influential contributor to the overall chaos by carrying out attacks in Yemen for nearly two decades in pursuit of its War on Terror. Furthermore, the US declared its support to the Saudi-led coalition in March 2015. When both US interferences are assessed together, the US involvement in the Yemeni conflict appears to be contradictory to its Middle Eastern foreign policy for two specific reasons. Firstly, the US directly attacks AQAP, but also forms a collaboration with the Saudi-led coalition in fighting the Houthis who, in fact, are also fighting AQAP. As a result, the indirect attacks form an unintended collaboration between the US and AQAP. Secondly, the US is supporting the YPG in Syria to fight their common enemy ISIL; however, it does not do the same with the Houthis in Yemen against AQAP, despite previously considering an intelligence collaboration with the Houthis. Without any public statement about why the stance towards the Houthis changed, the US declared its support to the Saudi-led coalition, to which the US public remained unaware or indifferent. This raised the following question:

477 Najjar, “Why the United States will never leave Yemen”.

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How did the government of the United States of America rationalize and justify support for the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis to its public, considering that its interference is seemingly inconsistent with its War on Terror?

The theoretical chapter suggested that in controversial contexts such as the one at hand, ‘national interest’ is often invoked to legitimize specific state actions.\(^478\) For this justification to be effective, the decision made in the self-interest of an actor needs to appear objective and self-evident, as those are more likely to appear legitimate. Weldes argues that legitimacy emerges out of representation—a construction based on a dual process. In the first stage, certain linguistic elements are articulated, which will be more effective if the linguistic elements appear inherently connected.\(^479\) Upon successful repetition, the audience will come to identify with the specific articulations suggesting a subject position.\(^480\) When internalized, representations are less likely to be questioned. Since self-identification suggests consent, the construction of self-evident national interest that the audience identifies with, can legitimize controversial actions.

Weldes’ approach guided a discourse analysis of the CNN coverage of the Houthis between 2011, when the movement received widespread international media coverage for the first time, and March 2015, when Operation Decisive Storm was officially declared. The discussion of the findings attempted to disentangle the narrative framing of the Houthis and helped to understand how the Houthi representation changed from being sympathetic to the Houthis described as the idealistic underdog protesting president Saleh, to enemies of the US. This tried to shed light on how the US’ switch to a seemingly inconsistent foreign policy in Yemen was presented as legitimate. The following section will briefly reflect to what extent the expectations provided in Chapter 2 held in the Yemeni case.

**Expectations**

The most general expectation was that the Houthis would be presented as a threat to the Self by describing them as an extension of the Iranian regime. While Iranian ties were indeed emphasized in Frame B, it was not repeated as often as anticipated. Instead of presenting the Houthis as ‘Iranian puppets’, the movement was presented as being threatening because it took over the capital and presidential palace, which was frequently referred to as a coup. Five months after the takeover, the US embassy shut down and its personnel returned to the US. While the Houthis were not described as the actors threatening the US embassy directly, it was the chaos that was linked to their takeover that was presented as the cause of AQAP growing and thus the US being threatened. Scapegoating the Houthis

\(^{480}\) Weldes, “Constructing National Interest,” 303.
was possible by omitting the movement’s military achievements in their effective battle against the proliferation of AQAP. This omission inhibited the possibility of CNN’s audience from perceiving the Houthis as a viable collaborator, instead reinforcing the movement’s threatening nature. Therefore, instead of being presented as an Iran-backed entity that threatened the US, the Houthis were presented as an indirect threat by being the reason that the Self was increasingly threatened by the growing AQAP.

The second expectation was that the US would justify its presence and interferences in Yemen as being in its national interest in line with its War on Terror, ideally portraying its actions as consistent and appropriate. As expected, the articles did indeed refer to US interest by frequently repeating that the chaos created by the Houthis was causing AQAP to flourish. Thus, its interferences were framed as necessary to bring stability to the country, which was presented as being in the national interest of both the Self and the Hadi regime. Many articles in Frame B appeared to touch upon US interests in Yemen in their concluding paragraphs, which, towards the end of the period, was accompanied by stressing the strength and military capabilities of the Self, leaving the reader reassured.

This leads to the next expectation: conferring legitimacy to US actions because it received an illegitimate reputation after the Iraq invasion. This is achieved by stressing the collaboration with the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis, to help the democratically elected president Hadi. By collaborating with sovereign states against an irrational appearing non-state actor, the US is presented to the region as one that respects territorial sovereignty, which could be interpreted as an attempt to present itself as a legitimate actor. Exerting military power is presented as being appropriate as it occurs in collaboration with a weak state that is presented as being on the verge of becoming a failed state. By doing so, the US is presented as a strong actor that helps a weak albeit legitimate leader in ensuring the national interest of the Self and the Other.

Instead of referring to 9/11 as expected, Frame B drew on more recent AQAP-claimed attacks, namely the 2009 Underwear Bomber and 2015 Hebdo shooting. Initially, the US was presented as a victim of the chaos created by the aggressive Houthis, because AQAP was benefitting from this chaos. Subtle hints emerged after the Sana’a takeover, which reconstructed the Houthis from a peace-demanding underdog to an irrational, barbaric actor threatening the stability of Yemen. These characteristics were reinforced by omitting the rationales behind Houthi actions, portraying the movement as one that does not have legitimate demands. The movement was increasingly presented as immoral and barbaric by referring to both the Houthis and AQAP as a militant group, putting the Houthis and the US’ greatest security threat under the same category.

The final expectation was that Islam would be presented as inherently incompatible with democracy and thus a threat to the Self. A close analysis of the jargon showed that this expectation also held up. In both frames, the discourse referred to the Shiite-Sunni divide in an overly simplistic manner. By labelling all actors according to their sects and stating that these groups oppose each other, the
conflict was portrayed as an exclusively Muslim one in which all actors were presented as similar to each other, in that they all strive for the domination of the ideology of the sect they identify with. Including AQAP as a party to a religiously framed conflict essentially reinforced the notion that that Islam is incompatible with democracy. Yet, it would be misleading to conclude that all Muslim actors were presented as undemocratic, as some actors were, as expected, presented as believers of a ‘positive Islam’ and others as ‘evil fundamentalists’. Within Frame A, the hierarchy among Others fluctuated as the representation of the Yemeni regime changed once president Saleh was forced to resign; however, in Frame B it became increasingly evident that the Hadi regime was perceived and presented as a superior Other to the barbaric, unreliable, immoral Houthis. President Hadi was categorized as a reflection of ‘positive Islam’ because he was a democratically elected key ally of the US in its counterterrorism campaign. Such a characterization allowed to draw on the similarities between the Self and Other, ascribing an alliance between them. However, the Self is still perceived as superior to the Other, as it is using its military capacity to ensure the survival of the weaker Other. The following hierarchy supports the expectation that the discourse would produce hierarchical dichotomies among the Others, presenting itself as the ally of the superior Other:

![Hierarchy 5](image)

**Figure 6: Hierarchy 5**

**Answer to Research Question**

Assessing to what extent the expectations from Chapter 2 held allows to answer the aforementioned research question. The discussions conducted in Chapter 4 suggest that the US legitimized its seemingly inconsistent foreign policy by representing the Houthis as an indirect threat to its survival. This was achieved by presenting the movement as the cause of Yemen’s instability that allowed AQAP to grow. The Houthi’s contribution to the chaos was presented as self-evident by describing them as irrational and barbaric in contrast to the president who appears to be elected democratically. By supporting the latter, the US was presented as a state that respects international law, unlike its representation following Operation Iraqi Freedom.481 Thus, by repeating that president Hadi

is a key ally in the battle against AQAP, the audience was distracted from the US position vis-à-vis the Houthis and the fact that in essence the US does not have a conflict of interests with the Houthis. This distraction was made effective by omitting what the contributions of the US, UK and France are in Operation Decisive Storm, framing the Houthi conflict as a solely regional one. The seemingly appropriate actions of the US were reinforced by omitting the negative implications of US involvement and not mentioning the fact that AQAP is a common enemy of the Houthis and the US. Finally, at a closer look, it became clear that the dangerous and barbaric identity of the Houthis was dominated by a continuing asymmetry in news sources that favoured the perspective of the Hadi regime over the Houthi stance. As a result, the bias of the Hadi regime largely guided the construction of identities, which explains how the Houthis were effectively constructed as a threat to the stability of Yemen and thus justified US actions in the country.

**Theoretical Implications**

As the above section indicates, Weldes’ understanding of national interest was able to provide an answer to the question raised in this research. As was raised in Chapter 2, a reflectivist approach to national interest was suitable for this research question because of its ability to address and explain change in national interest. Instead of merely stating that the position of the US changed towards the Houthis, the approach was also able to peel layers of reality, allowing to shed light on how the representation changed over four years. Since the entire period was assessed in detail, the research was also able to detect that the position of the US changed towards the Houthis especially after the Sana’a takeover. Therefore, Weldes’ understanding of national interest is able to reveal when and how positions change towards an Other in cases where no explanation is provided. The approach is also successful in revealing that no threat is self-evident, and thus neither is the response to such threats. Weldes’ approach indeed helps the researcher make sense of how actors interpret and thus present political developments. However, what Weldes does not address explicitly in her understanding of national interest is that the conclusion presented in this section is merely one interpretation of CNN’s presentation of the changing Houthi representation. Therefore, it is only partially addressing the meaning assigned by CNN to the Houthis, which should be emphasized.

This research concludes that omissions play a crucial role in creating a dominant discourse that fixes meaning—in this case fixing the meaning given by CNN to the Houthi identity. Nonetheless, Weldes does not address the importance of omissions in a discourse. Instead, in her dual process of constructing representation, the first stage states that producers of discourse articulate a meaning by drawing on particular linguistic elements. If this meaning appears self-evident, and is repeated successfully, which in this context means ensuring that alternative discourses remain invisible, she
asserts that the audience will identify with the articulated subject position. This research shows that omissions play a very important role in ensuring that alternative discourses remain marginalized. Thus, adding such an assumption would make Weldes’ approach to national interest more complete.

The next section will reflect upon the validity of the findings and the conclusion made in this chapter.

**Validity of results**

The findings of this research are case-specific and thus not generalizable, which poststructuralist research does not deny.\(^{482}\) The findings of this research enable the understanding of how a media channel made sense of developments in Yemen and how it contributed to the legitimization of the seemingly inconsistent US foreign policy in the eyes of its audience. The discussion of expectations shows the reader how CNN, as one of the producers of discourse, perceived and presented the Houthi representation. However, it would be misleading to believe that these findings are the only interpretation of the data. Although the research does elucidate an overarching shift with regards to the discourse used in the coverage of events over time, others might disagree on the extent of this shift. Thus, this research could be used as a starting point to continue disentangling how CNN contributed to the construction of the Houthi representation.

Chapter 3 explained that it is important for the researcher to continuously reflect on his or her personal assumptions with respect to the topic.\(^{483}\) The lack of such awareness can result in the researcher imposing personal preconceptions to the data.\(^{484}\) While constant reflection was possible by comparing the data to the chronological information obtained from other sources, this research created a timeline that was primarily based on Western scholars or news outlets. The inability to use first-hand Arabic resources was tried to be compensated for by using Al Jazeera to create a more complete picture of the events. However, one must keep in mind that Al Jazeera has a Qatari bias, and may thus be more likely to favour the Houthis due to its tense relations with Saudi Arabia following the diplomatic crisis that started in June 2017.\(^{485}\) While omissions play a crucial role in creating a hierarchy among discourses, one should keep in mind that other Arabic/Yemeni perspectives were not reflected upon in this research. Therefore, the findings of this research only reflect a partial omissions of the Houthi representation by CNN.\(^{486}\)

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\(^{482}\) Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as a method,” 816.

\(^{483}\) Mohammed et al., “Rethinking Case Study Methodology in Poststructural Research,” 110.

\(^{484}\) Cheek, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 359.


This research also based its analysis on a set of assumptions about the self-perception of the US—peaceful, democratic, civilized etc.—and treated the US as a unitary actor, ignoring diverse views within the Obama administration. This, again, is merely one interpretation of the US representation and is a clear example of the researcher being a producer of the discourse.\textsuperscript{487}

Lastly, the research was also not able to reveal to what extent articulations are actually self-identified by the US public. Thus, this research cannot prove interpellation, which is the second stage of constructing representation. Since this research cannot prove whether the public indeed identifies with the repeated dominant articulation of representations, it is an assumption that the US identifies as ‘the protector of individual rights and liberties’\textsuperscript{488} and that it feels it should free ‘oppressed societies who look to [the US] for leadership’.\textsuperscript{489}

The next section will reflect upon the research limitations this research faced.

**Research Limitations**

Throughout the research, a number of limitations were encountered, which limited the researcher from revealing the extent of CNN’s bias concerning the Houthis. Firstly, the information provided in the referred statements often relied on anonymous individuals whose statements have mostly been paraphrased by CNN. Therefore, it was not possible to trace these statements and thus not possible to assess in which context the external references were originally made. This hindered a more comprehensive assessment of the use of intertextualities in the addressed discourses. Secondly, most published statements were originally made in Arabic, meaning the research had to rely on the translation used by CNN. Therefore, it was not possible to assess the meaning lost in translation. While these limitations did not stop the research from revealing that CNN does not have an objective stance towards the Yemeni conflict, the conclusion is limited from understanding how far CNN’s bias goes.

**Further Recommendations**

The following is a list of further research suggestions that could be addressed under future research:

- A similar discourse analysis should be conducted for the representation of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and al-Qaeda in CNN coverage. By assessing a multitude of potentially relevant discourse

\textsuperscript{487} Cheek, “Foucauldian Discourse Analysis,” 359.
\textsuperscript{488} Weldes, “Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture,” 126.
\textsuperscript{489} Ibid, 126-127.
structures, research could yield a more complete understanding of the discourses used to contextually represent the Houthis.

- Theory suggests that despite being inherently ambiguous, photographs are powerful tools in constructing national interest, because they appear as a transparent window of objective reality.490 A specific meaning is attributed to a picture by choice of subject and the exclusion of specific context.491 This can, in turn, be used to legitimize certain controversial practices. Therefore, conducting an analysis on the images that accompanied the CNN articles could be valuable.

- A comparative discourse analysis with a conservative news outlet, such as Fox News, could be used to understand to what extent liberal-leaning CNN constructed the Houthi representation in favour of the Obama administration.

- A similar discourse analysis could be conducted on CNN’s coverage of the conflict during the Trump administration to see whether the Houthi representation changed, especially following the breakdown of the Iran Nuclear Deal and the murder of Khashoggi. This would reflect to what extent CNN contributes to the legitimization of the continuation of the US support for the Saudi-led coalition during the Trump administration.

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491 Ibid.
Bibliography

Books/Chapters


Journal Articles


Websites


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Annex

Timeline

- 1992: Foundation of the Houthi movement
- 2000: USS Cole attack
- 2004: al-Houthi is killed & his brother takes over Houthi leadership
- 2006: AQAP jailbreak in Yemen
- 2009: Saudi Arabia officially declares alliance with president Saleh against Houthis
- 2009: Obama administration increases aid to support counter-terrorism in Yemen & increases drone strikes
- 2010: Saudi Arabia withdraws from Yemeni conflict
- 2010: Second AQAP jailbreak in Yemen
- End of 2010: Obama administration refuses to extradite hundred Yemeni AQAP suspects
- 2011: Arab Spring spreads to Yemen
- 2011: US withdraws military trainers and consultants
- End of 2011: President Saleh is forced to step down
- February 2012 President Hadi is elected & Houthis stop attacks
- 2012: UN-sponsored National Dialogue drafts a new constitution; Houthis restart conflict; increase in US drone strikes & certain Yemeni tribes join AQAP
- 2014: Ex-president Saleh forms alliance with Houthis
- 21 September 2014: Houthi takeover of Sana’a
- February 2015: shutdown of US embassy in Sana’a
- February 2015: president Hadi flees to Aden
- March 2015: President Hadi flees to Saudi Arabi
- 25 March 2015: Operation Decisive Storm led by Saudi-coalition, backed by US, UK, and France