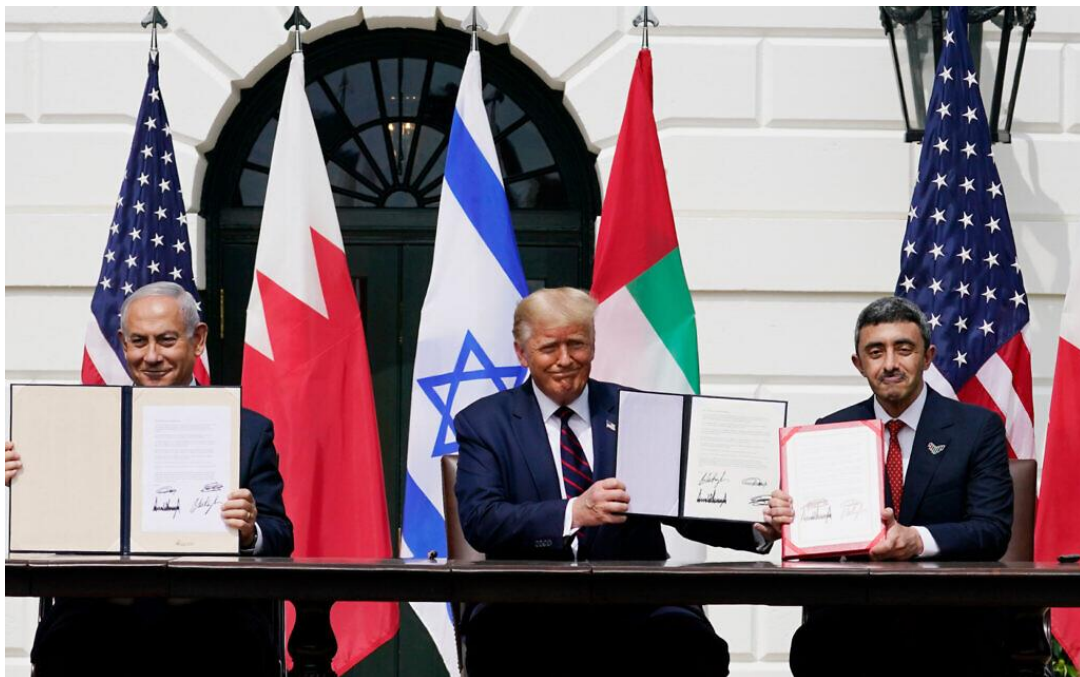


ARMS FOR ALLIES

Security Perceptions and Pragmatism in the F-35 Arms Deal between the US
and the UAE



Inge Geerlings, s1047015
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Abstract

The US-UAE F-35 deal that followed the Abraham Accords peace agreement between Israel and the UAE is unprecedented in terms of advanced fighter planes sales to a country that could potentially pose a risk to Israel's military status in the region. The US legal commitment to this Israeli military standing takes the shape of a legal doctrine also known as the Qualitative Military Edge (QME).

Building on several security related theories within the field of International Relations (IR) – notably, the security dilemma, collective security, triadic relationships and the patron's dilemma – this thesis tries to gain a better understanding in terms of what drives the US to close an arms deal of this magnitude. It moreover serves to shed light on the motives, interests and objectives of actors involved in the deal. Leading in the analysis is the constructivist perspective, although liberalist and realist perspectives are taken into account to a certain extent.

The third chapter answers the sub question what US policy concerning arms deals is that might negatively affect Israel's QME. Through a factual description of legislative regulations the legal framework in which policy makers operate is set forth. Thereafter, the diplomatic relations between the US, Israel and other relevant actors is explained through the concept of the patron's dilemma and the notion of triadic relationships.

The most important insight that emanates from this sub question is the realization that what is written on paper in terms of legislation is too much of a simplified construct to grasp the complex reality that is geopolitical diplomacy.

When analyzing what factors play a part in US risk assessments, the most important outcome is the pivotal role Iran seems to fulfill. The war in Yemen is critical in understanding the dynamics that characterize the context of the case. US risk assessments, moreover, take into account various national and Israeli security concerns and the role of external factors such as the reliability of the UAE and the role of Saudi Arabia are, additionally, discussed.

When, subsequently, assessing how risk considerations eventually influence policy, security concerns and fear-based decision making stand out. In legal frameworks, security related concepts associated to risking Israel's QME are very useful. In more practical contexts, many US decisions seem to directly derive from security concerns – or even fears. The fear of Iran as a powerful and growing enemy seems to be paramount in the prioritization of national and international security over Israel's QME in the region. Through both expanding and arming allies the US hopes to create a strong and united front against Iran.

The negative effect on Israel's QME are uplifted from the US standpoint, since Israel also benefits from this particular deal, at least short term, for two reasons. With the US brokered Abraham Accords, the UAE are now their ally, which could provide them with more security now and possibly more allies in the near future. Moreover, Israel is also threatened by Iranian power in the region, so they cannot be too displeased with US attempts to create a regional armed front against the Iranians.

The longer term danger of facilitating a regional arms race, that is so often expressed by authors regarding this subject, seems largely neglected by US policy makers as well as the

effects of their power struggle on Yemen. Yemen has been a battleground for war between US supported Saudi led coalition and Iran backed Houthi rebels since 2014. The unprecedented humanitarian crisis resulting from this war and the US general approach herein does not seem to completely square with policy intentions.

When it comes to US politics, the most important conclusion to be drawn from the study is the differentiation between security perceptions, regulations and actual decision making resulting in policy. Security perceptions and images of other countries prove to be crucial in understanding the decision making process. The balance between the legal framework on one hand and actual decision making on the other hand is sometimes hard to find and blurred by emotion driven, fearful security perceptions.

Judicial constructs that at first glance seems to be more fixed than fluid, are actually very flexible. Legal policy, acts, bills and national politics are a grey area in which space exists for individuals to pick and choose how they want to interpret and then act on certain rules, regulations and values. In other words, opportunistic decision making is very much possible and characterizes US decision making at least in some instances – for example when it comes to upholding Israel's QME or in policy questions surrounding Yemen.

When mapping the legal framework – in a similar way that was done with the QME – that exists surrounding human rights in US legislation, one important observation stands out. Again, in a similar manner that the QME and arms deals creates the opportunity to make decisions and create policy in an ad hoc manner. This not only reinforces the declared pragmatic character of US policy, but also deepen problematic aspects of the subject to the extent of risking the safeguarding of human rights in countries such as Yemen.

Preface

Writing this thesis has been a joy and, at times, a difficult process. Remaining focused on what was relevant was not always a clear cut task, which meant going through a lot of information, articles and data that was not always necessarily relevant for my case. Despite the heaps of information – relevant as well as irrelevant – I never got bored of reading nor writing. The subject always kept sparking my interest and still does.

The fact that the F-35 deal and politics surrounding the deal are very contemporary, knowledge surrounding it is subject to change. This meant following closely news outlets regarding the F-35 case and related subject. The fluidity surrounding the subject characterizes the vision emphasized in my thesis as well.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor for always offering me guidance even when progress was rough, reading what I had written, patiently listening to my thoughts and ideas, and giving me useful feedback every time.

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Chapter 1: Research Proposal

1.1 Introduction: background, rationale, problem statement

*‘We are here this afternoon to change the course of history. After decades of division and conflict we mark the dawn of a new Middle East,’*¹ were US president Donald Trump’s words describing the Abraham Accords Declaration. Officially known as the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel, the peace treaty was signed on August 15th 2020 as a joint declaration overseen by the US to normalize relations between the UAE and Israel. The UAE, simultaneously with Bahrain, was the first country this century, following Egypt and Jordan in respectively 1979 and 1994, to normalize relations with Israel.

The UAE, geographically located at the eastern end of the Arab peninsula sharing borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia, in part used this opportunity to fulfil a long cherished wish to purchase F-35 fighters among other American weaponry.² Emirati officials already requested extensive classified information on the jet’s capabilities dating back to 2011 and seized the opportunity to use the jets as a bargaining chip in normalizations talks.^{3,4}

Part of the deal are 50 F-35 stealth fighter jets, valued at 10.4 billion dollars, that are to be delivered after 2025; air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles worth 10 billion dollars; an additional half a billion dollars’ worth of Sidewinder air-to-air missiles; and 18 MQ-9B drones with an estimate worth of 3 billion dollars.^{5,6}

After announcing the planned arms deal, US secretary of state Mike Pompeo spoke of ‘a once-in-a-generation opportunity to positively transform the region’s strategic landscape’.⁷ The official notification of the sales from the US Defense Department to US Congress said the deal would have the power to significantly alter the regional military balance and capabilities.⁸

Apart from a statement that the security position of the US will be solidified through supporting a vital partner and helping them deter aggression in the region, no specification was provided as to how exactly the military balance would shift or the strategic landscape will be transformed positively.

In addition to the military benefits the UAE will gain from the deal and the contribution to the US security position, the purchase reaffirms and solidifies the UAE’s security relationship

¹ “A Historic Day for Peace,” 00:00 – 00:09, YouTube, accessed may 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2Pm9o7Ax9o>.

² Kobi Michael and Joel Guzansky, “Might Qatar join the Abraham Accords?,” *INSS Insight*, no. 1391 (October 2020): 2.

³ Mike Stone, “UAE Signs Deal with U.S. to Buy 50 F-35 Jets and up to 18 Drones: Sources,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, January 20, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-emirates-f35-int-idUSKBN29P2C0>.

⁴ Staff Writer With AFP, “Trump Says He Has ‘No Problem’ Selling UAE Advanced F-35 Planes,” *The Defense Post*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/09/15/trump-selling-uae-f-35/>.

⁵ Carry Keller-Lynn et al, “Biden to Approve \$23 Billion Sale of F-35s to UAE That Followed Abraham Accords,” *The Times of Israel*, April 14, 2021 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/biden-to-approve-23-billion-sale-of-f-35s-to-uae-that-followed-abraham-accords/>.

⁶ Alexander Bertschi Wrigley, “New UAE Arms Sales Raise Concern,” *Arms Control Today*, December, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-12/news/new-uae-arms-sales-raise-concerns>.

⁷ Wrigley, “New UAE Arms Sales.”

⁸ Aron Siegel, *Federal Register*, December 23, 2020, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-12-23/pdf/2020-28321.pdf>.

with the US.^{9,10} A fighter jet of this stature was previously reserved for longtime ally Israel only – this would be the first F-35 sale in the region to a country other than Israel.

After putting it on hold in January 2021 to review the deal, newly elected US president Joe Biden approved the 23 billion dollar sale to the UAE three months later in April. Practically speaking, it will take quite some time before everything will be put into practice due to the logistical steps that need to be taken to endorse every arms sale concerning military equipment.

More importantly, one regional aspect characterizes the particularity of this specific deal: Israel's so called military edge. Since the establishment of the state Israel in 1948 US-Israeli relations have strongly developed up until the point that the two have become virtually inseparable. Different legal arrangements have set in stone this relationship throughout the decades, among which the very important status of Israel as having the Qualitative Military Edge (QME) in the region.

Obtaining the status of a fixed policy objective, the QME doctrine fortified over the years as the political and military relationship between the countries strengthened the countries' interdependence. The policy is meant to convey the message and practically imply the prioritization of Israel's security position vis-à-vis other countries in the region.¹¹ The practical implication being that the combined military force provided by the US to Arab states must never surpass the capacity provided to Israel, thereby protecting Israel's security position as stable constant in a precarious region.¹²

Taking it one step further, the US tends to reward Arab states that have normalized relations with Israel equipping them with more state of the art arms than their Arab counterparts that maintain a hostile attitude towards Israel.¹³ The UAE signing up to the Abraham Accords is in fact the latest example of normalization in pursuance of electronic warfare aircraft, lethal drones and potentially pioneering to possess F-35 fifth generation fighter jets.¹⁴

Israel's qualitative military edge, as defined in section 36(h) of the 2008 Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2776(h)) is:

*'... the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors, while sustaining minimal damages and casualties, through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity, including weapons, command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that in their technical characteristics are superior in capability to those of such other individual or possible coalition of states or non-state actors.'*¹⁵

⁹ Grant Rumley, "Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations," The Washington Institute, February 15, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations>.

¹⁰ Amin Tarzi, "The strategic benefits to the US and Israel of offering F-35's to the UAE," *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies* (2020): 66.

¹¹ Dalia Dassa Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy in the Middle East: Sustainable Partnerships and Strategic Investments* (RAND Cooperation: Santa Monica, 2021), 23, 24.

¹² Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 23, 24

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ "Reports and certifications to Congress on military exports," Arms Export Control, 2010, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2010-title22/html/USCODE-2010-title22-chap39-subchapIII-sec2776.htm>.

As discussed above and following the definition in the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) the practical implications on arms sales to other countries in the region are described in the same section as having to be preceded by a determination that the sale will not negatively affect Israel's QME over military threats to the country whatsoever.¹⁶

On top of that, a new bill extending the AECA of 1976 was set up April of 2021 to specify that an F-35 sale could never compromise US interests or Israel's QME. The Act also inscribes a quadrennial assessment of Israel's quantitative military disadvantage as well as an assessment of the possible compromise for US military edge and the threat of foreign intelligence expansion of hostile countries as a result of F-35 sales and its technological implications. The Act, moreover, prescribes to set up protective measures to safeguard against such compromise through preventive measures and cooperation with countries receiving arms.¹⁷

Judging from the fact that a more extensive description of the possible effects of F-35 sales is recently drawn up, it seems likely that a disperse of F-35 will take place in the foreseeable future. This will put Israel's QME at risk, not to mention the fact that it might accelerate a regional arms race. After all, after the UAE pioneering, other countries will potentially want to follow suit and purchase F-35 aircraft.

A case in point is Qatar that already requested to purchase jets as well.¹⁸ The peninsular Arab country located along the Gulf shoreline has not normalized ties with Israel, in addition to the fact that conflict occurs between Qatar on the one hand and Israel, the UAE and Bahrain on the other hand.¹⁹ Qatar's request to purchase F-35's from the US in part reflects Doha's rivalry with the UAE, however it might also be a sign to the US that they are willing to consider normalization with Israel.²⁰

This again signals another reasoning behind the UAE's partaking in the Abraham Accords: the wish to improve the country's image in the US Congress and administration and subsequently strengthening its position in the regional as well as the international arena.²¹ In any case the above mentioned circumstances require a tightening of security concertation between the US, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.²²

Just this one example is a perfect representation of different risks that need to be assessed when expansion of arms sales by the US occurs – especially in a region that, more than others, has a history of conflict that tends to flare up and up until today is the stage of many regional and international conflicts that know countless victims. The dire situation of Syria and Iraq in a post Islamic State vacuum; the ongoing civil war in Yemen that is labelled one of the world's worst humanitarian crises; and the everlasting conflict that victimizes many Palestinians in Israel as well as in the Palestinian territories are just a few examples that indicate the region's vulnerability to conflict.

¹⁶ "Congress on military exports," Arms Export Control.

¹⁷ "SECURE F-35 Export Act," 117th Congress, April 15, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1182/text>.

¹⁸ Yaakov Amidror, "US Must Protect Israel's QME after F-35 Sale to UAE," The Defense Post, November 25, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/11/18/us-israel-qme-f-35-uae/>.

¹⁹ Michael and Guzansky, "Might Qatar join the Abraham Accords?," 1.

²⁰ Ibidem, 3.

²¹ Ibidem, 2.

²² Ibidem, 3.

The case of Yemen, in fact, ties together several important actors that play a part in geopolitics surrounding the F-35 deal. The US, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have all been, in one way or another, actively involved in the war in Yemen in differing modes of intensity of participation over the years. The civil war that has been tormenting Yemen has almost reached a number of 400.000 direct and indirect casualties of which up to seventy percent are children under the age of five.²³

Being aware of the complexity of geopolitics, diplomacy, arms deals, armed conflict and power struggles, questions arise as to how to relate all these matters to doctrines and legal frameworks such as the QME. How does an arms deal of the F-35 status influence the QME doctrine and diplomatic ties. Especially with large future sales of military equipment to other countries in the region, Israel and the US certainly plan on maintaining their dominant status on the power scale in the region.

There are several quite evident reasonings as to why these deals are signed in the first place and some are less apparent – these are of course the most interesting and the ones I am hoping to shed light on. One of the ‘obvious’ reasons being that the US economically benefits from selling weapons as it decreases industrial costs. At the same time spreading their weapons and means increasing their security status in the world as their allies reach a more security in terms of military status.²⁴

Moreover, both the US and Israel benefit from a growing number of countries that normalize ties with Israel. Not only does this decrease some of the ever-existing tension, it also adds to the number of US and Israeli allies in the region. With a growing number of allies one would be inclined to conclude that the desperate need for Israel’s QME will eventually become superfluous.

However, as this is a very slow process judging from the fact that in seventy years not many regional alliances have been formed, the question is how promising arms sales to actors involved in peace agreements like the Abraham Accords will actually influence the power balance in the region. If the UAE purchase fifty F-35’s maybe more countries that have their eye on the fighter jet will consider joining an alliance normalizing relations with Israel.

If more countries follow suit, this will possibly activate a region-wide arms race. Moreover, supplying the whole region with more and more arms can potentially be disastrous if agreements collapse over any small destabilizing factor. That would certainly be dangerous for Israel’s QME, even when the US simply ups every sale with an even bigger arms sale to Israel. The Pentagon is said to have already promised additional weaponry in talks with the Israeli Ministry of Defense.²⁵

Considering the potential pernicious effects of an arms race, even with the financial benefits taken into account, the US is unlikely to stimulate a widespread regional build-up of arms keeping in mind the stability within the region. Maintaining Israel’s QME is, furthermore, of the utmost priority not only for Israel but also for the US. The extensive legal framework

²³ “Yemen War Deaths Will Reach 377,000 by End of the Year: UN,” Al Jazeera, November 23, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/23/un-yemen-recovery-possible-in-one-generation-if-war-stops-now>.

²⁴ Kevin Fashola, “Five types of international cooperation for missile defense,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2020, 2.

²⁵ Alexandra Stark, “Proposed UAE Arms Sale Raises National Security Concerns,” Just Security, December 1, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/73617/proposed-uae-arms-sale-raises-national-security-concerns/>.

surrounding the QME certainly attests that.

There undoubtedly exists a fine line between the value of forming durable relations with other countries in the region and the (military) implications this entails. The fine line being the benefits of having allies as well as a market to sell arms and make money on the one hand, and the uncertainty of military and political implications of major arms sales on the other hand.

This consideration applies to both the US and Israel. Even though the US seem to be have the upper hand when it comes to mere power, Israel's military and political leverage is not to be underestimated.²⁶ The US needs Israel maybe as much as the other way around. Having an ally in an often tumultuous region is vital, apart from the fact that the arms sales work two ways since Israel is currently one of the most advanced countries in military technology in the world.

Thus, taking into account the various insecurities concerning this and potential future arms deals and how they will impact the regional power balance and security status the main question that arises is; if this F-35 sale is ground-breaking and potentially critical to existing power balances in the region then why did Israel not strongly object to the sale?

Why did they go along with the Abraham Accords knowing this was part of the deal? In what way does the sale fit into the overarching goal of maintaining Israel's QME and what are the short-term implications and long-term expectations of the sale? Of course, time will tell all, but conducting a substantiated analysis will hopefully offer insight into this complicated situation.

1.2 Aims of the thesis

At first glance, the F-35 deal raises questions concerning the preservation of Israel's QME and why all parties involved were so quick to sign and consent. By getting some facts straight and making sense of the chaos that is international relations and security concerns, we might get a better idea of how and why certain events take place on a small scale and how they were influenced by larger geopolitical processes and vice versa..

The aim of the thesis is to use the case of the US-UAE F-35 deal that followed the Abraham Accords as a lens to understand political shifts and events in the region on a broader scale. The practical outcome of the research is thus to understand geopolitical processes through a specific situation that, in itself, seems fairly conspicuous due to existing international relationships. US' loyalty to Israel's QME and previous carefulness with which arms deals of this nature have occurred – the scarcity of these deals and F-35 circulation proves this point – are two examples that seem to clearly point to the controversiality of the F-35 deal.

In this case the aim is to link short term arms sales and peace agreements to long term shifts in power balance and unravel step by step how this works. Not only will this thereafter apply specifically to this case, but the way to go about it might be useful in different case studies or similar cases in the future. Creating a clear cut analysis of a majorly complicated situation that involves many actors and interests using security concepts as tools serves to lay bare how and why certain decisions are made, deals are closed and peace agreements are signed.

The aim is to contribute to social debates concerning underlying motives behind peace accords, arms deals and how these are intertwined with the ambition to move forward this

²⁶ Sasson Hadad, Tomer Fadlon and Schmuël Even, "Israel's Defense Industry and US Security Aid," *Institute for National Security Studies*, no. 202 (July 2020): 24.

debate. Very simply said, the objective is to understand existing relations between different actors involved in this specific deal with hopes to contribute to further understand relations on a larger scale on a societal and scientific level.

1.3 Research question and sub-questions

Main question: Why was the US-UAE F-35 deal as part of the Abraham Accords concluded considering the potential consequences concerning Israel's Qualitative Military Edge in the region?

Sub questions:

1. What is US policy concerning arms deals that might negatively affect Israel's QME?
2. What factors are involved in US risk assessments?
3. How did risk considerations influence eventual policy-making in the case of the F-35 deal?

1.4 Societal relevance of the project

The aim of the thesis is to answer questions concerning the F-35 arms sale discussed above. First of all, some clarification is needed as to why this specific arms sale is so important since large sales of military equipment are nothing new. The F-35 fighter jet, however, is a particularly advanced fighter jet that is not available to just any country in the world. This fighter jet could mean maintaining or losing the edge that Israel desperately needs.²⁷ This alone already makes the sale worthwhile to examine more closely.

The implications concerning the legal and political relations between the US and Israel is an even more interesting topic to look into. Since the creation of the state Israel in 1948 there has been a special bond between Israel and the US. The US' effort to strengthen and advance Israel's military has never lacked. How will this deal affect this close relationship?

There undoubtedly is a reasoning behind this F-35 deal and the fact that Israel seems to go along with it without much hassle. Shedding light on this reasoning and unveil something of the process behind the scenes will hopefully gain insight into this and similar processes that take place behind the scenes and will consequently offer a broadened understanding of decision making processes and relevant risks and interests.

Thus, the main actors are the US and Israel, however it is equally important to describe the role that some other actors play such as of course the UAE and other countries in the region, since any decision made concerning arms, Israel and neighboring countries will not take place in a vacuum. It is, therefore, essential to create a context in which to understand the F-35 sale and the role it fulfils in short-term and long-term power balance in the entire region.

This touches exactly on the broader relevance of the outlined situation and the questions asked. It is not a matter of merely describing an arms deal involving a distributor and receiver. The stakeholders directly and indirectly involved and the considerations they take into account in decision-making surrounding the implications of this arms deal reach as far as one decides to question the matter.

This is exactly what makes the subject so terribly interesting- the study, scope and

²⁷ Shimon Arad, "Delaying the Release of Fifth-Generation Fighter Planes to the Arab States," *INSS Insight*, no. 1029 (March 2018): 1.

stakeholders are endless. Trying to put together the puzzle and figure out how every actor directly or indirectly takes place in this struggle for power not only answers questions concerning this particular deal, but elucidate the current, and maybe even future, status of power balance in the whole region in general. The question is how the case currently in question will influence the region as a whole – short term as well as long term.

To make the matter more concrete and simple: this particular arms deal has the potential to increase safety in the region, for instance through stimulation of more peace treaties in the future. On the level of security it could thus prove well worthwhile, especially if a reliable risk assessment is made in anticipation of such deals to rule out risk factors that would undermine the security increasing prevalence.

Part of that risk assessment would undoubtedly be an assessment of Israel's QME on the one hand and the region's stability on the other hand, whether the importance linked to the QME by the US is realistic or not. However, there is a fair chance that power balances will change, instability will be induced, the chances of conflict or violence will get higher and subsequently safety will decrease.

Conducting an analysis surrounding these considerations will be very valuable for scholars and other readers that, for example, are concerned with arms diffusion; security debates; humanitarian crises like the one in Yemen; peace treaties; US-Israel diplomatic ties; and US interference in the region as a whole.

This research would serve as a way to introduce different perspectives in order to zoom out and lay bare the underlying processes, interests and security matters and to eventually answer the questions that have been raised before. This is not just in order to gain understanding of the current situation in the region and this specific case but in future arms deals that are without a doubt already in the making.

1.5 Scientific relevance of the project

Looking at the case from a scientific point of view, other ideas and questions that transcend societal relevance come into mind. Within the realm of international relations a few different perspectives will come under review, the aim of which is to offer a substantiated analysis that takes into account relevant theories and concept as a framework to hang on to, especially concerning their perspectives on security. Theories that will be useful in this particular case are, for example, realist, liberal and constructivist views on security and its role in international relations and politics.

The liberal perspective draws on the assumption that states are indeed able to come together and make rules and regulations concerning internal and international security. States take responsibility for their own actions and their attitude towards security concerning their own and other countries. This view primarily concerns democratic states, their international regulations and institutions that aim to spread these democratic norms and values.

The constructivist perspective reasons from the view that security and what that means is to be determined depending on who is asked. Security in social constructivism is a subjective concept that is in the eyes of the beholder as opposed to the realist approach that is much more about hardcore alliance building and trying to predict what one's opponent will do in order to determine one's own security strategy and policy.

The question is if these considerations could contribute to a better understanding of what

is happening in the F-35 deal case. Is it a matter of staying one step ahead of the ‘enemy’, creating strategic alliances, or promoting their own norms and values in the region? Taking into account these different theories and perspectives helps to understand why different stakeholders take certain decisions.

Using the different perspectives moreover serves to understand what the concept of QME entails for different actors involved in its creation and maintenance. Eventually, the outcome is to describe what role security in this case plays. They will not necessarily be called upon to test their usefulness, but really serve to gain accumulated insight into the background and rationale that hides behind certain policies and decisions relevant to this case.

Even though theory-testing is not the aim of the study, a deliberation as to what theories in which realm of study have been useful is part of the concluding chapter of the research. This is not only in order to explicitly describe in what way those theories were useful in analysis of the case, but also to put them into perspective of the general academic debate. In other words, even though the study is strictly empirical and theories are a means to an end, a conclusion on the usefulness of theories in this specific case is meant to further the academic debate.

1.6 Theoretical and conceptual framework

As discussed in the ‘scientific relevance’ section, there are some main perspectives in international relations that shed light on the very much contested concept that is security. Realist, liberal and constructivist views are meant to offer more a substantiated explanation as to what motives actors have to sign peace agreements and arms sales.

The guiding principle in this case is the QME, not just because it is a highly remarkable concept in itself as it is a US compulsory commitment to protect the Israeli security position in the region, but also because it represents a measurable level of security. It is presented by the US as primary in the way regional partnerships are engaged in and arms deals are made – a tangible procedural demonstration of the US commitment to Israel’s security position.

Besides Israel’s QME, there are multiple theories and concept that are specifically useful in this case. One of these concepts is the so called ‘security dilemma’ that states face as they take decisions increasing their own security while encouraging other states to do the same while doing so. The outcome of an internal security increase might mean an external security decrease because of other states’ reactions.

A concept related to the security dilemma is that of ‘collective security’. After World War I it came about as a substitute for alliance systems and power balance policies that proved to be undesirable for the future. The doctrine being that overwhelming power functions as a disincentive for war, meaning that states considering using force or violence will be imposed political, economic and military sanctions.²⁸

Other useful theories related to this deal and the security perspectives concern the relationship between political alliances and arms transfers. One concept is that of the ‘patron’s dilemma’, which describes the position of security providers and how they should act without

²⁸ Ramesh Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security: From Collective Security to The Responsibility to Protect* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 35.

becoming entangled in unwanted conflict.²⁹ Taking a closer look into this study concerning the strategic logic of arms transfers executed by great powers will hopefully offer valuable insight into the practice that seems to be implemented by the US on a substantial scale.

Besides all the dilemmas that are involved in security considerations in the F-35 deal, other theories might prove useful in analyzing the interrelationships that can be distinguished in the making of this deal. The concept of 'triads' in international conflict extends the idea of 'dyadic' – two state – behavior to the notion that third parties, often superpowers, influence the members of the dyad.³⁰ Since studies of conflict and cooperation tend to focus on dyadic relationships rather than on the network of international relations³¹, using this relatively new theory is expected to provide renewed understanding of this particular case as well as confirm usefulness for future research.

To be clear, this research is not focused on performing theory testing to measure the level of usefulness or efficacy through the systematic analysis of a particular case. It is rather a study that focusses on gaining a better understanding of the case in question and in doing so makes use of different theories and concepts that could shed light on different perspectives, motives, decisions and eventually decisive policy.

All the above mentioned theories are promising at first glance, however three seem to stand out when it comes to providing insight. The relatively new concept of triadic relations might offer a new angle and help to make sense of some of the intertwined relationships that define the region and US involvement.

The novelty of the concept makes it relevant and interesting to take into consideration, however long existing concept such as the security dilemma have explained previous cases and is almost undoubtedly useful since it is tied to security choices states face, thus links seamlessly to the case in question.

The third theory that in this instance is most promising is the patron's dilemma, not merely because it links to the security dilemma on a theoretical level, but also because it links the specific practice of arms transfers to the political realm – a practice that seems to relate to the F-35 deal case.

1.7 Methodology

This research is of qualitative inductive nature, thus aiming to uncover general trends, motives or characteristics that do not solely apply to the specific case of the F-35 deal and all actors involved, but could be used as a framework to understand other seemingly peculiar arms deals, international relationships, security perceptions or whatever, however related subject comes to mind.

The ultimate goal is to try and break open the black box of decision making surrounding major arms deals like the one in question. The difficulty in this task is the way to go about that, since much of the decision making takes places behind the scenes and is not at all accessible to the public. Although that is of course what makes it so very interesting to begin with, it does

²⁹ Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally? the Patron's Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances," *International Security* 41, no. 2 (2016): 90.

³⁰ Alex Mintz and Uk Heo, "Triads in International Relations: The Effect of Superpower Aid, Trade, and Arms Transfers on Conflict in the Middle East," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 20, no. 3 (January 2014): 456.

³¹ Mintz and Heo, "Triads in International Relations," 441.

not help the finding and accessibility of resources.

The methods of data collection, thus, largely rely on sources such as legal acts, assessments of other authors and researchers as well as news articles of all kinds. These range from scholarly articles to news articles of a journalist nature, the former discussing different topics somewhat related to the subject and the latter specifically concerned with news about the F-35 deal and updates relevant to the subject. News articles were particularly relevant since updates not only about the F-35 deal itself, but directly related events such as UAE bombing by Houthi rebels associated with the war in Yemen were taking place as this research was progressing.

Possibly because the subject is very recent, conducting a research based on a large amount of different sources is difficult, however taking this deficiency into account and attempting to still, and maybe even more so, tap into a variety of different resources this shortcoming is hopefully accounted for.

The methodological deficit is the fact that formulating an analysis largely relies on the assessment of other authors, suggestions and appraising the plausibility of these assessments and explanations. Having said that, maybe the black box cannot be fully cracked, but undoubtedly a sneak peek can be offered into the behind the scenes of decision-making and policymaking surrounding this deal, its current and future implications and why it was concluded in the first place.

1.8 Demarcation

Considering the scope of this study it is inevitable to set parameters and slightly skim and trim in order to prevent a situation opposite of tunnel vision where one can look in any direction and see something worth mentioning or analyzing. The best way to attempt to understand this undertaking is to take a step back and try to make sense of this arms deal within the context of broader international relations.

The bigger picture is just as relevant to understand, maybe even more so, than the specifics of the deal and the actors directly involved. When reading into the subject and following recent developments, zooming out and placing regional events into global context and vice versa is inevitable in reaching an understanding of the case and its context.

Ranging from the seemingly very local reality of a planned arms expansion in the UAE to the realm of security within international relations, there are direct and indirect linkages to be unveiled and layers to be peeled. The best way to undertake this study thus seems to be to cover the specifics of the F-35 deal case study while using security related concepts and the concept of Israel's QME as a framework to elaborate and understand what the deal entails and how the actors involved are related to each other.

Thereafter, having created a practical framework to build on, it is essential to set forth the way in which the micro level event that is the F-35 deal plays out in a broader macro level international arena. It goes without saying that smaller scale in this case still covers an irrefutably large political and geographical area that stretches from Israel, to the UAE and then taking a giant leap connecting the US.

Working our way up to the geopolitical level more actors come into play incorporating an even larger array of political and geographical territory. The list of all the countries involved that came into view as taking a vital place within the study of the subject is: the US, the UAE,

Israel, the Palestinian territories, Yemen, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The former three countries serve as main protagonists; the latter ones fulfil pivotal roles in outlining and understanding the full context of the matter.

What is really important in this case is neither a value based judgement of what is worth studying nor the result of an objective analysis. It is, though, solely the result of decisions that are made in order to limit the scope of the study and set parameters. Setting these boundaries is an extremely difficult task, however by substantiating choices in a logical way hopefully certain limiting decisions are accounted for in a comprehensible manner.

For instance, the Palestinian issue is strongly related to every political decision made by any Arab country in relation to Israel is frowned upon by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and parties that support the cause of the Palestinian people by boycotting anything that has to do with normalizing the mere existence of the state Israel.

Given the fact that Saudi Arabia is hesitant to join the Abraham Accords indicates that more countries will fear internal unrest as public opinion possibly opposes undermining the Palestinian cause.³² The accord also indicates a changing attitude towards the Arab states' doctrine established in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.³³ The API was initiated by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah during the Second Intifada and proposed full Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian Occupied Territories vis à vis complete normalization between Israel and all 22 Arab League states.³⁴ The Palestinian cause as an absolute imperative thus seems to have faded slightly to the background.

Taking the complex nature of this subject alone into account, it is too heavy of a task to extensively deal with the effect of the Abraham Accords on the Palestinian side. It is inevitably intertwined in every political issue that involves Israel and other Arab countries which is reflected in literature on the subject. Hopefully this is a sign that the question is dealt with in a sufficient manner in existing literature, so that a shift of focus on other actors and the perspective of security is innovating and valuable.

Taking it one level up the scale to global politics we arrive at the important matter of growing tensions between Iran and the US as well as between Israel and Iran. Reading into the subject I realized that these tensions seem to be playing out not only in macro level interstate relations, sanctions, threats and negotiations, but even more so manifest themselves in regional politics and indirect on the ground realities that at first glance are not directly related. Regional politics and relations, non-state actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon - Iran's closest ally - and Houthi Rebels in Yemen are only a few examples of how important global macro level politics influence local micro level events.

It is ironically necessary to deal with the unstructured nature of international politics that characterizes this specific area since decades through structured analysis as a way of not losing sight of what is really important. To make sense of the hodge podge of international, regional and national interests and how these are all so very much intertwined with each other,

³² Saad Hafiz, "Is the Israeli-UAE Deal a Blueprint for Lasting Peace in the Middle East?," The Defense Post, September 17, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/09/07/israel-uae-deal/>.

³³ Jim Zanotti, *Israel: Background and U.S. Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 8.

³⁴ Elie Podeh, "Israel and the Arab Peace Initiative, 2002–2014: A Plausible Missed Opportunity," *The Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (2014): 585.

diving into the subject one realizes more and more that the on the ground reality as well as the more abstract meta level politics both do not let themselves be simply analyzed as bite-sized chunks of information that piece by piece lead you to a clear cut answer as to why certain events take place and decisions are made.

Through the mapping of stakeholders and interests based predominantly on academic literature and news articles and secondly on sources that provide additional information such as legal acts and documents of financial information a detailed picture of all relevant aspects of the F-35 deal and its implications are depicted and linked to relevant theories in the field of International Relations.

Chapter 2: Overview and reflections on security theories within the academic debate

2.1 Introduction to the security concept

A key analytical concept in this study is security. Applying the theoretical concept of security to the F-35 deal there are four security related notions that will be used in current analysis of the subject: the security dilemma, collective security, triadic relationships and the patron's dilemma. Before using these concepts to specifically illuminate security and its relation to the F-35 deal, a general delineation is set forth on the use of the security notion in the different pillars within IR.

Security as a political concept stems from the seventeenth century European Westphalian state system that necessitated a solution to violence and disorder. State consolidation included monopolization of security in a way that linked personal safety to the state's identity and security.³⁵ Unfortunately, the definition is not as straightforward as it seems. Security is not just an unambiguous notion that can be used as an analytical tool. It is rather a politically constructed idea that is characterized by many internal discrepancies.³⁶

When the focus on national security and territorial focus started to shift, the broader concept of 'human security' started to gain ground.³⁷ Multiple events such as the industrial and scientific revolutions spurred this development as they increased the broader potency of firepower and with that the broadening of the scope of human violence in general. With the surge of weapons of mass destruction this shift in what security entailed was accelerated even more.³⁸

Taking into account the potential role of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), better known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, light could be brought to the reasoning behind security matters connecting to the F-35 deal and arms deals in general. The JCPOA, signed in 2015 under the Obama administration, has known a hectic transformation with Trump withdrawing from it in 2019, Iran following shortly after and Biden trying to revive it.

Could it be the case that after the flunking of the JCPOA, the US decided to resort to different methods to contain the nuclear threat that comes from Iran's nuclear program? In other words, if reaching an agreement on paper does not seem to work an alternative method could be to equip recently acquired allies with arms in hopes of augmenting the level of security among these allied countries – of course with the indirect consequence of enlarging one's own level of safety and security.

Returning to the theoretical concept of security, the conclusion is that it is a fundamentally contested subject that has been extended horizontally and vertically to respectively military matters and regional, global, local and individual structures.³⁹ As described in the theoretical and conceptual framework there are a few important ideas to be set forth. In the following paragraphs these ideas will be described in order to be used in analysis throughout the rest of the study.

The concepts used in this study are drawn from the realist to constructivist perspectives

³⁵ Thakur, *Peace and Security*, 83.

³⁶ Ibidem, 86.

³⁷ Neil Macfarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 269.

³⁸ Thakur, *Peace and Security*, 84.

³⁹ Ibidem, 79.

in International Relations (IR) and range from the well-known security dilemma to the lesser known concept of triadic relationships. A short introduction to each one of these concepts is meant to prepare for the use of wide ranging theories in analyzing the role of security perceptions related to the QME in decision making in the coming about of the F-35 deal.

2.2 Realist and liberal security perspectives and the security dilemma

One of the most prominent political scientist in the classical realist line of thought is Hans Morgenthau. Even though consensus largely exists on the conviction that the narrowness of Morgenthau's classical realist approach concerning politics is limiting and ignores the complexity of politics as social and historical trajectories, it is not to be completely discarded.⁴⁰

Morgenthau makes some interesting comments concerning superstition and the bending of truth in politics. He states that the amount of superstition has not changed, but now attaches to politics instead of religion. Where rational demonstration previously needed to show that natural phenomena were not caused by supernatural powers like demons and devils, they now shifted to the realm of IR. He states that theories of IR must put notions about world-wide conspiracies, naturally evil nations must be empirically verified.⁴¹

Many of Morgenthau's classical realist ideas are a bit outdated according to many, however the foregoing ideas concerning superstition and framing of world-wide conspiracies might be part of a possible explanation for the status of Iran as eternal enemy. In the remainder of the study a more detailed analysis will be made that investigates the status and the position Iran occupies within the larger situation of arms dispersion.

Hence, classical realist ideas in its broadest sense of blunt strategic calculations and decision making are not necessarily aligned with the scope of the study, but certain elements – especially conspiracy thinking – do seem important to take into account in the analysis.

Another preeminent political scientist in the realist spectrum that described the security dilemma is Robert Jervis. In an article he wrote in 1978 he describes Rousseau's 'stag hunt' as a way to explain the security dilemma that states are exposed to.

The 'stag hunt' metaphor compares states' choices in their level of cooperation and armament to a decision between a stag or rabbit hunt. If all countries cooperate and trap the stag it means that they are fully cooperating and disarmament takes place.⁴² In the other cases one or more countries choose to chase a rabbit instead which means they maintain a high level of armament. If all countries chases rabbits this means there is a high risk of war and an arms race takes place.

The problem with this metaphor is the unpredictability of future insecurities. Despite of being all for maintaining a status quo in cooperation and disarmament, there is no saying that their successors and even themselves will not change their minds in whatever way. After all, times change, values change, previously unknown dangers come into existence. Circumstances are not static whatsoever, the context in which a stag hunt is cooperative is fluid and this insecurity might just paradoxically be the reason to keep arming to a certain extent.⁴³

⁴⁰ Michael Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 58, no. 04 (2004): 636.

⁴¹ Hans Morgenthau, "Common Sense and Theories of International Relations," *Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 2 (1967): 212.

⁴² Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 268.

⁴³ Jervis, "Security Dilemma," 268.

A more recent article that analyses different approaches of the security dilemma depending on the IR perspective is written by Shiping Tang.⁴⁴ Tang offers insight into how the security dilemma takes concrete form in political relations according to different authors.

Comparing the different perspectives to the case of the US, Israel, the UAE and Iran will hopefully help understand why certain decisions in the political and military arena are made. He for example states that the security dilemma for offensive realists entails the inevitability of war while for defensive realists like Jervis, it promotes real cooperation between states in an attempt to maintain a status of security.⁴⁵

According to liberals, international democratic institutions are a means to achieve security between countries. Promoting democratic norms and values as a way to secure international safety is an interesting point of view to consider when analyzing the Abraham Accords and the F-35 deal. On one hand this cooperation clearly takes place on the level the US, the UAE and Israel.

Signing peace agreements is preeminently a liberal activity promoting cooperation and democratic values. On the other hand this, again, raises questions concerning the role of Iran that seems to be outside of this cooperating democratic environment. The Abraham Accords thus seem to alleviate the security dilemma on the level of the US, the UAE and Israel triangle, but at the same time perfectly aligning the dilemma from the perspective that arming an ally based on the fear that your foe, which could be Iran in this case, is equipping militarily as well.

There is, though, a tension in the coming about of liberalism in general. The liberal perspective taking a prominent position in IR was ironic in the sense that it dealt with conflict and cooperation between great powers at first. When liberalism seemed to bear fruit reducing the likelihood of large scale conflict, globalization came around and created security questions on another level.⁴⁶ Environmental, societal and economic security started to be on the liberal agenda expanding and overarching mere military security.⁴⁷

2.3 Collective security and constructivism

A concept related to the security dilemma is that of collective security. After World War I it came about as a substitute for alliance systems and power balance policies that proved to be undesirable for the future. The doctrine being that overwhelming power exercises a disincentive for war, meaning that states considering using force or violence will be imposed political, economic and military sanctions.⁴⁸ Again, this notion might be helpful in understanding the relation between actors involved in the F-35 deal and Iran.

There is, however, a fundamental tension in the concept, namely that the concept is useless when it comes to smaller states, since war can do damage but will not pose real danger to world peace. When it comes to great powers that can indeed cause danger to world peace when using force, there is no use in enforcing to maintain 'collective security', because it has the possibility to cause exactly what the concept is designed to avoid: world wars.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Shiping Tang, "The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis," *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 588.

⁴⁵ Tang, "The Security Dilemma," 588.

⁴⁶ Barry Buzan, "The English School: A Neglected Approach to International Security Studies," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 2 (2015): 128.

⁴⁷ Buzan, "The English School," 128.

⁴⁸ Thakur, *Peace and Security*, 35.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

The seemingly paradoxical nature of the concept as stated above can be tested against the possible usefulness of collective security as using assembled military force to balance out threats to peace. Charles Kupchan, reasoning from a constructivist perspective, wrote an article about the promise of collective security describing its advantages of balancing power under collective security as opposed to power balancing in a state of anarchy.

He adds that it promotes a cooperative international environment that makes rivalry and aggression between states less likely.⁵⁰ The advantages described can be tested against the particular case of the US and Israel expanding alliances and Kupchan's premise of the relationship between collective security and the likelihood of violence occurring.

What characterizes Kupchan's and other like-minded author's approaches to the study of security is the notion that it is a socially constructed concept. This approach aims to be critical to for example rationalist theories, which operate through the formal and informal application of rational choice to IR and have an explanatory 'why' objective.⁵¹ Constructivists on the other hand claim that agents do not operate apart from their social context and attempt to understand 'how' objects of security and perceptions of threat are socially constructed with emphasis on discourse methods.⁵²

Related specifically to security and security perceptions there are a few basic principles among which there are a few important ones to this study. Firstly, the main actors in world politics are a product of complex historical processes and are constructed – and reconstructed – through political processes that establish shared social understanding.⁵³ This is a permanent process in which primary institutions like nationalism, territorialism and war are durable though not fixed or constant.⁵⁴ War and its legitimacy and purpose have, for example, changed historically. The use of nuclear weapons for instance is usefully framed within a more fluid understanding of war as a primary institution.⁵⁵

Insider – outsider status is an important notion in these debates and concern the perceptions of countries of themselves and others within international society and security. In principle, all is part of what is called international society and the institutions mentioned in the previous paragraph, however in practice some countries are considered to be outside of this social structure.⁵⁶ Especially in institutions that are nowadays often considered more Western than universal, most notably in human rights and democracy, the insider – outsider perspective prevails and marks a differentiation between 'civilized' and 'barbarian'.⁵⁷

This line of thought was highlighted in the colonial era where 'civilized' countries could impose their standard of civilization on 'savage' outsiders, implicating serious security repercussions for the colonized. This practice is still in place nowadays, with some countries considered 'not fit for membership' within the international society labelling them as outsiders

⁵⁰ Charles Kupchan and Clifford Kupchan, "The Promise of Collective Security," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 52.

⁵¹ Nilüfer Karacasulu and Elif Uzgören, "Explaining Social Constructivist Contributions to Security Studies," *METU Conference on International Relations* (2007): 32.

⁵² Karacasulu and Uzgören, "Social Constructivist Contributions," 31.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 34.

⁵⁴ Buzan, "The English School," 134.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 136.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 137.

and simultaneously implying all kinds of insider – outsider security perceptions.⁵⁸

Secondly, considering the fact that world politics are socially constructed, it is fluid, not static and it is out of question that there is an objective truth in the world – socially speaking.⁵⁹ What comes to mind speaking about fluidity is Jervis' critique on the 'stag hunt' theory that does not take into account the unstable nature of security perceptions. Despite his realist background, Jervis takes a more constructivist stance which proves that there is something to take away from all different aspects and theories.

In short, even though some ideas and characteristics of other theories on security within IR might prove useful, the constructivist approach seems to be the most applicable and justifiable means to an end. As stated throughout the whole of the study so far, the aim is to gain a more detailed understanding of how arms deals come into existence. The socially constructed reasoning behind this process seems, overall, to be the best way to go about it. In addition, the liberal perspective could offer new insights into the seemingly paradoxical nature of the cooperation between certain states and the supposed non-cooperation of other states and how this links up.

Hence, certain elements of other lines of thought could offer valuable explanations as well, so they are not to be rejected as a whole. Take, for example, Morgenthau's classical realist views on superstition that seem to be interesting for the current case taking in mind that superstition and enemies are also fluid and not always inextricably bound to one 'enemy'. Nevertheless, judging from the created overview of ideas and authors, the constructivist approach seems to have the upper hand in the forthcoming analysis.

In short, what has been discussed in this chapter are different perspectives on security in literature and within the academic debate. In the forthcoming analysis security will be viewed as socially constructed and fluid rather than static and fixed, while taking some useful ideas from different lines of thought. This method hopefully contributes to the academic security debate by offering new insights into the case under study and related international politics and relevant security perceptions.

2.4 Triadic relations

A relatively new viewpoint in academic circles is to move from dyads to triads. In their article Alex Mintz and Uk Heo describe that studies on a dyadic level in conflict and cooperation are becoming increasingly more common. The dyadic relationship in this case can be described as the relationship between an economic aid-supplying and an economic aid-receiving country with a focus on whether this support influences the behavior of the receiving country.⁶⁰

A twofold level of analysis nowadays is often preferred over systemic, integral studies.⁶¹ Mintz and Heo argue that expanding analysis to a triadic level can significantly expand our understanding of conflict and cooperation in international relations. They produced a theory on triadic relationships and test it with data on aid and trade of major powers (among which the US) and aid and trade receiving countries on the other end.⁶² In the current analysis, this theory and that of triads in general is used to advance knowledge of relationships concerning the F-35

⁵⁸ Buzan, "The English School," 137.

⁵⁹ Karacasulu and Uzgören, "Social Constructivist Contributions," 34.

⁶⁰ Mintz and Heo, "Triads in International Relations," 444.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 441.

⁶² Ibidem.

deal in a security context.

Mintz and Heo thus broadened the dyadic twofold theory into a threefold analysis that studied the impact of superpowers' aid and arms transfers on dyadic conflictual conduct. Reasoning behind this extension is the fact that dyadic conduct in relation to conflict generally does not present itself in isolation. The comportment of states that are part of the dyad is usually influenced by third parties, often in the shape of superpowers.

Through their data collection the authors demonstrate that the introduction of triads in the equation has a significant effect on dyadic behavior in various cases. For example, economic aid from the UK, the US and France has proven to reduce the prevalence of conflicts among Arab countries.⁶³ The theory in question, of course, offers possibilities when it comes to testing the current F-35 case and the actors involved against the findings of Mintz and Heo. Superpower US takes the third party role, whereas Israel and the UAE fulfill the roles of the dyads.

Triads are always made up of three countries within the broader international community, two of which might be connected through official or unofficial alliances. Two of the three parties might have a history of hostility or one of them might have a significant control – to a certain extent – on one or both of the others.⁶⁴ In this case of cooperative, though conflictual relations the conduct of two countries is presumably influenced by the third party, especially if there is a superpower involved. Third country's actions and motivations are most carried through arms transfers, aid and trade.⁶⁵

In other words, the way in which dyadic conflictual behavior takes shape is very much determined by the connection between one or both of the countries with a superpower third country and dyadic dealings, thus, rarely take place in a vacuum or in isolation from the rest of the world.⁶⁶

Third parties could, for instance, induce or reduce the chances of conflict among the dyads when one or both of the dyads is relying substantially on the third party regarding economic aid, trade, arms transfers or several of the above. The more dependent, the more responsive, because 'Big Brother is watching', is the rationale behind this statement.⁶⁷ Moreover, financial support might be vital to smaller countries urging them to act according to the do's and don'ts the superpower imposes directly or indirectly.

2.5 The Patron's Dilemma: Arms and Alliances

Yet another dilemma that comes creeping around the corner is that of the patron. When confronting the relationship between arms and alliances, scholars Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka and Cooper that wrote an article on the strategic logic of arms transfers and alliances, asked themselves the question why superpowers would supply arms to client states and what is the reasoning behind forming certain alliances.⁶⁸

Great powers face something that is called 'patron's dilemma': a term that entails the policies and related calculations and considerations superpowers ought to carry out to balance

⁶³ Mintz and Heo, "Triads in International Relations," 456.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, 442.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 444.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 445.

⁶⁸ Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally?", 90.

the security status of themselves and their allies – without being caught in conflict.⁶⁹ This notion is pivotal in grasping US security policy and interstate conduct in general.

The authors refer to the Iranian nuclear deal as an incentive that spurred the US to strengthen security relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel. Among the practical outcomes of this effort are peace treaties (like the Abraham Accords) and arms sales (like the F-35 deal).⁷⁰ Would this tactic not be carried out some say that the spreading of nuclear weapons or war are just around the corner.⁷¹

They then offer an explanation as to how superpowers balance arms transfers and alliances based on a twofold strategy: shared common interests and the status of military capabilities.⁷² An assessment of these two factors together forges the totality of security commitments that the patron gives their client. This commitment in the article takes the shape of arms and alliances as security commodities and the authors show when a patron employs which.⁷³

They demonstrate when and why patrons use alliances and arms transfers to urge a client to act in a certain manner. In other words, it is demonstrated how patrons use arms in order to manage dilemma's revolving around alliances.⁷⁴ The most important disadvantage of arms transfers are the fact that they cannot quickly respond to big changes in military capacity in relation to a considerably stronger rival.⁷⁵ So even though arms transfers offer a fast answer to minor changes in the local military equilibrium, there is no direct use in the larger scale geopolitical realm.⁷⁶

Following recent events of Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories in Eastern Europe, debate sparked on whether US security commitments are adequate and up to date.⁷⁷ The patron's dilemma in this case seems to remain contemporary and might influence more radical action since current security efforts proved to be insufficient.

2.6 Operationalization

The process of defining the measurement of security, related policy considerations and risk assessments regarding the F-35 deal is not immediately evident. Security is an ambiguous notion and the different lines of thought within IR offer a blend of perspectives and yield different outcomes in analysis. The realist perspective, for example, draws on a fixed, more factual account of affairs whereas the constructivist perspective takes social-historical context into consideration. The liberal perspective focusses on the cooperation of states within the parameters of international institutions.

While reading and analyzing primary sources as well as secondary sources the objective has been to take into account all three perspectives to keep an open mind to the explanatory value of each of them in understanding the coming about of the F-35 deal. There is, however, a clear distinction between some of the main characteristics of the different approaches, that

⁶⁹ Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally?", 90.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Ibidem, 92.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 97.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, 99.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, 90.

has been taken into account. The strength of this study is to acknowledge the complementary quality of all perspective and put them to use where they fit best.

To make sure not to solely consider one of the perspectives, the value of taking into account all three is pointed out in the next chapter. This starting point is analogous to the approach taken in this study. From the outset, when reading articles, legal sources or other texts, analysis will be conducted keeping in mind different lines of thought that can generate different interpretations. How security, policy, decision making and actors are framed is key in the collection of information.

Analysis of the data collection that ranges from legal acts, bills and other governmental documents is conducted to ensure the diversity of Besides legal documents and news articles, other authors analyses – of journalist as well as scholarly nature – are part of the study. The relative novelty of the subject signals a rather limited offer in scholarly publications concerning the subject. This not only makes for an relevant case study, but makes news articles an important source of information. This necessitates a critical approach and a broad variety of sources resource.

The slight inclination towards the constructivist perspective is to be found in the focus on the socio-historical context of the F-35 deal and the geopolitical circumstances that will be set forth in the creation of a background that outlines the circumstances in which the F-35 came into existence. To this end it is important to keep up to date with news articles surrounding the subject, official statements and acts and bills that provide information on standpoints or the decision making process. The study itself is made up of constructed information that piece by piece arrived as events advanced.

Chapter 3: What is US policy concerning arms deals that might negatively affect Israel's QME?

To help answer the question that is the focal point of this chapter two theories will be made use of. The first is the theory surrounding triadic relationships and the second concerns the patron's dilemma. With the help of these theories a substantiated answer can be formed as to how US policy regarding arms deals might negatively impact Israel's QME and how previously concluded arms deals have directly or indirectly influenced Israel's military edge.

3.1 Existing legal Acts, Bills and primary sources

US commitment to Israel's security status that is linked to its military status and superiority facing other great powers and accumulated potential force of Israel's adversaries as well as the US' – these latter two are irrefutably intertwined. This also applies to the ensuing measures that are taken to conserve this security position and every element that is linked to this US-Israeli construct. Several legal actions – that stay in place despite the fact that many questionable arms sales do indeed take place – showcase the US – or parts of the US governmental system – commitment to upholding Israel's QME.

In the following subsection a number of Acts and Bills related to the US commitment to Israel's military edge on the hand, and several contradictory legal actions that seem to go against this established relationship on the other hand, are set forth to illustrate the fact that even legal commitments are not a hundred percent set in stone. In other words, in spite of the legal commitment the forthcoming Acts and Bills implicate, also the letter of the law can be twisted to one's own advantage.

The first legal act that is also chronologically the first is an Act that stems from the year 2008, which is the same year the AECA originates from. Subsection 3 (c) and (d(VII)) prescribes specifically how the UAE cannot cooperate with Iran on nuclear weapons or transport any goods that could contribute to Iranian nuclear, biological, chemical weapons or ballistic missiles.⁷⁸ They are also decreed to fully implement UN security council sanctions against Iran, which included monitoring of financial institutions; inspections of cargo; travel bans; and asset freezes.⁷⁹ Following this 2008 Act, the US signed an agreement of cooperation with the UAE regarding the peaceful use of nuclear energy in May 2009.⁸⁰

Everything stated above does not only underwrite the relationship the US has been building with the UAE, it also affirms once more how much the US has been and still is occupied with restricting Iranian power on the whole. Applying the framework of collective security and the security dilemma to these legal actions clear comparisons can be found. Not only because US actions and sanctions against Iran seem to be a way of constraining Iranian power and closely monitoring every step they take, it is also confirmation that they are trying to do so through the use of institutions built on the notion of collective security like the UN.

Furthermore, motivating allies to adopt these same measures and sanctions against Iran,

⁷⁸ "Limitation on Nuclear Cooperation with the United Arab Emirates Act of 2008," 110th Congress, December 9, 2008, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/7316?s=1&r=1>.

⁷⁹ "Security Council authorizes more sanctions against Iran over Nuclear Issue," United Nations, March 3, 2008, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2008/03/251122>.

⁸⁰ "AGREEMENT FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES," The president of the United States, May 21, 2009, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CDOC-111hdoc43/pdf/CDOC-111hdoc43.pdf>.

to subsequently supply those allies with more weapons, hence a stronger security position, is a textbook example of the patron's dilemma in practice. Shared common interest is balancing out Iran's military position in the region and the status of military capabilities of the UAE is supported to this end.

Then, making a leap to September 2020, a slightly amended version of the AECA of 2008 named 'The Values in Arms Export Act of 2020' was introduced to ameliorate the monitoring of the use of defense articles.⁸¹ The Act contains a lot of information on the behavior of arms receiving countries especially in relation to human rights.

The term 'human rights' can be counted twenty-three times in the thirty-nine page counting Act that strongly emphasizes the US obligation to assess recipient countries to never use arms to violate neither internationally recognized human rights nor the law of armed conflict.⁸² To this end, a designated Executive Board operating under the name 'Human Rights and Law of War Oversight Board' will analyze, review and ensure the actions of arms receiving countries to limit the risks of said violations.

An act of similar nature was approved in April 2021 also known as the 'SECURE F-35 Exports Act of 2021'. This act, that is drawn up in addition to the original AECA, compels the president to submit a report that ensures that Israel does not suffer a quantitative military disadvantage as a result of F-35 aircraft sales to neighboring countries – the UAE in this case.⁸³

They are hereafter compelled to carry out such an assessment every four years to update Israel's security position. What stands out in the general outline of the document is the fact that the security position of the US itself as a result of F-35 sales is only mentioned in section 3 and repeatedly mentioned after Israel in an enumeration.⁸⁴

All the political activity mentioned above thus seems to – sometimes literally – put Israel's security position even before the US'; what more could they do could one think. Well, even though they seem to put significant emphasis on the preservation of Israel's QME and the prevention of its weakening at all cost, there are several Acts and Bills, recently introduced, that do not seem to go hand in hand with this narrative.

It might be a matter of internal political processes that are characterized by many opposites like: liberalism vs. conservatism; democrats vs. republicans; and congress vs. president. The outcome is a rather erratic policy that points represents both sides of this capricious coin.

The following administrative affairs seem to be counterproductive when it comes to upholding the US pledge to keep up Israel's military edge. In January 2021, for starters, legislation was concluded on revising the Missile Technology Control Regime (MCTR) that would speed up the process of sales of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) such as drones. Under the previous guidelines MQ-9 Reaper Drones, for example, were by default categorized 'strong

⁸¹ "Values in Arms Export Act of 2020," 116th Congress, September 29, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/4739>.

⁸² "Values in Arms Export Act of 2020," sec. 4 (c (1B)), 116th Congress, September 29, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/4739>.

⁸³ "Senators Menendez, Feinstein Introduce Secure F-35 Exports Act," Foreign Relations Committee, April 16, 2021, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/senators-menendez-feinstein-introduce-secure-f-35-exports-act->.

⁸⁴ "SECURE F-35 Export Act," sec. 4 (a (4)) and sec. 4 (b (3)), 117th Congress, April 15, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1182/text>.

presumption of denial', but are now examined the same way as any other FMS.⁸⁵

According to the department in question, reasoning behind this relaxation of UAS sales policy is that the previous approach proved to be inflexible in responding to rapid advancement of the uses of UAS, thereby creating a 'competitive disadvantage for the United States'.⁸⁶ In order to fully participate in the global commercial markets, the US needed to let go of 'restraining' policies, putting the goals of the MTCR – that tries to limit the proliferation of UAS – on the backburner.

On top of that, 18 pieces of this MQ-9 Reaper Drones are part of the F-35 deal, making this policy revision relevant in QME assessments.⁸⁷ Noteworthy is that neither Israel, nor its QME were part of the consideration in this policy change. Israel is also expected to withhold from interfering in deals of this sort.⁸⁸ Opponents of the F-35 deal also observed the magnitude of this unprecedented arms sale and expressed concern that spreading these advanced weapons into this specific region would do nothing more than enrich the defense industry while weakening international security.⁸⁹

Another policy change that will probably do more harm than good to Israel's QME is the invoking of an AECA condition which now means that a president can overrule Congress when they consider an arms sale to be essential for national security.⁹⁰ The Trump administration made great use of the subjectivity of this provision to further large arms sales to, for example, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.^{91,92}

Concerning the F-35 deal, it was expected that Trump would veto in the case of a majority of disapproval by Congress. The Trump administration, however, was about to resign and Biden was assumed to suspend sales and possibly block actual distribution.⁹³ Since that did not happen and Biden readily pursued the deal, he seemed to side with Trump's policy of focusing on national economic gain rather than international security concerns or Israel's QME.

3.2 US relevant regional arms sales in relation to triads and the patron's dilemma

After having provided a brief overview of some of the most important legal measures that are related to Israel's QME, whether that be in the interest of Israel or not, There seems to be a constant friction between taking action with the QME as highest priority on the one hand and choosing action based on the US security position in the region as a whole on the other hand.

Creation of political and military context surrounding this F-35 deal is meant to put into perspective how to understand decision-making concerning arms deals in this specific case and

⁸⁵ Wrigley, "New UAE Arms Sales."

⁸⁶ Matthew Borman, Federal Register, January 12, 2021, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-12/pdf/2020-27983.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Rumley, "UAE F-35 Negotiations."

⁸⁸ Yahel Arnon and Yoel Guzansky, "A Conventional Arms Race," *INSS Insight*, no. 1074 (July 11, 2018): 2.

⁸⁹ Alexander Bertschi Wrigly and Jeff Abrahamson, "UAE Arms Sales Survive Senate Vote," *Arms Control Today*, January, 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-01/news/uae-arms-sales-survive-senate-vote>.

⁹⁰ "Public Law: Military Assistance Program," 94th Congress, June 30, 1976, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-90/pdf/STATUTE-90-Pg729.pdf#page=16> sec. 211 (b) (1) (M(A)).

⁹¹ "US State Dept approves latest raft of Saudi, UAE, Jordan arms sales," *Al Jazeera*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/4/us-state-department-approves-latest-raft-of-middle-east-arms-sales>.

⁹² Jeff Abrahamson, US Arms Sales Under Review, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-03/news/us-arms-sales-under-review>

⁹³ Wrigley, "New UAE Arms Sales."

in general. Looking into similar cases in which US interests seem to transcend the importance of their dedication to Israel's QME might prove to be highly relevant to gain understanding into when and why it is decided to pursue arms sales possibly compromising Israel's security position in the region.

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) aerial freedom is jeopardized as large scale US sales of advanced fighter planes to Arab countries has become very common in the last few years.⁹⁴ Deals are signed with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, meaning that there will be up to 600 more fighter planes present in the region that apart from the F-35, they will soon have a technological upper hand over the IAF's stockpile.⁹⁵

With the majority of them being manufactured in the US with the most advanced technological capabilities, Israel's monopoly over the F-35 is considered essential in maintaining their regional aerial military edge – which was guaranteed by the Trump administration to be upheld for a substantial duration of time.⁹⁶ Time in this case is considered to be the main advantage Israel could have in order to prepare for the possession of the F-35 of their regional adversaries. That is, time would give them the opportunity to add more F-15's and F-16's to their fleet and prepare for existing plans to integrate more F-35's into their array by 2023.⁹⁷

But with the US continually selling more weapons and more advanced weapons, is Israel not endlessly forced to keep preparing and expanding technologically and militarily in order to counterbalance these sales? This is not to say that Israel is completely left to its own devices, since the US commitment to maintaining Israel's military edge and its related legal obligation to uphold this objective are still very much on the agenda. What is questioned here, however, is if this two sided provision of weapons by the US is like fighting a running battle and creating a wobbly warehouse of weapons in a region that is unstable to say the least.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) produced data about weapons exports to Arab countries showing that they grew with 103 percent between 2013 and 2017 compared to the preceding four-year period.⁹⁸ Egypt and Saudi Arabia, both important US allies, even enlarged their arms imports with, respectively, 215 and 225 percent and Saudi Arabia's and the UAE's arms purchase surmounts that of Western European countries altogether.⁹⁹

Recently, in January of 2022, US president Joe Biden approved a 2.5 billion dollar arms sale to Egypt despite concerns about a very poor human rights record.¹⁰⁰ Even though Egypt and Israel have a standing peace treaty since 1979 – that will be addressed briefly later on in this chapter – that is not to say that the US can sell weapons to Egypt indefinitely without endangering Israel's security position.

Historically, Israel-Egypt relations, despite decades of normalization, have been of a

⁹⁴ Arad, "Fifth-Generation Fighter Planes," 2.

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ James Stavridis, *ATLAS SUPPORTED: strengthening U.S.-Israel strategic cooperation*, (JINSA Gemunder Center, 2016), 27.

⁹⁸ Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 1.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ "US Approves \$2.5bn Arms Sale to Egypt, despite Rights Concerns," Al Jazeera, January 26, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/26/us-approves-2-5bn-arms-sale-egypt-despite-rights-concerns>.

cold nature. The two have only recently been starting to develop actual active ties. In this case, U.S. financial incentives are no longer critical to maintaining this relationship, which is now sustained by these states' own self-interests.¹⁰¹ In the case of Egypt and Israel this concerns containing extremist groups in the Sinai and restricting the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.¹⁰²

The State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs stated that US' national security and foreign policy will be supported by improving the security of a Major Non-NATO Ally.¹⁰³ Subsequently, in February of 2022 news came out that the US is selling an array of arms to the UAE, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, all important allies in the region.¹⁰⁴

Jordan will purchase seventy million dollars' worth of launch rocket systems, fighter jets and explosives among other things.¹⁰⁵ The UAE will, for their part, be sold sixty five million dollars' worth of defense system articles in addition to the F-35 deal. Saudi Arabia has been upscaling weapons sales since 2015 when they initiated an intervention in the Yemeni civil war.¹⁰⁶ From that moment on the Saudis have acquired hundreds of short-range missile interceptors; signed a fifteen billion dollar contract to purchase more defense systems, radars and fire control units.¹⁰⁷

3.3 Triadic relationships and arms trade

Mintz and Heo described and studied the relationship between economic aid-supplying and economic aid-receiving countries in a triadic composition. They focused on whether or not support influences the behavior of receiving countries in a triad because dyadic behavior does not usually take place in a vacuum. Since the F-35 deal primarily involves merely the US and the UAE as, respectively, supplier and receiver, but many more countries and their interests are involved the case seems to be a perfect fit for this relatively new theory. It is, moreover, interesting to look into the US and other relationships that have been dealt with earlier on in this chapter.

Applying Mintz and Heo argumentation to the case of the US as superpower in relation to, for example, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Israel and the UAE, the former two might significantly rely on US financial aid and arms transfers, but the latter three are quite prosperous and independent. Saudi Arabia being a superpower itself probably needs to be taken out of the equation, leaving Israel and the UAE as doubtful dyads.

Both the UAE and Israel are very strong politically and militarily, but especially Israel receives major financial and military aid and might need to dance to the US tune to a large extent. Could this be the reason behind the quiet passing of the F-35 deal? For their part the UAE's recent policy shift that includes talks with Iran, shows a development that goes against the US influence and signals the country's independency when it comes to its diplomatic

¹⁰¹ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 26.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ Omri Nahmias, "State Department approves a possible \$70 million military sale to Jordan," Jerusalem Post, February 9, 2022, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-695984>.

¹⁰⁴ "Latest raft of arms sales," Al Jazeera.

¹⁰⁵ Nahmias, "\$70 million military sale," Jerusalem Post.

¹⁰⁶ Fashola, "Missile Defense," 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

ties.^{108,109}

The authors state that US aid to dyadic states is of significant influence on military conflict with specific relation to Arab states. This significant influence, to be more precise, is a strong reduction of the probability of violence occurring among members of the dyad.¹¹⁰ Of course, the question arises if this applies to the F-35 deal as well. It can go two different directions.

The first option is a confirmation of the Mintz and Heo theory that, when followed, will most probably argue that selling advanced weapons to the UAE will enable them to reduce violence in Yemen through actual military resistance or merely the deterrent effect the rather unique possession of F-35 fighter jets will yield. A more zoomed out vision could be that expanding alliances on the side of Israel will balance powers and lessen the chance of violence from whatever side.

The second direction, that unfortunately seems quite realistic and goes against the effect described by the authors is the increasing of violence due to the augmentation of the number and power of weapons in the region. Adding to that the fact that the UAE have been present and active in the Yemen war is a risk-inducing factor that needs not to be taken lightly.

Even though the authors found that the effect of greater arms transfers does not significantly lead to more conflict, lesser arms transfers do reduce conflict in the case of France and the US. The hypothesis thus does not completely go against the authors'. What seems to be crucial is the role of other actors that might influence the dyad or triad.

To put it more clearly, when superpower US gains leverage over other countries that do not necessarily need to be all too dependent on the US, they might have shared interests making the receiving of aid and then carrying out US supported policy, a win-win. This shared interest could be to withstand a common enemy, and so another actor comes into play. In short, it comes down to the influence of a shared enemy that could likely be Iran – essentially adding a fourth member to the triad making it a tetrad.

3.4 Arms and alliances: the patron's dilemma

There are more instances that arms deals function as a bargaining chip in peace agreements to serve national interests. More than once, the US was involved in peace treaties between Israel and other countries in the region – not in the least, but also not exclusively in the interest of Israel. The following peace treaties were brokered by the US:

- Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979 following Camp David Accords
- Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty of 1994 following the Oslo Accords
- Bahrain normalized relations simultaneously with the UAE as part of the Abraham Accords
- Sudan and Morocco both normalized relations in 2020 following the Abraham Accords

¹⁰⁸ Hamdullah Baycar, "The UAE's Israel-Iran Balancing Act," Gulf International Forum, January 10, 2022, <https://gulfif.org/the-uaes-israel-iran-balancing-act/>.

¹⁰⁹ Giorgio Cafiero, "The UAE-Iran Rapprochement: Causes and Effects," Gulf International Forum, July 22, 2022, <https://gulfif.org/the-uae-iran-rapprochement-causes-and-effects/>.

¹¹⁰ Mintz and Heo, "Triads in International Relations," 450.

Remarkable is the fact that of the arms sales mentioned earlier on in this chapter most of the countries have, at least on paper, a standing peace treaty with Israel. The question that emerges and is also asked by scholars Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka and Cooper that wrote an article on the strategic logic of arms transfers and alliances. They asked themselves the question why superpowers would supply arms to client states and what is the reasoning behind forming certain alliances.¹¹¹

One very important factor is the compatibility of security interests. At the moment, especially when considering the common threat that is posed by Iran, the compatibility of security interests is at a high point. Though this has not always been the case. In the 1960's, during the Cold War, a common threat for both Israel and the US was the Soviet Union and the fear that Arab states would strengthen their ties with the latter.¹¹² There were, however, different approaches to this threat. The US perceived Arab nationalism as a potential force against communism, while Israel saw Arab nationalism as endangering their own security.¹¹³

The fact that security interests did not align had consequences for security aid and arms transfers to Israel and other countries in the region. Israel received less aid than would have been the case if their interest lined up. Instead, the US decided to invest in the relationship with Egypt to try to maintain an important Arab ally to counterbalance Soviet influence in the Arab world.¹¹⁴

In the case of the F-35 deal, arms as well as alliances are part of the package – the strongest combination of aid available. It seems to be a perfect storm for all those involved. Security interests are lined up with Israel as well as the UAE which remarks on the perceived Iranian danger and the way the US and client states act on this threat.

3.5 US foreign policy shift: the Arab Spring and Israel's security status

Apart from the theories presented along academically oriented lines in this and the previous chapter, a more practical approach offers insight into US policy and how a shift hereof could directly or indirectly influence Israel's QME. In light of this policy directed approach an article that advises the US government on a – in their opinion – much needed policy change when it comes to partnerships, especially in the region currently under study.¹¹⁵ The authors of the document are part of a research organization that develops solutions to policy challenges and they make many suggestions and remarks on how the US should achieve a healthier and more positive relationship with countries in this region.

'Old' approaches, according to the authors, have led to a partition of countries into blocs that lack coherence and fueled an unstable political status. The behind the scenes of these traditional approaches will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter three, but the most important advise to take away is a prospective recalibration of relationships with countries in the region. The document prescribes this recalibration to be based on an 'interest enhancing regional stability' that is led by an emphasis on better governance, arms control and enhanced cooperation.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally?", 90.

¹¹² Ibidem, 121.

¹¹³ Ibidem, 122.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹¹⁵ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, iii.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, 41, 42.

Since 2003 US policy in this specific region is characterized by a twofold unpredictability; one being diminishing transparency of foreign policy and the other concerns unpredictability when it comes to intervention.¹¹⁷ The only irrefutable constant in US policy has been Israel since the end of World War II.¹¹⁸ This process of disengagement took shape of innovation in strategic thinking under the Obama administration and was tested in practice amidst social unrest during what was called the Arab Spring.¹¹⁹

The civil insurrections were a test as to how far US loyalty towards country's leaders reached – would the US chose to support former autocratic leaders even if this compromised important democratic qualities.¹²⁰ Especially Egypt and Yemen that were considered to hold the status of important allies showed how changing US policy reacted in a complicated situation. Mubarak's Egypt was pivotal in the Israeli security matrix since Camp David and Yemen proved crucial in countering Al-Qaeda in the Arab peninsula. Contradictory messages followed especially in the case of Egypt as Obama stated support for Egypt's leadership at first, only to fully support the protestors not long after.¹²¹

The statement issued by the US government could have been signaling a decline in US support for ruling governments, thus at the same time indicating a strong preference for liberal democratic values over diplomatic ties putting the political relations on the backburner. US policy in this case seems logical, since choosing the other side would mean abandoning their liberal democratic flagship product that they have been trying to enforce on the region through numerous military interventions among other means.

How the Arab Spring and US position taking on this matter directly or indirectly influenced the Israeli military status in the region is not immediately evident. The obvious observation would be that by dismissing the interests of the governments and choosing the side of the protestors, the US also dismisses the interests at stake concerning those government's support for Israel.

Two reasons make this argumentation superfluous and one argument does signal the impact of the Arab Spring on Israel. Firstly, Israel-Egypt relations were anyway of a 'cold' nature and did not seem to have been jeopardized by these protests or US policy. Egypt was too occupied with their own problems to worry about their relations with Israel short term nor in the long run.

What was in fact crucial for Israel's status was the fact that they had promoted themselves as being the only liberal democratic political system in the region and had economically, militarily and politically benefitted from holding this status in international relations.¹²² By losing this status, they would lose having the unique support from Western powers would they decide to start investing more in democratic systems in the region.

This would moreover signify an obligation to improve their own democratic system by

¹¹⁷ Jordi Quero and Andrea Dessì, "Unpredictability in US Foreign Policy and the Regional Order in the Middle East: Reacting Vis-à-Vis a Volatile External Security-Provider," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 2 (February 17, 2019): 312, 313.

¹¹⁸ Quero and Dessì, "Unpredictability in US foreign Policy," 323.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, 319.

¹²⁰ Ibidem.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² Haim Bresheeth, "The Arab Spring: A View from Israel," *Middle East Journal Of Culture And Communication* 5, no. 1 (2012): 46.

radically reforming, for example, their policy towards Palestinians and the illegal occupation of land.¹²³ All this would contribute to a decreasing military status internally as well as externally.

After this short Arab Spring interlude to explain some of the dynamics of diplomatic policy and how that might directly or indirectly influence Israel's QME, returning to the document with recommendations on US policy should shed more light on these processes. First of all, it is important to note that a general shift of what security entailed was introduced during the Clinton administration in the early 1990's up until 2001.

This new approach was characterized by an emphasis on the relation between security, arms sales and the American economic security.¹²⁴ This vision was revived during the Trump administration when arms sales and exports were considered of great importance to the maintenance and creation of jobs with up to one million people relying on income within this sector.¹²⁵

This method applies to Israel along with the countries surrounding Israel. Arms sales do not just tie countries to US manufactured equipment, but also tie them to political security considerations to a certain degree. The authors of the document, however, consider this a problematic approach for several reasons. According to the authors, there is a discrepancy between what they see to be US stakes in the region and the strategy the US administration applies to strengthen and develop these stakes.¹²⁶

They argue that a reappraisal of US policy taking into account many factors ranging from climate change and the local economic situation to health crises and other internal challenges is necessary in order to pinpoint what is actually important in US policy that will benefit both the US and regional countries.¹²⁷

In other words, a more comprehensive approach that integrates different aspects of a regional or local reality should bring about a method that advances national and international security positions that eclipses an excessive focus on security based arms sales. At first glance this new approach seems to advance Israel's security position and QME, since the flow of arms into the countries surrounding Israel will be halted partially if security will be based on more than mere military might.

The recommendations made in the document, however, advise the US government to diminish presence and refrain from ample interference, which could also prove to have a contradictory result when the tumultuous region is largely left to its own devices.

The recommendations made are based on remote control instead of direct involvement. The idea behind this policy is to achieve long term independency from too much Western – particularly US and European – meddling and create a stable independent political and economic foundation that improves the negative impact of climate change, unemployment and corruption.¹²⁸

Some direct intergovernmental assistance is of course necessary, but much of the

¹²³ Bresheeth, "The Arab Spring," 56.

¹²⁴ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 29.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 44.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

recommended assistance is based on cooperation between, for instance, American and local universities and US institutions that partake in foreign investment that favors regional institutions reducing youth unemployment.¹²⁹

The problem with this policy shift, that has partly been applied during the second term of Obama's presidency, is the fact that the US was and will be accused of abandoning longstanding regional partnerships.¹³⁰ Restricting presence or shifting it to more indirect involvement was received as neglect by Egypt, Israel and the Gulf states, and will most likely be received with even less enthusiasm with the recommendations made in the report under review.

There are two reasons for this negative outlook on this proposed policy shift. The first being that it strongly challenges existing expectations regarding financial and military stimuli linked to Israeli-Arab normalization¹³¹, which will have an impact on interregional relationships Israel maintains and other country's willingness to normalize relations with Israel.

Moreover, the US have guaranteed their commitment to sustaining Israel's QME, which is not a surprise seen the history of the alliance and the history of the US-Israeli security partnership and how much that is still underlined in the current security context. Having said that, it might be inevitable that some change occurs in that partnership as well when the US decides to keep pursuing this policy shift and cut down presence and engagement in the region.

The long term effects of this renewed policy will have to be awaited, but the short term decisions could signal where the US is headed in terms of on the ground presence. In 2021 all US troops withdrew from Afghanistan; President Biden announced in February of that year that the US would not continue their support for Saudi led belligerent activities in Yemen and weapons sales related to this conflict^{132,133}; and they formally concluded the US combat mission in Iraq in December of the same year.

¹²⁹ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 44.

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² "Latest raft of arms sales," Al Jazeera.

¹³³ Wrigly and Abrahamson, "Senate Vote."

Chapter 4: What factors are involved in US risk assessments in contemplation of the F-35 deal?

An important aspect in understanding the coming about of the F-35 deal is its relation to Israel's QME and the fact that it does not seem to sit quite right. Especially on the US and Israeli side, the two actors that are so desperately concerned with maintaining Israel's superior military position in the region, unclarity prevails.

With a major arms deal, with potential to be a serious threat to Israel's military edge, in the making, one important step is to zoom out as far as needed to be able to see the bigger picture of the reasoning behind the arms deal. Knowing that such decisions are not made on a limb, and that it is even legally impossible to take decisions concerning arms sales to countries that could pose a risk to Israel's QME, the question is why a peace agreement is worth an unprecedented arms sale.

This implies that other interests are at stake that outweigh a potential risk to Israel's QME. By endeavoring to figure out exactly what is worth potentially weakening Israel's military edge in the region, this thesis presumes that a better understanding of the effect of security perceptions is a means to this end. The QME in this case presents a tool to function as a measurable level of security and the concrete showcasing – and essentially testing – of US commitment to this.

What are the considerations concerning the F-35 deal? What place does the UAE take within the grand scheme of things? What can be so overwhelmingly important that it is worth equipping a country that could potentially endanger Israel's QME with fifty advanced fighter jets and more? All these questions serve to shed light on the bigger picture of geopolitical relations that is so very complicated. In short, understanding these relations through the lens of a case study – a pixel – hopefully helps to understand the bigger picture, even though it is still a small picture in the film that is world politics.

In this chapter the following subsections serve to answer the question what factors are involved in US risk assessments in contemplation of the F-35 deal: US commitment to the QME and Israel's security status; Israel's considerations that are relevant in US decision making; external factors such as other stakeholders; the role of Iran and the war in Yemen; and the reliability of the UAE partnership.

4.1 US risk assessments linked to QME

US risk assessments concerning arms deals are fundamentally hinged on security on the level of their own security perceptions, but also take into account Israel's level of security in the region. The fact that the QME doctrine takes a fundamental position in deciding whether or not to sell weapons to countries surrounding Israel and the many legal responsibilities it entails is a sign that Israel's security position is not taken lightly in US policy.

Besides being longtime allies on many facets in the economic, technological, military and other areas that stimulate wealth in both countries, the doctrine of Israel's QME stands out in many ways. It seems like US security considerations are inevitably intertwined with Israeli security needs – that is why they are included in this overview of some risk and security considerations concerning the F-35 deal. The aim is to lay bare some facets in US decision making that explicitly emphasize the US commitment to the Israeli security position that took

procedural shape as the QME doctrine

For starters, Early October 2020 senators Menendez and Reed sent 16 questions to the Administration asking about national and international security concerns that could follow the proposed F-35 sale.¹³⁴ Taking a closer look at this document it becomes quickly apparent that most of the questions concern Israel and its QME. To be precise, 4 of the questions and up to 7 sub questions confronted Israeli security concerns and emphasize US commitments to upholding Israel's QME.¹³⁵

Some of the subjects under question by the senators are if there is talk of reduced capability compared to US and Israeli aircraft and if the QME will not be jeopardized by the sale. They also ask whether the sale means a shift from a qualitative to a quantitative one providing more aircraft and munition to Israel to lift the threat that is created with the F-35 deal and how this will be financed.¹³⁶

Many more factors, however, are taken into account when such a deal is on the table. For example, there is the combinational aspect of power and economics. An important reason for the US to extent alliances by signing peace agreements and transferring arms is undoubtedly found in balancing out power status with other great powers in mind. This works even on the basic level of demand and supply in the economic sense. If the US do not sell weapons to countries in the Gulf, maybe China or Russia will fill the void and supply what is demanded.¹³⁷

Those who oppose the sale, for instance, fear the consequences that will be brought about if Saudi Arabia, as a result of the sale to the UAE, will also be in possession of the fighter jets and weaken Israel's QME.¹³⁸ Nonetheless Saudi Arabia, being a longtime US ally potentially interested in buying F-35's, will possibly turn to another supplier if the US do not deliver. This 'other supplier' would reap the economic and political benefits of these deals and consequently weaken the US and Israeli position in the region. Not to mention the fact that if the US sell to the UAE, it will almost be impossible to deny Saudi Arabia's request would they express interest.¹³⁹

The economic factor works its way through different layers of cooperation, thus also influences politics, security and risk perceptions.¹⁴⁰ The risk of losing economic leverage to other great powers is consequently the first of many reasons to keep building alliances and keep selling weapons – other than it being a simple matter of a capitalist undertaking that keeps money flowing into the country.

There are, however, many other factors that ought to be taken into account when analyzing QME related US risk assessments, such as practical features of this specific jet. One of the main features of the F-35 plane is its ability to record, send and receive aerial footage to and from other planes, meaning intra-aerial communication is made possible.

This paves the way not only for network-enabled warfare, but also enhances integration

¹³⁴ Jeff Abrahamson, "Process Changes Offered as Arms Sales Rise," Arms Control Today, November, 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-11/news/process-changes-offered-arms-sales-rise>.

¹³⁵ Reed and Menendez Letter to Pompeo and Esper, October 2020, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/10-09-20%20RM%20Reed%20letter%20to%20Pompeo%20Esper%20re%20F-35%20UAE.pdf>

¹³⁶ Menendez and Reed, "Letter to Pompeo and Esper."

¹³⁷ Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 3, 4.

¹³⁸ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 67.

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, 68.

among planes and upgrades the value of older planes.¹⁴¹ This advantage would mean that even releasing just a few F-35's to Arab countries would imply an improvement on the operational level that could pose an unprecedented threat to the Israeli Air Force (IAF).¹⁴²

This is not the first time Israeli aerial superiority has faced erosion. In the past few years air defense systems have significantly improved and the acquisition of fighter planes among Arab countries is nothing new. In the late 1990's under the Clinton administration the US already sold 80 F-16's worth 6.4 billion dollars to the UAE and Under the Obama administration in 2010 the US made an unprecedented 60 billion dollar deal on an arms package including 84 F-15 fighter planes and more with Saudi Arabia.^{143,144}

The F-35, however, stands out because it is the first time a fighter jet of this technological status is part of the deal, though that is not to say many other fighter jets have preceded as being part of an arms deal. Some analysts, however, go as far as claiming that Israel *must* have exclusive access in the region to maintain its military edge.¹⁴⁵

Others, however, state that it is important to keep in mind that Israel's QME is not based merely on aircraft. Mainly through its close relationship with the US, Israel maintains a qualitative tactical edge over potential enemies.¹⁴⁶ The way to ensure this edge or even make it superfluous would be to try and change existing or potential future enemies to normalize relations or at least acceptance of Israel.

This process will entail taking some risks in order to reach this status and increasing of the security status in the long run.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Israel's position in the region is typically not defined by the fluid character of political agreements, but more so relies on the perception it's superiority in the technological and military arena.¹⁴⁸

This might not be a strange analysis keeping in mind that there will always be a practical quantitative disadvantage, that is exactly why this qualitative edge is valued to reach the extent of holy levels. On the Israeli part of risk assessments, it is important to take into account its regional position-taking after this first act of normalization.

An important reason why Israel has gone along with this arms deal without too much hassle is the fact that persuasion to act otherwise would not go down well with neither Congress nor the Trump administration – or at a later stage the Biden administration.¹⁴⁹ This would quite possibly harm the growing and vulnerable relationship between the UAE and Israel as well as between the UAE and the US.

In other words; aircraft and other arms that provide factual military edge combined with the image of Israel as a technological militarily superior country and adding to that the advantages that come with building regional alliances takes defensive depth to a whole new

¹⁴¹ Arad, "Fifth-Generation Fighter Planes," 3.

¹⁴² Ibidem.

¹⁴³ Wade Boese, "U.A.E. to Receive 80 F-16s With Features More Advanced Than Similar U.S. Jets," Arms Control Today, April, 2000, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-04/news/uae-receive-80-f-16s-features-more-advanced-similar-us-jets>.

¹⁴⁴ Ian Black, "Barack Obama to authorise record \$60bn Saudi arms sale," The Guardian, September 13, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/13/us-saudi-arabia-arms-deal>.

¹⁴⁵ Arad, "Fifth-Generation Fighter Planes," 1.

¹⁴⁶ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 68.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁸ Arad, "Fifth-Generation Fighter Planes," 61.

¹⁴⁹ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 67.

level. This development gives the US the opportunity to maintain a lighter footprint while still gaining ground as a way to deny Russian and Chinese influence in the region.¹⁵⁰ This consideration is in line with changing US policy with regards to scaling down on direct influence that is discussed in the previous chapter.

It is a matter of weighing pros against cons and the scale needs to tip to the positive side, which it apparently does since the deal has been reviewed under both the Trump and Biden Administrations. This definitely does not take away from the place Israel's QME takes within US policy towards arms exports.

The process towards deciding and weighing the consequences of arms deals that might endanger Israel's security and QME, however, is one that is not always unequivocal. Since Israel's QME is considered to be the backbone of its national security by the US as well as Israel it is striking that there is no clear cut approach that prescribes a blueprint as to how and what concerning a security assessment and the US commitment to Israel's QME.¹⁵¹

4.2 Significant Israeli risk assessments in US decision making

There are a few reasons to be considered when trying to make sense of why Israel relatively easily went along with US plans to sell advanced arms to the UAE, while they face challenges in recent years due to a growing number of arms sales to countries in the region.¹⁵²

In this paragraph three of them that are deemed relevant in US decision making are shortly touched on and elaborated to articulate the place Israel takes in US arms deals. Diplomatic reasons will be addressed first, after which the role of Iran will be linked to Israeli risk assessments related to the US, and the dispersion of advanced weapons will be discussed.

First and foremost, the peace agreement model that is pursued by Jordan and Egypt is one of cold status. Formally, a peaceful coexistence and recognition exists, but Israel would benefit from a warm peace that includes cultural, political and economic aspects that allow the flow of money, people and goods.¹⁵³ The peace agreement with the UAE creates the opportunity for Israel to pursue such a 'warm peace' and pave the way for similar relations with more countries in the region.

This cooperation with the UAE might serve as a gateway to other parts of Asia such as the eastern and southeastern parts, and a connecting opportunity for Israel to other Sunni states that choose to follow the route the UAE chose to pioneer.¹⁵⁴ On the UAE's side, they could benefit from Israel's advanced military technology and general scientific advances to develop their own status as a force to be reckoned with.¹⁵⁵

Indirectly, the US government would undoubtedly benefit from a situation where countries in the region are encouraged to trade and enforce ties among them. Judging from the diplomatic efforts the US has made in the past to encourage normalization through brokering these agreements, I reason that they have Israeli as well as their own interests at heart when

¹⁵⁰ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 67.

¹⁵¹ William Wunderle and Andre Briere, *US Foreign Policy and Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: The Need for a Common Vision* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2008), 17.

¹⁵² Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 2.

¹⁵³ George N. Tzogopoulos, "DEBATE: The Israel-UAE Deal: What's next?," *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies* (2020): 12, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Tzogopoulos, "The Israel-UAE Deal," 11.

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem.

pursuing such agreements.

Regional peace agreements do not only serve the US on an economic level, but at the same time it would benefit them politically in the long run as enforced ties, and with peace agreements – that are practically implemented – at stake, the chances of conflict breaking out diminish as circumstances are more complicated in a state of cooperation.

Currently, the security cooperation between Israel on the one hand and Egypt and Jordan as well as the Gulf states on the other hand is growing and Israel has no intention to harm this process. In light of this occurrence, Israel has softened its position taking vis-à-vis countries in the Gulf and arms export and has even sold advanced security systems to the Gulf itself in the past few years.¹⁵⁶ Israel must, however, be fully aware and examine closely the consequences of arms exports to Gulf countries and the details of how this particular equipment will affect their own security status.¹⁵⁷

Israel's changing relationship towards Gulf countries is relevant to the US, since the building of friendly relationships in that political and geographical area strengthens stability and creates a coalition. Another aspect that goes hand in hand with the process of expanding friendly territory and is highly relevant to both Israeli and US risk assessments is building leverage against Iran.¹⁵⁸

The role of Iran in the coming about of peace agreements and arms deals is to be accounted for more elaborately in a separate paragraph later on in this chapter, but a brief remark on Iran's position in Israel's risk assessment is in place here. That is, this historical peace agreement with the UAE not only sets the stage for diplomatic, economic and strategic opportunities in the Gulf region, but also offers the chance to spread and display their defensive technology there.¹⁵⁹ Not to mention the strategic benefit Israel – and also the US for that matter – gains by the option to locate defense technology way closer to their most feared foe to create a territorial buffer.¹⁶⁰

The last important aspect in Israeli risk assessment concerns the instability of regimes and the danger of weapons falling into the wrong hands. Even though the Gulf countries do not have a past of involvement in direct military action against Israel, the risk of regimes that seem to be relatively stable yet will eventually turn against Israel is realistic. Similar situations have occurred with less advanced weapons systems in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.¹⁶¹

Especially since the collapse of some of the regimes came with no early warning signs, the unpredictability creates concern as to how the IDF and the US will guarantee Israel's security status in the case of unexpected hostility when there are advanced weapons systems that need to be reckoned with.¹⁶²

The changing relationship between Israel and its neighboring countries; the creation of a bloc against Iran; and the fear of instability of arms-receiving regimes and weapons falling into the wrong hands is in a nutshell the common thread in Israeli risk assessments that have a direct or indirect influence on US risk assessments.

¹⁵⁶ Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 3, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 3, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 67.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem, 66.

¹⁶¹ Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 3, 4.

¹⁶² Ibidem.

All aspects are in the end intertwined to some extent and take their own place within risk assessment and the decision making process. Some are more important to Israel, some to the US, but it is clear that what matters to Israel also concerns the US to a significant degree.

4.3 External factors relevant in US risk assessments: Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Besides US risk assessments that directly concern domestic and diplomatic affairs and US engagement with Israeli risk assessments there are some external factors that might have a direct or indirect influence on policy making with regards to an arms sale like the F-35 deal. Take, for example, Saudi Arabi; a country pivotal in the region; a major power that has a history of good diplomatic relations with the US; and plays a large role in public and political stance of other countries in the region.

The Saudi's, up until this day, have stood by the resolution of the Palestinian issue as an unconditional stipulation in normalizing relations with Israel. The reluctance of Saudi Arabia to follow in the footsteps of the UAE indicates that more countries are prone to approach the matter in a careful manner. Not in the least because of fear for domestic unrest since the public will presumably oppose forging ties with Israel without improvement on the side of the Palestinian issue.¹⁶³

It is, nonetheless, difficult to measure public opinion on this subject, since the media in Arab countries are often firmly controlled by authorities.¹⁶⁴ Speculation has it, though, that the Israel-UAE peace agreement will intensify disunity among Arab states.¹⁶⁵ Even though the Palestinian issue has been pushed back on the international agenda, solidarity with the Palestinian people persists among the public in many Arab states.

With that being said, it is needless to say that strategic or political considerations sometimes force ideological standpoints to take a backseat when it comes to geopolitics. Biden's decision to reinforce ties with Saudi Arabia after a period of abating relations is a perfect example of this practice.

Biden condemned the country, its crown prince and his neglect of human rights in his presidential campaign and vowed to make the country a 'pariah state', only to decide to restrengthen ties after the Russian invasion of Ukraine that sparked a call on Saudi oil reserves.^{166,167}

As for Saudi Arabia, a history of strong advocacy for the Palestinian people, has not held the country from recently putting their own national interests, like increasing security, before ideological considerations.¹⁶⁸ There are, already, abundant reports of covert cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel. The Saudi's have, for example, opened their airspace to Israeli

¹⁶³ Hafiz, "Lasting Peace in the Middle East?."

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁶ Bethan McKernan, "Oil trumps human rights as Biden forced to compromise in Middle East," The Guardian, July 16, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/16/oil-trumps-human-rights-as-biden-forced-to-compromise-in-middle-east>.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen Collis, "Saudi Crown Prince outlasts US' moral outrage, with a little help from soaring gas prices," CNN, June 14, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/14/politics/joe-biden-saudi-arabia-mbs/index.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Massaab al-Aloosy, "Biden in Jeddah: Pursuing U.S.-Saudi-Israel Alignment," Gulf International Forum, July 18, 2022, <https://gulffif.org/biden-in-jeddah-pursuing-u-s-saudi-israeli-alignment/>.

aircraft as of July 2022.¹⁶⁹

Some have stated that with the US-UAE F-35 deal in the making, it will be hard for the US not to sell them to Saudi Arabia too at some point in the near future.¹⁷⁰ With a strategic asset like the F-35 in the hands of not only the UAE but also the Saudi's, Israel is put in an awkward position. With Israel surely, if not desperately, wanting the recognition of a great power like Saudi Arabia, they would not want to send a message to the Saudi's that could endanger their fragile inchoate relationship would they openly oppose the deal(s).¹⁷¹

From this standpoint, Israel's QME could be perceived to be undermined once again, or is the risk worth coming closer to Saudi Arabia, thus expanding friendly territory with a more than significant actor in the region? Since the election of Joe Biden as US president, the relationship with Saudi Arabia had become tenser as Biden shifted policy to focus more on human rights – a policy that did not sit right with the then prevailing US-Saudi relationship according to the newly elected president.¹⁷²

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led Biden to reassess his policy towards Saudi Arabia and visit the country in July 2022. The result of the fruitful meeting with the Saudi authorities was the opening of airspace for Israeli civilian flights; a simple, yet significant offer.¹⁷³ Despite current negotiations between the Saudi's and Iran, the former has grown closer to Israel seemingly following the 'enemy of my enemy is my friend' principle.

The situation is, of course, more complicated than that, but the simple fact is that Saudi Arabia is growing closer to Israel. US' interests are obvious since Biden has set aside his own focus on human rights to pave the way for a trilateral US-Saudi-Israeli relationship that serves as a front against common enemy Iran.¹⁷⁴ It has also sparked cooperation and recognition between the Saudi's and Israeli's creating a foundation that could ultimately bring about normalization between the countries that are both significant allies of the US.¹⁷⁵

Trying to understand these observations in the perspective of the theoretical framework, constructivism seems to be the best way to understand the bigger picture. Viewing the relationships between Israel, the US and Saudi Arabia as socially constructed means seeing changing security perceptions a short or long period of time, acknowledging the changing ability of different factors and overall recognize the fluent nature of international relations.

So far, Iran runs like a thread through the analysis of risk assessments relevant to the US. Both Saudi Arabia and Israel seem to profit from a more closely coordinated front against the Iranians. Let us not forget the receiving country in the arms deal under review: the UAE. Taking the step of forging ties with Israel and the advanced defense systems flowing into the Gulf as a result are a way of safeguarding the country's political framework. As a small, but prosperous country, the UAE need to protect itself from internal and external threats.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ Kyle Blaine and Eliza Mackintosh, "Saudi Arabia opens airspace to Israeli flights," CNN, July 15, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/07/15/middleeast/saudi-arabia-israeli-airlines-airspace-biden-intl/index.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 67.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

¹⁷² al-Aloosy, "Biden in Jeddah."

¹⁷³ Alexander Cornwell and Dan Williams, "Saudis open airspace to more flights serving Israel," Reuters, August 4, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudis-open-airspace-more-flights-serving-israel-2022-08-04/>.

¹⁷⁴ al-Aloosy, "Biden in Jeddah."

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁶ Tarzi, "Benefits of offering F-35's to the UAE," 67.

4.4 In the eyes of the beholder: US perceptions of Iran and the role of the war in Yemen

At this point, it goes without saying that one of those external threats is the regional Shia Islamic superpower Iran. Besides the fact that the UAE are involved in the civil war that plagues Yemen – in which Iran is also involved on the opposing side – the recognition and normalization with Israel is not working in their favor. Possessing F-35's will help the UAE defend against the threat posed by Iran and improves integration into US military assistance if needed.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, obtaining the advanced fighter jets tightens the link with the US as well as promotes its status in the intra-Arab realm.¹⁷⁸

Once again, US merits are obvious. They already had Israel unconditionally in their corner and now they gained an ally for Israel through trading advanced military equipment in exchange for a peace agreement that normalized relations. It seems to be a win-win for the US; spreading military equipment that could countervail Iran in the case of erupting conflict; expanding friendly territory normalizing regional relations with regards to Israel; coming closer to Saudi Arabia as a possible ally already loosening up on its cold attitude towards Israel; and that adds up to a situation where a strong front against Iran strengthens the position of a US-created bloc. In the upcoming paragraph more detailed information is provided in order to shed light on Iran's position in this political-military build-up and demonstration of power.

A collective fear of Iran – that raises concern among many countries in and outside the region – is one reasoning behind the F-35 deal that has been presenting itself consistently. Even though the potential gains of the deal go far beyond this topic and comprise political, economic and technological domains,¹⁷⁹ the frequency with which Iran keeps on recurring throughout this study is baffling and necessitates a more detailed account of affairs. In the forthcoming paragraph this subject is illustrated with several examples of the relationship between the US and Iran.

In 2015 the JCPOA, or Iran Nuclear Deal, was drawn up as a means to document and constrain partial dismantling of the Iranian nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of US and EU economic sanctions against the country. The deal would later turn out to be of no avail when the US decided to withdraw from the deal putting all US sanctions back into force in May 2018. This decision prompted Iran to start violating the agreement – though this did not happen until a year later in May 2019.¹⁸⁰ US president Joe Biden's attempts to revive the deal have thus far not been very successful and some say the deal is practically unsalvageable at this point.¹⁸¹

As tensions heighten and Iran keeps breaching the agreement's restrictions that are no longer in place, there is no end in sight as to how far Iran will go in stockpiling uranium and preparing nuclear weapons. The US shares these concerns with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other countries.

In 2015, with the JCPOA in place, a shift in US perceptions concerning shared security interests with regards to Iran suggested that a defense pact with Iran's regional adversaries was

¹⁷⁷ Arnon and Guzansky, "Arms Race," 3.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁹ Tzogopoulos, "The Israel-UAE Deal," 11.

¹⁸⁰ Kelsey Davenport, "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a glance," Arms Control Today, March, 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>.

¹⁸¹ Kabir Taneja and Vivek Mishra, "The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Thorn in Biden's Side," Observer Research Foundation, June 28, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-iran-nuclear-deal-a-thorn-in-bidens-side/>.

less likely to form.¹⁸² Now that the deal is hitherto off the table, subsequently the chances of a defense pact forming are growing.

In this case, the liberal perspective on security is found in the involvement of international institutions in security politics. Even though the attempt flunked on the commitment of all countries to comply with the regulations and requirements put in place, this is a perfect example of a 'collective security' based undertaking.

It is also a good example of the paradox that the concept is useless when it comes enforcing collective security onto to great powers, because the outcome is plausibly exactly what it is meant to avoid – world war. What happened in the case under study underwrites exactly this scenario. After diplomatic attempts in the shape of the Abraham Accords and the joint organization of the JCPOA, the next step is ignoring the options that international institutions have to offer and states proceed to exhaust other options that are more individually security oriented – like arms deals.

With the coming about of the Abraham Accords and the UAE's soft power in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), more countries were expected to follow in the footsteps of the UAE – a development that could spell disaster for superpowers Iran and Turkey and their proxies. Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco respectively followed the UAE in the months after the signing of the peace agreements and normalized relations with Israel. Oman, Kuwait and Lebanon have expressed their willingness to do the same.

Would this happen, Iran and Turkey, Israel's sworn enemies lose the edge of an important narrative that they frequently use to legitimate animosity towards Israel and the US; namely the Palestinian issue, and force themselves into isolation in the region.¹⁸³ Turkey and Iran both reacted vigorously against the signing of the Abraham Accords.

Erdogan threatened to withdraw the Turkish embassy from the UAE after the peace deal that he deemed 'hypocritical' and agreed with the Palestinian denouncement of a backstabbing of the Palestinian people.^{184,185} In agreement, President Hassan Rouhani on the Iranian side, condemned the peace agreement to be a politically motivated betrayal of the Palestinian people.¹⁸⁶ In addition, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that the UAE committed an act of betrayal and dishonor that will forever mark a stain on their foreheads.¹⁸⁷

Ironically, a framework similar to the one that is used by Turkey and Iran to narrate their conflict with Israel and its allies seems to be exercised by the US to paint a picture of Iran and legitimate substantial arms sales – possibly at the cost of Israel's QME – to countries in the region surrounding Iran. Here, Morgenthau's realist idea on the shift of superstition from religion to politics can be applied to the US-Iran case.

Conspiracy theories; profoundly negative security perspectives; and mentioning of the Iranian threat in nearly every regional security discourse are all pointing in the direction of the

¹⁸² Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally?", 139.

¹⁸³ Tzogopoulos, "The Israel-UAE Deal," 15.

¹⁸⁴ "Turkey may suspend ties with UAE over Israel deal," Al Jazeera, August 15, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/15/erdogan-turkey-may-suspend-ties-with-uae-over-israel-deal>.

¹⁸⁵ Daren Butler and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Erdogan may suspend ties with UAE over Israel deal, Erdogan says," Reuters, August 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-emirates-turkey-idUSKCN25A00N>.

¹⁸⁶ "Iran on New Middle East Peace Deals," United States Institute of Peace, September 15, 2020, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/sep/15/iran-new-middle-east-peace-deals>.

¹⁸⁷ "Middle East Peace Deals," United States Institute of Peace.

framing of Iran as the eternal enemy. Politics might be the main source for this process of stigmatization, but possibly to a certain extent it is still based on religion or other factors as well. Same goes for the aforementioned Cold War analogy that was based on religion – or rather its absence – as well as power politics.

A realist approach offered this insight into geopolitics and IR, but adding to that is the constructivist perspective that takes into account the changing perception of others and all factors that could be involved, whether it be based on politics, religion, security, sentiments or a combination of all kinds of factors.

The authors proposing a US policy shift address the Iranian matter as well. They aim for the creation of a realistic understanding the Iranian threat. They state that Iran military capabilities are not nearly as mighty as often portrayed.¹⁸⁸ The technological capacity of Iranian military equipment is not very advanced, nor are their border defense structures very effective.

International sanctions have, moreover, prevented the country from modernizing to their full potential. Adding to the military considerations is Iran's Persian identity as alienating them from their surrounding Arab states and Israel.¹⁸⁹ Being isolated in between these countries that are keen to limit Iranian power in the region is another factor that does not offer many options for broadening their sphere of influence.¹⁹⁰

Taking all these factors into account, a different image is created that is meant to rightsize the threat coming from Iran. This not only serves to put into perspective unrealistic images and discourse that legitimates, for example, action, but also serves to eventually ease the maximum pressure approach that has been characterizing US policy regarding Iran since 1979.¹⁹¹

Part of that policy has been military support for Iranian adversaries. An example of this tool is the US-UAE arms deal that was made in the wake of increased tension with Iran and the UAE has faced a series of attacks that have been claimed by Houthi rebels in relation to the civil war in Yemen. The conflict in Yemen needs accounting for as the country seems to function as the stage for a war between Saudi Arabia and Iran that is largely played out on the ground by a Saudi led military coalition on the one hand and Houthi led rebels that are supported by Iran on the other hand.

The UAE became the target of drone and missile attacks claimed by Houthi rebels in response to actively taking part in the war pushing back the Iran supported Houthis from the oil-rich southern part of the country. From the moment of completing the withdrawal of troops in 2020 after five years of full military partnership with the Saudi led coalition up until the beginning of 2022 the UAE refrained from actively engaging in military action.¹⁹²

Moreover, some claim the attacks are a message sent by Iran in reaction to scaling up presence in Yemen on top of normalizing ties with Israel.¹⁹³ Saudi Arabia has been targeted multiple times in the recent years as well and the US have stated to continue the support for

¹⁸⁸ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 48

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, 49.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 51.

¹⁹² "Timeline: UAE under drone, missile attacks," Al-Jazeera, February 3, 2022, [Timeline: UAE under drone, missile attacks | Houthis News | Al Jazeera](#).

¹⁹³ "Iraqi militia attack on UAE a 'message from Iran,'" Al-Jazeera, February 4, 2022, [Iraqi militia attack on UAE a 'message from Iran' | Conflict News | Al Jazeera](#).

defense capabilities of its allies and has emphasized arms transfers as one means to this end.¹⁹⁴

The question arises if this military support for allies in the region is partly legitimated by the framing of Iran as being behind the attacks and in general as being a constant threat to US and US' allies in the region. Three reasons point to at least partial truth in this assumption.

First of all, the fact that Iran is by and large part of the narrative in legitimizing arms sales in the region surrounding the country and these arms sales are often presented as military counterbalancing Iran is remarkable. When taking a closer look at the war in Yemen and the Iran backed Houthi rebels that take part herein, one starts to wonder what is exactly the relationship between Iran and these rebels.

They are framed as being Iranian puppets, but do they really maintain a close relationship with the Iranian government? Contrary to the narrative that is created by Saudi Arabia and the US, the ties between the Houthis and Iran have only developed quite recently and was a direct result of the Saudi invasion of the country. The Saudi's actually did not even address the group as being Shia or having any connection to Iran prior to that event.¹⁹⁵

Iran considers the Houthi rebels in Yemen to be part of the so called 'axis of resistance' against Israel and the US.¹⁹⁶ They were, though, never considered to be an Iranian proxy since they do not act under Iranian command and largely act autonomously.¹⁹⁷ Iran's influence on the Houthi rebels is thus very limited and seems to be a narrative framed by the Saudi's and the US to strengthen the framework of Iran as the typical threat and legitimizes military action like the UAE and Saudi bombing of Yemen in response to the Houthi attacks.¹⁹⁸

In general, the process of arms transfers and the forming of alliances presents interesting empirical puzzles.¹⁹⁹ The actual transfer of advanced warplanes – like F-35's – or the signature under a peace agreement – such as the Abraham Accords – are just the tip of the iceberg. The world that hides behind Foreign Military Financing (FMF), for example, is very complex and extensive.

Looking at the 2021 and 2022 FMF budgets allocated to the Near-East region, they are astonishingly high with a budget, respectively, of 5.19 billion dollars and 5.46 billion dollars.^{200, 201} The official Congressional Budget Justification provides a summarized legitimization of the allocated resources and gives insight into the US reasoning behind what countries or regions need financing and why. At first glance the 2022 text seems to be the same as the year before, but taking a closer look two sentences were added in the new justification. Both texts start with the following sentence:

¹⁹⁴ "Latest raft of arms sales," Al Jazeera.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas O'Falk, "The Limits of Iran's influence on Yemen's Houthi rebels," Al-Jazeera, March 8, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/8/the-limits-of-irans-influence-on-yemens-houthi-rebels>.

¹⁹⁶ Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran is set to reclaim its role as regional leader," Al-Jazeera, November 6, 2014, [Iran is set to reclaim its role as regional leader | Opinions | Al Jazeera](#).

¹⁹⁷ O'Falk, "Yemen's Houthi rebels."

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁹ Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally?", 90.

²⁰⁰ "Congressional Budget Justification," Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2021, 99.

²⁰¹ Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2022, 119.

*“The strategic security priorities in the Near East region are to counter Iran’s malign influence; ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, al-Qa’ida and other terrorist groups; and to develop and strengthen bilateral and multilateral security partnerships.”*²⁰²

Two observations stand out reading this line: how Iran is perceived and at the same time framed. It is not difficult to be well aware of the US image that is created of Iran throughout the years and the threat that is perceived by the US and their regional allies. Even though the sentence does not directly address Iran as a terrorist group, it puts the country in line with terrorist groups that need to be countered. By explicitly not naming other countries that are perceived to form some kind of threat – like Libya that is mentioned later on – it is somewhat inevitable to spot the analogy between Iran and a terrorist group.

“In light of countering the malign Iranian influence FMF will keep building and enhancing lasting security partnerships with Israel, Jordan and Egypt; support the Iraqi Security Forces with training, advising and materiel; and through supporting of the Lebanese armed forces.”

The whole text is dripping with rhetoric emphasizing the threat that is coming from Iran. ISIS’ presence and threat in Libya is shortly referred to, but other than that the text seems to be centered around the Iranian danger.²⁰³ Another example of the perceived Iranian threat, and also of the Iranian danger as taking the position of the fourth actor within the quadrad as discussed in the triadic relationships theory.

According to the authors that reimagine US strategy, the US practice of identifying their most important threat of the moment – the Iranian threat for now – is also known as ‘threatism’.²⁰⁴ Their aim is changing this negative approach of the necessity to control a perceived threat to a positive view on reducing the roots that cause these perceived threats, leading to the creation of a new set of policy options in future decision making.²⁰⁵

Taking it one step further than the authors, I would try to identify what is part of the threat that is created by the US themselves as part of the image. The authors aim is to reduce ‘sources of extremism’ and ‘interstate competition’ to manageable levels, which still puts all of the agency where the perceived threat comes from and not where the threat is perceived – which is the US.

The image that has been created of Iran over the past centuries serves as a legitimization of a major arms build up in the whole region, when there is actually many destabilizing factors in the whole region that would validate an attempt to put a halt to the buildup of armed force.²⁰⁶ My question here is whether the perceived – or even the actual – threat Iran poses to the US is worth the risk that is posed to the whole region by the constant arms flow that it causes and if this will eventually backfire.²⁰⁷

²⁰² “Congressional Budget Justification 2021,” Department of State, 99.

²⁰³ Whole text in Attachment 2.

²⁰⁴ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, iii.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem, 168.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem.

4.5 Reliability assessment of the UAE as partner: UAE diplomatic shift, changing US policy, Yemen and decision tree tool testing

So far, many actors and topics that play a direct or indirect role in the F-35 deal have been discussed either briefly or extensively. One more actor that is very directly involved in US risk assessments and deserves some more attention is the UAE. The Gulf country located at the eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula has recently made some remarkable political and military decisions that put them on the map.

As noted before, they have been targeted multiple times in the recent months for taking part in the Saudi coalition in the Yemeni war; they have made the progressive decision to normalize relations with Israel through signing the Abraham Accords; signing the F-35 deal as a result of this treaty; and all the same still undertaking diplomatic talks with Iran, China and Russia.

With all this activity the question arises how reliable the UAE are as a partner to the US when it comes to selling advanced technological weapons. A situation where these weapons would fall in the hands of adversaries is to be prevented at all cost. That is why an assessment of US concerns is made in this paragraph touching on different aspects that seem relevant for all actors involved. The most important topics are the UAE's recent diplomatic shift regarding Iran; changing US policy towards the region; the UAE's involvement in the war in Yemen; and the testing of the decision tree tool that was mentioned before.

Reading into recent diplomatic action the UAE are undertaking it is remarkable how the country attempts to build strong ties with almost all countries in and outside the region. They are at the wake of a policy shift that intends to scale back on a rather aggressive geopolitical attitude in the region.²⁰⁸ The freshly normalized ties with Israel are intended to build a strong relationship with Israel and at the same time exert some kind of influence in the US and to be able to oppose regional rivals like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran.

Yet with the US withdrawing from Iraq and al-Assad's maintenance of power in Syria, Iran's influence and power in the region is growing and will not stop to do so in the recent future – a development that pushes the UAE to pursue a renewed relationship with Iran signing some commercial and trade agreements. The UAE's rapprochement actions seems to have paved the way for other Sunni countries to reconnect to Iran, which is most likely not to everyone's (especially US and Israel's) satisfaction.²⁰⁹

The UAE are acting out some skillful maneuvering between Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the US functioning as a diplomatic chameleon. While the ink was practically still wet on the Abraham Accords papers, they picked up the phone and contacted Tehran and no one is actively opposing the fact that they are buttering their bread on both sides.²¹⁰

Iran on the other side of the agreement has its own reasons to reconnect to the UAE. One might say that Iran chose to improve relations despite the UAE's recent normalizing with Israel, other will say that the Abraham Accords are actually a key motivation for Iran to get closer to the UAE. Iran will be able to impose borders concerning Israel's presence in the Gulf.

²⁰⁸ Baycar, "Balancing Act."

²⁰⁹ Ben Caspit, "Bennett Commits to partnership with Emirates on UAE visit," Al-Monitor, December 14, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/bennett-commits-partnership-emirates-uae-visit>.

²¹⁰ Baycar, "Balancing Act."

It has been a hot topic in recent scholarly debate how the renewed Iran-UAE relations will impact the Abraham Accords place in UAE politics.²¹¹

Expectations are that relations with Iran will not impact the relationship with Israel and the other way around. The UAE benefits greatly from having strong ties with both parties and balancing out double sided interests.²¹² Through open communication and transparent action taking the UAE are in fact sending a message to all parties that they can maintain good relations with everyone.²¹³ The UAE strengthening ties with Iran could be worrisome for the US that considers Iran one of their worst enemies and would not want their advanced military technology to fall into the hands of the Iranians through the UAE.

Moreover, the UAE increasingly maintain friendly relations with China as well as Russia, the former posing a realistic threat to the US for multiple reasons. In December 2021 the UAE threatened to pull out of the F-35 deal over disputes that concerned China's role in the Gulf.²¹⁴ One of those concerns is, for example, a Huawei-controlled phone network operating in the UAE that is feared to be able to collect intelligence on the F-35 planes, thus gaining and exploiting sensitive US information.^{215,67}

A similar situation occurred in 2019 when the US decided to deny Turkey industrial participation in the F-35 after it purchased a Russian defense system and the US feared the defense system could obtain some of the F-35 technological features through Russian intelligence efforts. The UAE sustains a strategic partnership with Russia since 2018 and has since then acquired missile defense systems from them – reason for the US to be worried what will happen with technological information that is not intended to fall into the hands of their adversaries.²¹⁶

Another important aspect regarding arms sales and avoiding the risk of weapons or technology falling into the wrong hands is the stability of a receiving country. Stability in this case it to be interpreted in the broadest sense of the word. In the document about the reimagination of US strategy that has been mentioned in chapter two the authors advise the US government to change their approach in the region and assess past and current methods to partnerships.

As mentioned before, the 'old' methods, that were a reaction to a perceived threat first by the Soviet Union followed by Iran, created an unstable situation. States that made peace with Israel, for example, could sometimes feel entitled to receive some kind of reward for working with alongside US' interests. The authors refer to the Gulf as one of those cases where large arms transfers have sparked proxy wars, unsafety and internal instability.²¹⁷ They recommend to revise their conventional approach and change relationships into ones that promote regional

²¹¹ Cafiero, "The UAE-Iran Rapprochement."

²¹² Ibidem.

²¹³ Ibidem.

²¹⁴ Gordon Lubold and Warren Strobel, "The UAE Threatens to Pull out of 23 Billion F-35, Drone Deal with the U.S.," The Wall Street Journal, December 14, 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/united-arab-emirates-threatens-to-pull-out-of-23-billion-f-35-drone-deal-with-u-s-11639491997?mod=Searchresults_pos1&page=1.

²¹⁵ Alexander Ward, Nahal Toosi and Quint Forgey, "U.S. ambassadors to Blinken: Send the weapons," National Security Daily, May 7, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/05/u-s-ambassadors-to-blinken-send-the-weapons-00043971>.

²¹⁶ Stark, "National Security Concerns."

²¹⁷ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 43.

stability, counterterrorism and enhanced governance.²¹⁸

The F-35 deal that is currently on the table clearly goes against this recommended policy that even explicitly refers to the Gulf countries. This is probably not without a reason and emphasizes even more the question how this arms sale will impact the region, Iranian behavior, the wars in Yemen and Libya and consequently the status of Israel's QME.²¹⁹ Moreover, if the UAE decide to use these fighter jets to oppose important Iranian interest it could lead to a wide-ranging outburst of conflict that will draw the US and their allies into an unwanted war.²²⁰

A few tools that were used to measure several factors that indicate the reliability and stability of the UAE are the Unrest Table Proxy War Risk Indicator, the Freedom House Score and the Polity Score. The data shows that the UAE score low on the Unrest Table for taking part in proxy wars in Yemen as well as in Libya and they have been part of disputes and internal unrest within the GCC.²²¹

On the Freedom House Score that, broadly speaking, concerns access to political rights and civil liberties, the UAE score Not Free with a strikingly low 17/100 points in 2018 and maintains the same score up until today in 2022.²²² The Polity Score that rates governance indicates the UAE as an autocracy.

Altogether the UAE scores sufficient stability score but the others scores pose a risk when it comes to long term stability that should be the objective when long term regional stability is guaranteed concerning major arms sales.²²³ The outcome of these data do not necessarily assure a likeminded attitude and the security of current and future stable alliance so far.

The UAE's involvement in the war in Yemen is another important factor that needs looking into. Although the country has long been taking a backseat when it comes to active involvement in the Yemeni war, it has recently picked up pass, sent troops and occasionally used weapons. Besides from the fact that the US does not want their weapons to be used by proxies, it is difficult to say whether they were French crafted weapons or American ones²²⁴ – which based on the insights gathered throughout this study comes across to me as being convenient rather than troublesome.

In general, but specifically concerning Yemen, human rights concerns come into view. This matter will be discussed more explicitly in chapter four that covers the practical policy outcomes following the F-35 deal. It is, though, important to mention that many human rights groups and arms control groups oppose the F-35 deal in relation to the war in Yemen²²⁵ and that the publicly propagated statement of the US government is that it does not want to see its weapons used in wars like the Yemeni one.²²⁶

It has become more and more common for congressional members to oppose and delay

²¹⁸ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 41, 42.

²¹⁹ Wrigly and Abrahamson, "Senate Vote."

²²⁰ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 43.

²²¹ Ibidem, 35 Table 2.4.

²²² "United Arab Emirates Freedom House Score," Freedom House, accessed September 9, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2022>.

²²³ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 37 Table 2.5.

²²⁴ Ibidem, 43.

²²⁵ Wrigly and Abrahamson, "Senate Vote."

²²⁶ Ward, Toosi and Forgey, "Send the weapons."

weapons sales to states hold a questionable human rights status.²²⁷ Moreover, the UAE conducted airstrikes in Libya and Somalia that were not coordinated with the US, adding to the already existing scepticism concerning the UAE's reliability when it comes to the use of weapons in ambiguous situations.^{228, 229}

There are, however, certainly factors that do point to the UAE as promising to be a trustworthy partner to the US. In the battle against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq a few countries deployed aircraft and contributed significantly to the ISIS defeat.²³⁰ With the UAE already receiving state of the art military technology for being one of the most important allies in the region, then receiving the F-35's might just be the next step in rewarding loyalty and military support against common enemies.

Another reason that supports this line of thought is that those billions of dollars coming in through these arms sales will boost the US economy in addition to strengthening the US-UAE security relationship. Both these outcomes will help the US counter adversaries like China and Iran.

²²⁷ Ward, Toosi and Forgey, "Send the weapons."

²²⁸ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 43.

²²⁹ Rumley, "UAE F-35 Negotiations."

²³⁰ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 45.

Chapter 5: How did risk considerations influence eventual policy-making in the case of the F-35 deal?

After taking into consideration US risk assessments on all the actors that are in some way directly or indirectly involved in the F-35 deal, it is time to set aside these speculations and focus on practical policy. That is not to say that this research so far is merely guesswork, because the theory based analysis of the ins and outs of this deal have thus far provided very valuable insights into some of the processes behind the scenes of geopolitical relationships that are not readily obvious at first glance.

What was, for instance, unveiled was the assumption that it could be the case that the US are trying to expand friendly territory in an attempt to strengthen resistance to their current Iranian opposition. The question that remains among scholars and analysts is whether this will possibly backfire and turn into a regional arms race or weaken Israel's QME despite comprehensive assessments of the consequences of arms deals through risk indicators and legal processes.

Having said that, it is important to note that by discussing these QME-linked legal activity it is first and foremost a confirmation of US commitment to Israel's regional security position, although this is not always primary priority when their own security position is on the line. In this case Israel needs to play second fiddle and take a backseat when it comes to difficult regional diplomatic decisions that could have crucial consequences for the region as well as larger scale geopolitical relations.

Some say that the F-35 deal at the time was merely a tool to the three leaders directly involved. It supposedly served to increase former President Trump's chances to be re-elected; former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu used the deal to distract from the fact that he was facing several corruption accusations; and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed allegedly just wanted to buy technological state of the art weaponry.²³¹ Of course, these assumptions seem a bit short sighted, but the point came across that the F-35 deal is not at all considered to improve the security situation in the region and that all actors have their own personal or national interests.

The US might have their own interests, but they are legally bound to commit to maintaining the QME doctrine. The question that this chapter aims to answer is how the US handles this commitment through policy processes as well as how US risk considerations relate to actual policy in the form of Acts, Bills, practical policy outcomes and human rights concerns. And above all: is there a discrepancy in the end?

5.1 Policy

By continuing to move forward with the deal, the Biden administration has made a bold and widely unexpected move. The controversiality surrounding the F-35 deal is for a large part reason to expect very careful consideration especially taking into account the US commitment to the QME notion and the fact that Israel's military position in the region could significantly change due to the deal.²³² One of the most notable statements Biden made is his announcement in February 2021 that the US would halt support for Saudi led offensive activity in Yemen and

²³¹ Hafiz, "Lasting Peace in the Middle East?."

²³² "US Defense Secretary in Israel talks on 'Military Edge'," The Defense Post, October 30, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/10/30/us-israel-military-edge/>.

all related arms sales (as mentioned in chapter two).²³³

This policy change would have important practical impact on arms sales that fall into this category. The UAE announced to withdraw from Yemen in July 2019 after approximately five years of direct involvement in the Saudi led coalition, opting a more diplomatic approach over a military method from February 2020 on.²³⁴ However on multiple occasions in the years after, that proved to be a false statement. One round of Saudi and UAE led attacks in January 2022, for instance, caused eighty civilian casualties²³⁵ and even if they withdrew their own troops they hold indirect influence over several non-state armed groups in the south having trained up to 90.000 Yemeni troops.²³⁶

Another reason to reconsider the F-35 deal after Biden's statement is the UAE's involvement in the war in Libya. According to the UN, at least five countries in region are in violation of an arms embargo to support regional armed forces.²³⁷ Three of which, namely the UEA, Egypt and Jordan, are key US partners also with regards to arms sales – as seen in previous chapters. The US, thus, are not only contradictorily selling weapons to the UAE, but also other partners that are engaging in proxy wars in Yemen and Libya.²³⁸

The fact that the US do not refrain from selling weapons to countries allegedly violating international regulations does not go without opposition. Senators within US Congress have spoken up addressing the matter by introducing several joint resolutions of disapproval of the planned F-35 deal in November 2020.²³⁹ In the resolution the senators state that the UAE has ignored arms sales agreements in the past, causing arms to fall into the hands of adversary militia and have violated international regulations in Yemen and Libya.²⁴⁰

These strongly formulated resolutions were followed by an attempt to block the sales through majority votes in Congress Senate. The votes fell short, but, in theory Congress could still pass resolutions. The other legislative branch, that is the House of Representatives, however, did not take on the resolutions necessary to go through with the attempt to prevent the sales from taking place.²⁴¹ What Congress did manage to achieve was the passing of what they called the 'Libya Stabilization Act' in September 2021 that obliges the secretary of state to release a report within a ninety day period that covers in depth the military activity in Libya of the UAE and other relevant countries.²⁴² Despite the intention of this bill to influence policy surrounding arms sales and the proliferation and use of arms in conflicts like the Libyan and Yemeni wars the question of course remains how these arms sales will eventually be blocked when this proved ineffective in the case of the F-35 deal.

²³³ Jonathan Landay and Jarrett Ranshaw, "Biden ends US support for Saudi Arabia in Yemen, says war 'has to end'," Reuters, February 4, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-biden-yemen-int-idUSKBN2A4268>.

²³⁴ Imad Harb, "Why the United Arab Emirates is Abandoning Saudi Arabia in Yemen," Foreign Policy, August 1, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/01/why-the-united-arab-emirates-is-abandoning-saudi-arabia-in-yemen/>.

²³⁵ "Yemen: Latest Round of UAE-Saudi-Led Attacks Targets Civilians," Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/18/yemen-latest-round-saudi-uae-led-attacks-targets-civilians>.

²³⁶ Harb, "Abandoning Saudi Arabia in Yemen."

²³⁷ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 35.

²³⁸ Ibidem.

²³⁹ Wrigley, "New UAE Arms Sales."

²⁴⁰ Ibidem.

²⁴¹ Ibidem.

²⁴² "Libya Stabilization Act," 117th Congress, September 29, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr1228/BILLS-117hr1228rfs.pdf>.

The aforementioned ‘SECURE F-35 Exports Act of 2021’, for example, if legally exercised, would imply that countries receiving F-35 planes are compelled to submit certification that it has not transmitted weapons to armed groups opposing US interests. This would, again, be particularly relevant in the case of the F-35 deal wherein the UAE do not meet this requirement. Knowing that the deal is still on the table, this determination clearly does not seem to refrain the US from selling arms to not only the UAE but other key partners like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt that are in some way involved in the wars in Yemen or Libya.

All these acts, bills and their procedural outcome in the form of actual policy seems to more so showcase intention rather than actual practical commitment. It has been made clear that the US dedication to preserving Israel’s military position is priority, but the realistic outcome seems to not always be in line with the legislative discourse displayed in Acts and Bills.

Examples are found in assessments of the UAE as being a reliable partner which was inconclusive at best and arms sales to countries that in all probability using US manufactured arms to commit human rights violations. Libya is a clear example of the latter activity and Yemen is a less obvious, more indirect example that nevertheless offers valuable insight specifically in the case under review.

Apart from discourse and legislative focused ways to test political commitment, it seems to be more fruitful to look at actions, since they seem to speak louder than words. What the US are doing in order to maintain their legal commitment and uphold the QME rhetoric is shift responsibility from debatable arms transfers into questionable countries to focus more on Israel. Israel is always, regionally, offered first access to military technological innovations. It is, additionally, offered a more sophisticated or better developed edition than their Arab counterparts when they do receive the same arms.²⁴³

5.2 US law and policy on arms sales and human rights

It seems to be the case that political activity in the form of Acts, Bills and the policy they bring about is very much subjective to the preferences and aims of the person interpreting their contents. Vague phrasing and the general absence of serious repercussions pave the way for opportunistic decision making and grey area maneuvering.

One more subject that keeps occurring and seems inextricably intertwined with the context of legislation and arms sales is human rights. The following subsection focusses on US law and its connection between arms sales and human rights while keeping in mind the context of arms that are sold only to be transferred into war torn countries such as Yemen. This is an expansion of how US policy making works concerning the role of human rights, arms sales and legislation, adding to the context of the F-35 deal. It is nevertheless crucial in understanding the bigger picture of diplomatic and military relationships.

There are several laws and policies that limit the possibility of arms sales on the basis of human rights. Although the AECA has some articles that theoretically could have some relation with human rights concerns, no specific referral to human rights exists.²⁴⁴ Considering

²⁴³ Wrigley, “New UAE Arms Sales.”

²⁴⁴ Paul Kerr and Liana Rosen, “U.S. Arms Sales and Human Rights: Legislative Basis and Frequently Asked Questions,” Congressional Research Service, April 30, 2021, [U.S. Arms Sales and Human Rights: Legislative Basis and Frequently Asked Questions \(congress.gov\)](https://www.congress.gov/resources/library/publications/2021/R46044).

that the AECA is one of the most important guidelines for US arms transfers, it is surprising to say the least that human rights are not at all mentioned in the Act.

The Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, on the contrary, argues that the main aim of US foreign policy is to pursue a heightened observation of international human rights as internationally acknowledged.²⁴⁵ It is then stated that no security support may be given to a country that participates in conducting human rights violations, unless a presidential decree declares ‘extraordinary circumstances’.²⁴⁶ As has occurred before, the presidential veto can and will be used against the formal regulations in the case of a subjective assessment of prioritization in terms of arms sales and who will get the short end of the stick.

The specifications of human rights violations as stated in the FAA concern religious freedom, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, coercion in population control, antisemitism, extrajudicial killings, trafficking in persons, freedom of the press and child marriage.²⁴⁷ According to the Freedom House score that was briefly cited in chapter three the UAE lack religious freedom; there is hardly any freely operating media channels; approximately ninety percent of the UAE’s population are noncitizens or stateless residents that lack political rights – and that is not to speak about their external activity for example, like in Yemen.

US defense articles are subject to End Use Monitoring (EUM) regulations that have to guarantee that the arms are only used within the parameters of their intended purchase aims.²⁴⁸ However, despite EUM regulations the US cannot always be certain that their weapons are used for the intended purposes. Example is the fact that US weapons were supposedly used in the civil war in Yemen and Libya, but they could also be of French origin as mentioned in chapter three.²⁴⁹

Some initiatives have introduced human rights in US legislation. One of these is meant to be a supplement to the AECA named ‘Values in Arms Export Act of 2020’ that would lawfully make human rights an obligated consideration creating embargos based on a track record of violations and list countries of concern, like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.²⁵⁰

Moreover, in February 2020 a bill carrying the name ‘Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act’ was introduced, trying to promote the idea of introducing human rights in arms trade decision making.²⁵¹ An act with similar intention called ‘Safeguarding Human Rights in Arms Exports (SAFEGUARD) Act of 2020’ was intended to oblige specific arms to be sold under the better monitored FMS program rather than under transparency lacking Direct Commercial Sales.²⁵²

One more approach is the ‘flip the script’ concept that was originally and paradoxically introduced in 1986 by Senator Joe Biden.²⁵³ This design would mean that Congress needs to

²⁴⁵ ‘Foreign Assistance Act of 1961,’ US Public Law, September 4, 1961, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-1071/pdf/COMPS-1071.pdf> Sec. 502 (B (a(1))).

²⁴⁶ ‘Foreign Assistance Act of 1961,’ Sec. 502 (B (a(1))).

²⁴⁷ Ibidem, 502 (B(b)).

²⁴⁸ Kerr and Rosen, ‘U.S. Arms Sales and Human Rights.’

²⁴⁹ Kaye et al. *Reimagining US strategy*, 43.

²⁵⁰ Abrahamson, ‘Arms Sales Rise.’

²⁵¹ Ibidem.

²⁵² Ibidem.

²⁵³ Ibidem.

approve all arms sales instead of having a majority vote to prevent an arms sale.²⁵⁴

5.3 Arms sales and human rights: US-Saudi ties and Yemen

In line with the reasoning behind the ‘flip the script’ proposal, President Biden said that the US would put an end to arms transfers that supported the war in Yemen.²⁵⁵ This not only shows his intention to halt US support for conflict that involve human rights violations, but also partly acknowledges the fact that US manufactured weapons are in fact used in Yemen – or at least the option is plausible.

Controversy over military support to Saudi Arabia remains a hot topic within Congress, still they did not manage to halt a new arms deal with the Saudi Kingdom in December 2021. A pivotal point of discussion on this matter was debate surrounding the definition of ‘offensive’ weaponry.²⁵⁶ Once again, another example of how linguistics in legislation can create uncertainty in practice. The lacking of straightforward and clear phrasing offer ample possibilities to work within a grey area and bend rules to one’s own needs.

Moving forward, the Biden administration reasoned that the US had already ceased to offer support for Saudi offensive operations in Yemen, therefore did not see the need to strengthen prohibitions in regards to arms deals with Saudi Arabia.²⁵⁷ At this point, it seems like the US will always find ways to make arms deals happen when they have an interest to do so.

Another option to reconsider here is the fact that they are doing so indirectly as well. As stated before, the UAE have formally withdrawn from the war in Yemen, but are indirectly – and as previously stated sometimes very much on the forefront – involved in military offensive operations in Yemen. So, if not through direct arms sales the US is able to work within the grey area surrounding laws and regulations to achieve the same goal in the end and avoid the risk of being accused of direct involvement in human rights violations.

What comes to mind here is the constructivist notion of insider – outsider status that positions countries inside or outside the realm of international society and security depending on who is asked. Some countries are positioned outside of this social structure by other countries, especially in relation to Western oriented notions such as democracy and human rights.

What follows in this line of reasoning is not only an inside – outside status, but a value judgement that considers insider institutions ‘civilized’ as opposed to ‘barbarian’ outsider institutions. This argumentation holds two important insights. The first is the rather hypocritical attitude towards the prioritization of human rights in policy towards Yemen. The practical possibilities to deny any degree of interference in human rights violations in this war offers opportunities to indirectly exercise power. The fact that the US largely neglects the real life consequences in pursuance of containing Iranian power highlights the paradoxical ‘civilized’ nature of the US as protagonist of Western democratic society and human rights.

Moreover, the notion of inside – outside also applies to the general perception of Iran as

²⁵⁴ Abrahamson, “Arms Sales Rise.”

²⁵⁵ Ibidem.

²⁵⁶ Abrahamson, “U.S. Arms Sales.

²⁵⁷ Abrahamson, “Congress Fails to Block Saudi Arms Sales,” Arms Control Today, February, 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-01/news/congress-fails-block-saudi-arms-sales>.

not being fit to function inside the social structure of international society. Through, for example, sanctions, policy, violence and discourse, Iran has been placed outside international society as defined by the US. This has serious repercussions for Iran as well as for US conduct towards Iran, that emphasizes this perception of Iran as outsider ‘savage’.

Another theory that might explain US policy regarding human rights is that of triadic relationships. The fact that the US shifted from direct involvement in the war in Yemen to waging a proxy war by arming allies after expanding alliances. The US, in this way, essentially uses its soft power to delegate other countries to act on their own needs – when they publicly cannot do it themselves.

In February 2022 Biden even stated that the US would not discontinue supporting Saudi Arabia in its safeguarding of territorial integrity and sovereignty.²⁵⁸ An important part of this discourse was the establishment of threats from ‘Iranian supplied forces in multiple countries’.²⁵⁹ This statement was specifically – though not solely – based on the Iranian role in the conflict in Yemen.

To put US decision making in perspective, in January 2022 Italy permanently repealed existing licenses for arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. One month later, the European Parliament signed a resolution to call for an EU wide prohibition on any form of arms trade; the sales of security equipment; or maintenance of said equipment due to the serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated in Yemen.²⁶⁰ It is clear that the US do not cooperate nor acknowledge any such activity. So to answer the question if there is a discrepancy in the end when comparing risk assessments and legislation to actual policy, the answer is irrefutably yes.

²⁵⁸ Abrahamson, US Arms Sales.

²⁵⁹ Ibidem.

²⁶⁰ Ibidem.

Chapter 6 : Conclusion

6.1 Conclusions regarding sub questions

Going back to the beginning of this thesis, what stands out was the curiosity surrounding an – at first sight – paradoxical arms deal that seemed to contradict an important doctrine and conventional regional policy. This remarkable situation sparked interest to dig deeper and conduct a policy and oriented analysis to answer the question why the US-UAE F-35 deal as part of the Abraham Accords was concluded considering the potential consequences concerning Israel's Qualitative Military Edge. With the help of US policy focused sub questions that provided direction it is safe to say that a big leap was taken and a heap of knowledge was gained. While working a way through different kinds of texts: existing theories within the academic debate; academic and news articles; and laws and regulations in the form of acts, bills and other government issued texts, a well-informed context was created.

After providing an overview of security theories within the academic debate and the elaboration of some of them, the importance of a constructivist perspective was emphasized in light of the current study. These theories and perspectives ran like a red thread through the whole thesis, some proving more useful than others, but all with their own value to some aspects.

The third chapter answers the question what US policy concerning arms deals is that might negatively affect Israel's QME. Policy is quite factually explained through acts, bills and other primary sources to then proceed to set forth the diplomatic relationship between the US, Israel and other important actors through the use of the patron's dilemma and triadic relationships. The most important outcome of this chapter is the realization that what is written on paper in policy and legal terms cannot be viewed to reflect real life action and the complicated reality of diplomatic relationships.

Even though the US clearly maintains a very close relationship to Israel, they also hold long lasting close bonds with other countries in the region and form new alliances. They are, furthermore, selling growing amounts of weapons to other countries surrounding Israel in recent years and a US policy shift that signals disengagement and remote control instead of direct involvement could mean moving away from Israel's security position as being a central objective at all times.

The fourth chapter covered the factors that are involved in US risk assessments. They range from risk assessments that have a direct link to the QME and significant Israeli risk assessments to external factors such as Saudi Arabia, the War and Yemen, the reliability of the UAE and, lastly, the role of Iran. The complexity of diplomacy and geopolitics is once again demonstrated.

As straightforward as the question seems, the answer turns out to be that US risk assessments involve a bewildering combination of important aspects and factors that relate to their own domestic and international security perceptions, assessments of current and prospective allies – respectively Israel and the UAE – and their potential role in forming a united front against opponents or explicit enemies like Iran. Iran plays a pivotal part in US decision making in the geopolitical realm and Yemen seems to be the battleground for a practical power struggle between the two sworn enemies.

In the fifth chapter, when, subsequently, assessing how risk considerations influence

eventual policy making, what stands out is that security concerns, negative sentiments and fear-based decision making seem to dominate. Relating to the QME, security theories in combination with legal frameworks is a very useful way of understanding security perceptions. In practice, however, these legal frameworks seem to be more of a suggested framework that offers the opportunity to be bend to one's own wishes and needs.

Taking into account all answers to the sub questions, the main question why the F-35 deal was concluded despite QME concern has a twofold explanation. The first being the most important and covering the fear and competition regarding US security perceptions and policy decisions in relation to Iran. After the 'red fear' that marked the US fear of communism that controlled the Soviet era and the Cold War, the current enemy is Iran and the threat that is perceived in this era is also that power and ideology. What has not changed is the nuclear threat and the insurmountable ideological disagreement.

The difference is, paradoxically, the content of the ideology that is the perceived to the world order at the time of the Cold War as opposed to the current situation. Communism in the Soviet case was characterized by the complete absence of religion and Iran has been an Islamic Republic ruled by Islamic law since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. With the color green standing for Islamic religion in the Iranian flag, the 'red fear' seems to have changed into 'green fear' with US-Iranian relations deteriorating after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and never really improving after that.

The prioritization of security concerns and policy making that serves to counteract and limit Iranian influence and power seems to transcend the QME doctrine – in the case of the F-35 deal but presumably also in other cases where major arms deals are signed with allies in the same region. Thus, through arming their allies, the US hope to create a secured front against Iran.

Another way to do so, that is important in understanding Israel's position in the F-35 deal case, is expanding alliances – especially if Israel is part of said alliance. Wiggle room within parameters of the QME exists as to how the QME will be affected by arms deals with other countries in the region. This wiggle room consists of a variety of profound assessments on the US side of the deal as well as on the Israeli side of things. Hereby, the opportunity for careful consideration is created and the latitude can be used to create valuable alliances that in the long run might even strengthen the QME. Thus it might seem like a short term compromise, but still offers immediate resistance to Iran, and is even more likely to be profitable in the long run.

Because of this diplomatic practice, the possible negative effect on Israel's QME is limited, at least short term – the region is characterized by unpredictability and unforeseen conflict. On top of that, forging diplomatic ties between Israel and countries in the region is not a widespread practice, so they are more prone to desist from opposing an arms deal to a newly allied country. Not to mention the fact that the Iranians also pose a serious threat to the Israelis, which could be limited by forming an allied front.

All the above showcase the pragmatic way with which legal frameworks are handled. Decision makers such as policy makers have the opportunity to pick and choose, and presidents can use their veto, to take the action they deem appropriate, whether or not those decisions are based merely on security perceptions or short term fears or sentiments rather than long term integral political analysis.

The second way in which opportunistic behavior in policy is demonstrated is linked to policy and human rights. Again, opportunistic behavior predominates this subject. Ample legislation exists that covers the safeguarding of human rights in exercising US politics. Comparable with the QME doctrine, human rights take an important place in politics. Even more so than the QME, one could argue, since they are pivotal on the international agenda as well.

When assessing how the US translates human rights legislation into policy, outcomes are strikingly similar with the discrepancy between arms sales legislation and actual policy that has been accounted for in the rest of the thesis. Human rights legislation discourse offers the opportunity to pragmatically be used one way or another depending on the needs in a certain the situation.

The one important notion that adds to the argumentation is the impression that the US delegates and expands alliances and arms to secure their own power position in the region. The one important red thread that runs through the whole study is, once again, the role that Iran plays herein – the one of eternal enemy that has to be opposed with force.

6.2 Scientific relevance

At the beginning of this analysis, there were several theories and perspectives that stood out as potentially useful in gaining insight into how and why US policy takes its shape when it comes to the F-35 deal. All theories that were put forward were useful in some way, the realist perspective that produced the analogy of superstition in religion and politics proved to be very accurate. As the study progressed, however, one perspectives stood out the most, namely the constructivist line of thought.

More than for example the realist theories that view great powers as driven by hard strategic motivations, constructivism concerns perceptions and a vision of others that is constructed by a variety of perceptions, such as, fears and sentiments. Despite the usefulness of some aspects within every theory and perspective, a general inclination developed towards constructivist insights. This, then, translates to policy matters in a way that is characterized by opportunistic emotion driven policy and decision making. This approach proved to be very valuable in offering insight into what drives the US – but also other actors involved – in the F-35 deal.

In short, when positioning this case in the academic debate and the realm of international security, more than one theory and concept proves useful, but to really gain deeper understanding into what drives decision making and policy, constructivism is eye opening and yielded most useful insights.

6.3 Societal relevance

Starting this study, the aim was to gain better understanding into how policy and decision making processes work and to find an answer to the empirical puzzles that are posed by geopolitical processes and diplomatic relationships in general but using one specific arms deal to concretize the objective and intelligibility. The aim was to shed light on the current power balance in the region and maybe even take a peek into the future.

What the future holds is still very much uncertain, however the one specific cause for

this uncertainty is laid bare. The unpredictable nature of ad hoc and opportunistic decision making in policy is precisely the reason that expectations of actions can barely be strategically assessed in the moment – let alone in the long run. In other words; this type of pragmatic decision making often characterizes geopolitical decisions and the grounds to legitimate arms deals, which makes it difficult to always logically justify certain sentimental made decisions.

Knowing now that that is the case, however, we can be aware of its consequences and take into account sentimental factors that constructivist insights offers. This then adds to the lens through which we view an arms deal, a peace agreement or any other geopolitical decision for that matter. ‘We’ in this case is anyone that observes, studies or analyses the matter, and perhaps even the policy makers themselves, that could be more mindful of what drives them and others.

The outcome of this study, mainly by virtue of the constructivist perspective, is therefore very valuable in understanding security perceptions and general perceptions of countries and of all actors involved – actively or not. Being aware of the fluid nature of the constructivist determinants of decision making processes, unfortunately, does not simplify the attempt understand international relations in the future, but will undoubtedly prove useful to some extent.

6.4 Further research and recommendations

One way to perhaps attempt to lessen the chances of short term impulsive fear-based decision making and the long term risks that it poses in some instances is by developing a paved way for policy makers to systematically instead of emotionally assess policy decision, such as arms deals. A tool to this end is the ‘decision tree tool’ that was drawn up by William Wunderle and Andre Briere.²⁶¹ The tool that is shown in figure 1 could take away from the messy context regarding policy making and help validate decisions surrounding, in this case, arms deals.

Another issue that came up during the analysis of the subject was the impact of policy and decision making on the flow of arms into a fragile region and the danger of creating fertile ground for a regional arms race. This was mentioned frequently by analysts and authors regarding this subject, though seems to be largely neglected by US policy makers. The scope of this thesis left little time to comprehensively research the matter, though it offers, and deserves, to be studied in depth not in the least because of the everyday consequences for people in areas that are subjected to the consequences of war and violence – like in Yemen.

Yemen is currently one of the most explicit expressions of the power struggle between Iran backed Houthis, a Saudi Arabia led coalition that includes the UAE and the US to a certain extent. The humanitarian crisis resulting from this war needs to be of the utmost priority on the international agenda – something that could be achieved through more academic and public attention.

6.5 Strong suits and imperfections

The elusive nature of policy making that is once again unveiled by this study, as well as the absence of ample possibilities to reach sources that provide direct insight into motivations of policy makers is an obvious deficiency in this subject and study. Interviews with policy makers

²⁶¹ Wunderle and Briere, *US Foreign Policy*, 17.

or sources besides the legal documents would have strengthened the argumentation significantly. The fact that this study is based mostly on secondary sources, scholarly authors, news articles and analysts is recognizably a shortcoming, even though the variety of sources and authors is large to prevent tunnel vision.

Despite the above mentioned points of improvement and the lack of direct contact with policy makers that resulted in mostly indirect information, all the questions posed were answered to a satisfying extent. More insight is gained into why this particular deal came into existence; what actors played a direct and indirect role herein; and how these risk assessments take place. The study also succeeded in suggesting the constructivist perspective to be valuable into this and future analysis of decision making processes. The thesis, in short, offers a behind the scenes insight without actually going behind the scenes.

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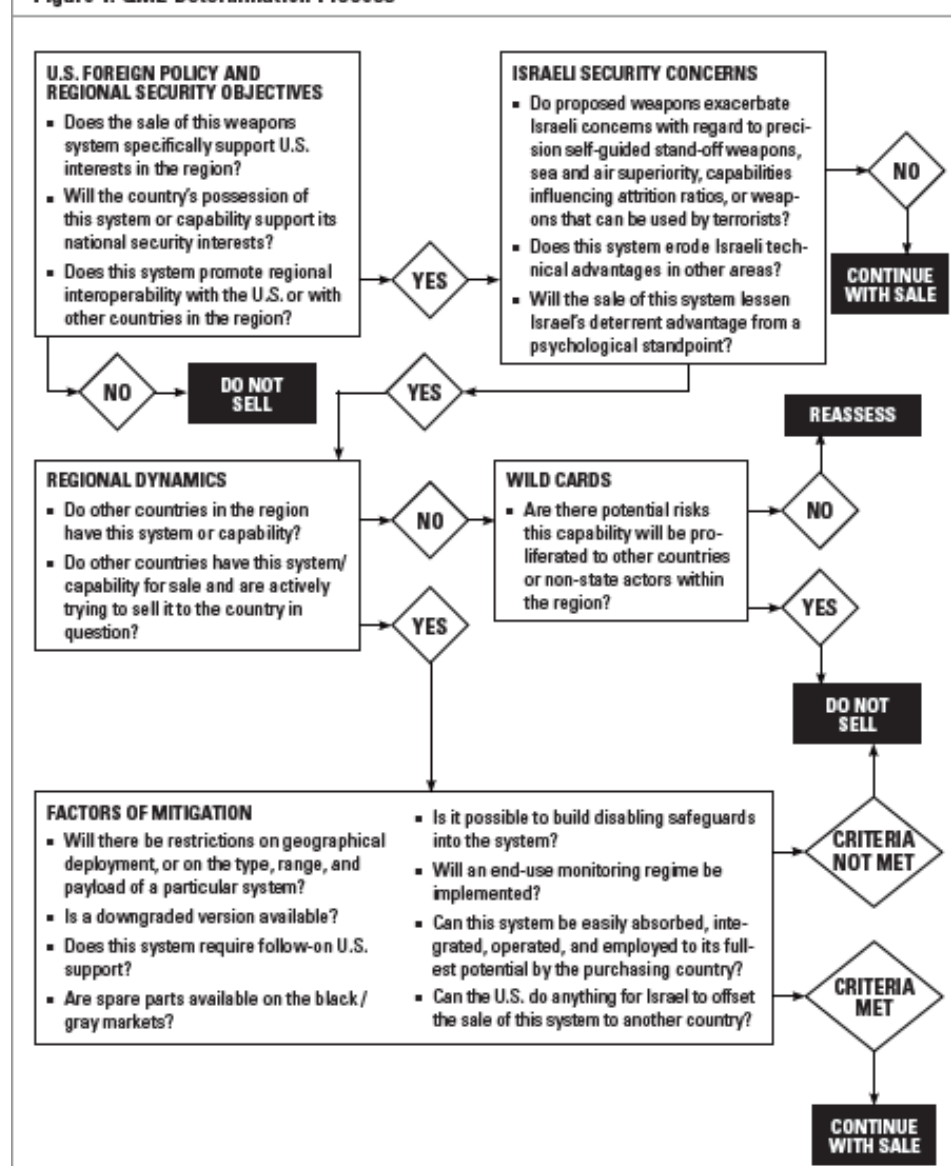
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Attachment 1

Figure 1. QME Determination Process



Attachment 2

The 2021 budget confirms this strategy with a 5.19 billion dollar budget for Foreign Military Funding and an even larger budget one year later, namely 5.46 billion dollars. The justification, apart from the difference in numbers, is copy-paste the same for both the years 2021 and 2022. The only difference are the lines that are the 2 sentences that are in bold:

*Near East (\$5,190.0 million in 2021 and \$5,459.0 million in 2022): The strategic security priorities in the Near East region are to counter Iran's malign influence; ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and other terrorist groups; and to develop and strengthen bilateral and multilateral security partnerships. Building and enhancing lasting security partnerships, such as those with Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, is critical to promoting regional stability, collectively deterring aggression, and reducing threats to U.S. and partner interests in the region. **FMF will support training, advising, and materiel support that will assist the Iraqi Security Forces in countering Iranian influence.** The United States also prioritizes FMF for Tunisia, which is on the front lines of the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups and instability emanating from Libya. **Tunisia is also a key partner for AFRICOM on the continent.** FMF will also seek to counter malign Iranian influence through support to the Lebanese Armed Forces. FMF will support the procurement of U.S. defense articles, services, training, and sustainment to modernize and enhance partners' interoperability with the United States to participate in coalition operations and support efforts to counter malign threats; to strengthen border controls to counter the smuggling of weapons and people, including foreign terrorist fighters; and to ensure aging equipment remains combat-capable. Resources for Jordan will support the acquisition of upgraded fighter aircraft.^{262,263}.*

²⁶² Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2021, 99.

²⁶³ Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2022, 119.