FACTORS, ACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF INSURGENT GROUPS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A CASE STUDY OF THE HOUTHI MOVEMENT IN YEMEN

2004 - 2014

BY

SARAH JAMAL MOHAMED

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR A MASTER’S DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY - AFRICA

SPRING 2018
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university other than the United States International University - Africa for academic credit.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: 26.03.2018

Sarah Jamal Mohamed (651257)
Student

This thesis has been presented for examination with my approval as the appointed supervisor

Signed: ___________ _____ Date: 21.03.2018
Dr. David Mwambari
Supervisor

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________
Prof. Angelina Kioko
Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________
Ambassador Prof. Ruthie C. Rono, HSC
Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic and Student Affairs
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To my husband, Nabeel Khan, for giving me the first push to pursue my MA and all his support and patience.

To my family and friends, thank you for believing in me and motivating me to reach this far.
# LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KSA</td>
<td>Kingdom of Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Dialogue Conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBUH</td>
<td>Peace Be Upon Him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROY</td>
<td>Republic of Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration  .......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgement ................................................................................................................ iii

List of Acronyms/Abbreviations........................................................................................ iv

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. v

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... vii

1. Chapter One - Introduction ............................................................................................ 1

1.1. Background of the Study ............................................................................................. 1

1.2. Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................ 4

1.3. Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................... 5

1.4. Objectives of the Study ............................................................................................... 5

1.5. Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 6

1.6. Significance of the Study ............................................................................................. 6

1.7. Scope and Delimitations ............................................................................................... 7

1.8. Limitations .................................................................................................................... 8

1.9. Structure of the Study ................................................................................................ 10

1.10. Operational Definitions of Significant Terms .......................................................... 11

2. Chapter Two - Literature Review ................................................................................... 13

2.1. Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 13

2.1.1. Internal and External Factors ............................................................................... 14

2.1.2. State and Non-State Actors ................................................................................... 18

2.1.3. Strategies ................................................................................................................ 20

2.2. Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 24

3. Chapter Three - Methodology ....................................................................................... 26

3.1. Research Design .......................................................................................................... 26

3.2. Location of the Study .................................................................................................. 27
3.3. Target Population ................................................................. 27
3.4. Sample/ Sampling Methods .................................................... 28
3.5. Data Collection Methods and Instruments................................. 29
3.6. Data Analysis Methods .......................................................... 31
3.7. Ethical Considerations .......................................................... 31
4. Chapter Four - Findings ............................................................ 33
  4.1. Internal and External Factors ................................................ 33
  4.2. State and Non-State Actors ................................................... 42
    4.2.1. State Actors ............................................................... 42
    4.2.2. Non-State Actors ....................................................... 47
  4.3. Strategies ........................................................................... 51
    4.3.1. Military Strategies ....................................................... 51
    4.3.2. Non-Military Strategies ................................................. 54
4.2. Non-State Actors .................................................................. 54
  4.3. Strategies ........................................................................... 54
  4.3.1. Military Strategies ....................................................... 54
  4.3.2. Non-Military Strategies ................................................. 57
5. Chapter Five - Conclusion ......................................................... 59
Bibliography .............................................................................. 65
Appendices ............................................................................... 74
ABSTRACT

This research explores the case study of one prominent insurgent group in the Middle East: the Houthi movement. There is limited research available on the strategies insurgent groups employ and factors that influence these non-state actors to attain their goals. The research examines three key areas of the Houthi movement: the factors, the actors and the strategies that enabled it to achieve its objectives. Yemen has struggled with various other insurgent groups in recent history. Nevertheless, the Houthi movement was able to assume positions of power more than the other groups. Therefore, this study explores the movement and identifies the factors that enabled its success, the actors who were involved and the strategies it used as a unit. To collect the necessary data, the researcher has used qualitative research methods. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted for the collection of primary data\(^1\). Due to insecurity and instability in Yemen, nine respondents have been interviewed online through the utilization of advanced technology. Additionally, the study has relied on existing literature on insurgent groups and the Houthi movement for secondary data. For the purpose of analyzing the data collected through online interviews, the researcher has used the thematic content analysis to derive results and findings accordingly.

\(^1\) See Appendix 2 for Virtual Semi-Structured Interview Guide.
Chapter One - Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The new era of the Cold War and proxy wars is taking place in the Middle East as the battlefield for the two regional powers: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the Islamic Republic of Iran. KSA and Iran represent the majority of the two prominent sects of Islam: Sunnah and Shia respectively. They are considered the strongholds of those sects. These variations in religious beliefs have to some extent presented a ground through which insurgencies have become a critical issue in the region (Gause, 2014, p. 10).

Most of the insurgencies that spread across the Middle East are religious armed groups such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, Hezbollah and Hamas (Moghadam et al, 2014). However, there are several scholars that take more of a cultural or historical view of insurgency. Ünal (2016) studies the active insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) that struggles for separation from the Turks and impacts the countries of the Middle East. On the other hand, a militant group that was able to impose its control over the state is the Houthi Movement that emerged in 2004 as a challenge and threat to the Republic of Yemen (ROY) and its neighboring states (Johnson, 2015).

The political situation in Yemen has been unstable since the Ottomans’ occupation of the north of Yemen in the sixteenth century (Holzapfel, 2014). The former government did not address the polarity of the Yemeni society, and most rival or opposition groups were marginalized because of their affiliation to a certain party, a group or even a religion (Clark, 2010). The main religion in Yemen is Islam. The majority belongs to the Sunni sect with a
minority of Shiite Muslims according to Blecua (2015, p. 2) and Clark (2010, p. 246). One of those Shiite groups is called the Zaydi sect which encourages its followers to rebel against an unjust ruler (Clark, 2010, p. 25). From the Zaydi sect grew a group that called themselves the Believing Youth (Al-Shabab Al-Mumineen) in Saada in the north of Yemen (Johnson, 2015, p. 4). That group started with the mission to revive the presence of the Zaydi sect in Yemen and demanded political equality and representation. The group also believed that the ruler should be a descendant of the Muslim Prophet (i.e. The Hashemite clan) (Salmoni, Loidolt, & Wells, 2010).

A very eminent family in the north of Yemen called Al-Houthi family, also descendants of the Hashemite clan, led that movement and fostered it into a bigger movement. This movement was able to claim the recognition of the international community as a formidable non-state actor in the political arena in Yemen and the Middle East. The group changed its name to Ansar Allah (the Partisans of God) to avoid any affiliation with Al-Shabaab group in Somalia (International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 5). However, the movement is recognized as the Houthi movement and named after the Houthi family because of the influence of the family, especially in the northern part of Yemen (Salmoni, Loidolt & Wells, 2010, pp. 1-2). For the purposes of this thesis, the researcher shall refer to the insurgent group as the Houthi movement.

According to Holzapfel (2014) and Johnson (2015), the movement had various demands from the former government of the Republic of Yemen. Its main concern, as apparent in the movement’s slogan "Allah is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, A Curse upon the Jews, Victory to Islam", was to reduce foreign influence on the country and on its population. The Houthis were also calling for an end to corruption and the government’s abuse of power.
Other demands, to a great extent, were concerned with issues such as freedom of religion, political affiliation and social equality since the Hashemite clan was a marginalized minority that possessed power and influence centuries ago (Clark, 2010, pp. 247-248). In addition, the Houthis demanded further political representation in the government which had not been granted nor considered by the former government of the ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Several events took place afterwards. The government launched six wars between 2004 to 2010 against the Houthis in Saada (Boucek, 2010). This was followed by the events of the revolutions of the Arab Spring in 2011. Most of the people in a number of Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Syria took it to the streets to call for political change; Yemen was no exception. This led to the ousting of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh (Holzapfel, 2014). He was replaced by his vice president Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi in 2012 (Blecua, 2015, p. 4). The situation became more complex especially after the current president Hadi fled the capital Sana’a to Aden and then to Saudi Arabia in 2014 (Mitreski, 2015, p.1). This in turn had enabled the Houthis to take over the official government offices assigning Houthi loyalists key positions in the government because of their affiliation to and support of the movement (Ghobari, 2014).

Insurgent groups emerge for various reasons and aim to achieve different goals and seek power (Shultz & Dew, 2006). They may serve others’ agenda as well (Kramer, 2010). However, the emergence of the Houthi movement was the result of a long-lasting struggle and marginalization inflicted by the former regime (Clark, 2010) which resonated with a large number of people who supported the movement eventually (Salmoni, Loidolt, & Wells, 2010, p. 10). The Houthi movement, as an insurgency, had been influenced by various revolutionary ideologies, events and social conditions. The researcher examines the factors, actors and
strategies that enabled the Houthis to achieve their goals during the period 2004-2014. These factors, actors and strategies are approached as a unit utilizing qualitative methods such as online interviews and thematic content analysis. This thesis asks about the internal and external factors which facilitated the process for the Houthi movement to capture Sana’a. Furthermore, it inquires about the role that various state and non-state actors played to help the insurgent group along with the strategies it employed.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In general, insurgent groups pose a threat to any state where they are created or nurtured. As non-state actors in the political arena, insurgent groups struggle to attain their interests. The strategies they employ to accomplish their goals may differ depending on the circumstances and the opposition they face. Moreover, a source of support for insurgencies may be state or non-state actors. Nevertheless, the challenge in such support is that those actors would naturally and expectedly vie for their own interests.

The Houthi movement grew from a small group of young people who were demandng social change, equality and political representation to a power able to overcome the state itself and capture the capital city of Yemen. The political situation in Yemen is characterized as unstable and highly infested with insurgent groups such as Al-Qaeda and the movement for secession in the South. Nonetheless, the Houthi movement is the most prominent of all. Thus, there is a need for studies that combine the factors, actors and strategies that could turn a small movement, such as the Houthi movement, that was calling for equality into one that runs the state.
1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to provide a critical analysis on the internal and external factors that enabled the Houthis to march to the capital Sana’a and capture it within hours on the 21st of September, 2014 (Ghobari, 2014). The study covers the most crucial period from the insurgency’s emergence in 2004 up to the fall of Sana’a in 2014 by the Houthis. It also analyzes the role of the different actors that were involved during that period. Moreover, the researcher identifies the various strategies used by the Houthi movement to achieve its objectives.

The researcher aims to bring together various components that facilitated the process for the Houthi movement to reach this far and control the state. The Houthi movement was able to accomplish that through persistence and seizing opportunities as they come. The researcher has approached nine Yemeni respondents who experienced the events from 2004 up to 2014 first hand; thereby presenting an in-depth and personalized view of the factors, actors and strategies that enabled the Houthi movement to capture Sana’a and assume power systematically.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The researcher is attempting to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the internal and external factors that enabled the Houthi movement to capture Yemen’s capital city, Sana’a, in circumstances of political violence and insurgency.
2. To analyze the role which state and non-state actors played to help the insurgent group achieve its objectives.

3. To identify the strategies employed by the Houthi movement to achieve its objectives.

1.5. Research Questions

Based on the above-mentioned objectives, the researcher is answering the following research questions:

1. In circumstances of political violence and insurgency, what were the internal and external factors that enabled the Houthi movement to capture Yemen’s capital city, Sana’a?

2. What was the role that state and non-state actors played to help the insurgent group achieve its objectives?

3. What were the strategies employed by the Houthi movement to achieve its objectives?

1.6. Significance of the Study

Facing various types of insurgent groups has become a continuous challenge in the daily life of both the government and many people in Yemen. All efforts attempted by the government to mitigate the situation have been confronted with resistance rendering it ineffective and unrecognized by different factions of the population (Mitreski, 2015). Therefore, this study identifies and combines the factors, actors and strategies the Houthi movement used to achieve its goals during the period of 2004-2014. Further, it offers an insight on how a small issue can become an acute one; since the Houthi group was initially claiming that it was only
seeking political recognition. Nevertheless, when the government ignored its demands, the insurgent group transformed into a force with which to be reckoned. Besides, analyzing all the elements combined may prove practical in countering insurgencies.

Academically, the study addresses the issue of insurgencies based on the internal and external factors enabling their success, the state and non-state actors involved and the strategies employed to achieve their objectives. Insurgency studies are imperative to the field of peace and security in International Relations. The strategies and factors that enabled the Houthi movement as a non-state actor to accomplish its goals and capture Sana’a are rarely covered in most literature where ideologies and motives are explored instead. Therefore, this study covers an insurgency (the Houthi movement) that was not given a well-rounded examination previously. It also combines all the elements (factors, actors and strategies) to produce a solid argument. Furthermore, the researcher has employed virtual research methods such as online interviews to benefit from the utilization of advanced technology in research for primary data.

1.7. Scope and Delimitations

The topic of insurgent groups is recurring in the field of peace and security in International Relations because of these groups’ impact on the political arena as non-state actors. Many scholars, such as Shultz & Dew (2006), Renard & Taillat (2008) and Connable & Libicki (2010) have discussed and debated over insurgencies, armed groups and their threat to the state. However, the researcher is planning to identify the factors, actors and strategies that enabled the Houthi movement to achieve its objectives as a unit. The issue of the Houthi rebels in Yemen is quite vast, hence, the study presents the events from the six wars that were
launched against the Houthis by the government of the ROY from 2004 up to the fall of Sana’a in September 2014.

Several events took place during this ten-year period, but the main focus of the research is on the events in relation to the Houthi movement and the impact of the group’s participation, presence and influence. This is done through exploring the factors, actors and strategies that enabled the Houthis to achieve their goals. Further, the study addresses the insurgency from a political rather than a social perspective since it started as a movement to gain political recognition and not to implement social reforms (Salmoni, Loidolt, & Wells, 2010).

The purpose of this thesis is not to discuss the events that took place from 2004 to 2014 in detail, but rather to examine how these events and circumstances enabled the Houthi movement to become such a force and control the state. The researcher gives detailed accounts of how these factors, actors and strategies gave the insurgent group the chance to assume power over the state and manipulate the situation in its favor.

1.8. Limitations

The ousted regime launched a media campaign and utilized negative propaganda attacking the Houthi movement especially during the six wars in Saada (Salmoni, Loidolt, & Wells, 2010). Therefore, the researcher has explored the topic through extensive research, examination of materials and peer-review with those who are knowledgeable in the field and the Houthi movement. This has been done to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity and transferability of the study throughout the process.

Furthermore, approaching respondents who were willing to share their insights and experiences with the researcher has proven challenging in some cases. The researcher had to
assure the respondents that their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. This was important since the Houthi movement is in charge of the situation in Yemen at the moment. In addition, the insurgent group imposes great control over the population and restricts their ability to express themselves freely without the fear of jeopardizing their lives. For instance, the Houthi movement detained two of the respondents for some time before, so confidentiality has been imperative for this study. The researcher has not shared the details and identities of the respondents with any entity, and pseudonyms have been used for the purpose of referencing in this thesis.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents have been more than willing to partake in this study for the benefit of knowledge and to shed light on the situation in Yemen. The researcher has interviewed nine adult and educated respondents (six men and three women) to explore the factors, actors and strategies that enabled the insurgent group to accomplish its goals. Moreover, the researcher has utilized the internet as a means of communication which has reduced the threat as no personal meetings were needed. The researcher has also approached those who moved to the diaspora for their input on the issue to avoid any unnecessary risks for the ones who cannot participate in the study from Yemen.

Dealing with an unstable internet connection and the delays in transmission have been an obstacle to the process of collecting primary data in some instances whereby the researcher had to reconnect calls in order to get better audio quality. However, the advantage of online interviews is that they do not require the respondents to go out of their way to participate in the interviews. The participants were able to contact the researcher whenever it was convenient for them. This has made the process more flexible and productive. This has also offered the respondents some freedom without the pressure of having to be available in a
certain place at a specific time. Moreover, by approaching the respondents in advance, the researcher has had sufficient time to collect the necessary data in good time to analyze and present the outcomes from the virtual interviews.

1.9. Structure of the Study

The researcher explores the factors, actors and strategies through examining the case study of the Houthi movement in Yemen thoroughly. This thesis consists of five chapters that reflect the essence of the study and has been submitted by April 2018.

Chapter one deals with the background of the study which gives a detailed account of the Houthi movement from its emergence in 2004 up to 2014 when it captured Sana’a. The researcher addresses the objectives and questions of the study to solve the problem of the lack of literature which encompasses all the elements that enabled the Houthi movement to achieve its goals: Capture Sana’a and assume power.

In chapter two, the researcher introduces several debates and arguments of different scholars on insurgencies in general and the Houthi movement in particular. The thesis addresses the knowledge gap and lack of literature that combines the factors, actors and strategies as connected elements that enabled the Houthi movement to succeed. The theoretical framework covers two schools of thought: liberalism and revolution theory in relation to the study to rationalize the phenomenon at hand.

Chapter three discusses the research design and data collection. The qualitative method is used as primary data have been collected through semi-structured interviews with respondents who experienced the events personally during that period. To analyze the collected data from both
the primary and secondary sources, the researcher utilizes the thematic content analysis to find similar themes that address the objectives and answer the research questions.

The researcher presents the findings in chapter four. First, it examines the internal and external factors that enabled the Houthi movement to succeed. Then it talks about the various state and non-state actors involved with the insurgent group and who influenced its abilities or opportunities. After that, it discusses the strategies adopted by the Houthi movement to achieve its objectives. The researcher concludes the thesis with a chapter that engages in and presents discussions on the findings and encompasses all the chapters with well-rounded conclusions that have been acquired from conducting the study.

1.10. Operational Definitions of Significant Terms

**The Arab Spring** is the wave of revolutions and calls for change that swept the Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen in 2011.

**The Believing Youth (Al-Shabab Al-Mumineen)** is a group of Zaydi students who took it upon themselves to revive the Zaydi sect and the pride of the Hashemite clan. They opened schools in Saada (North of Yemen) for such purposes. Later on, the movement took a more political shape.

**The Hashemite Clan** are the people who are the descendants of the Prophet of Islam (Muhammad PBUH). They are mainly from the Shiite sect and are called (Sada) meaning Masters.
The Islah Party is the opposition party that is considered to be the Islamist party in Yemen. It is ruled by one of the richest families in Yemen, Al-Ahmar Family, who also has strong tribal influence.

The Youth are the young men and women who participated in the revolution of Yemen as part of the Arab Spring in 2011 especially in the capital Sana’a.

Houthi loyalists are the people who believe in the cause of the Houthis and would offer anything to support them. In recent times, they have been favored in Yemen and given positions to ensure the rules of the movement are adhered to.

National Dialogue Conference (NDC) is the long conference that took place following the overthrow of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to mitigate the issues among the various players on the political arena and to create peace and unity in the Yemeni society.

Salafism is the Islamic sect from the Sunni branch that is followed by some of the population in Yemen but has its strong ties to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This sect is known for its strong support to the ruler.

Shia/ Sunnah are the main sects in Islam.

Zaydisim is the Islamic sect that was mainly practiced in the North of Yemen by mostly the Hashemite Clan. They are considered to be part of the Shiite but similar to the more moderate Islamic sect of Sunni Shafii.
Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1. Literature Review

Literature on the history of Yemen is abundant, but Victoria Clark’s (2010) book ‘Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes’ provides a well-rounded historical background of Yemen. The Houthi movement is mentioned along with other insurgencies. The discussion was about the events of the wars in Saada up to the fifth war only. This book offers an insight into the complexity of the political situation in Yemen.

The term “Political Violence” keeps recurring in scholarly articles that tackle issues such as terrorism and insurgency which implies that they are extensions of politics. Merari (1993) provides a list of several forms of political violence such as guerilla revolutions, riots, coup d’état and non-violent resistance, with a description of each. Violent struggle among state and non-state actors is explored, and it may be deduced that armed groups such as insurgents, terrorists, militias and criminal organizations fight for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population and territory indirectly in some cases (Shultz & Dew, 2006).

In this chapter, the researcher attempts to explore the literature that discusses the factors, actors and strategies that enable insurgents to achieve their objectives. Most literature which deals with the topic of insurgencies and armed groups has a more pragmatic approach. Scholars like Connable & Libicki (2010) and Curry (2012) support the state more than the insurgent group regardless of its ideology or how it is perceived by the people. Tse-Tung (1989), Ünal (2016) and Galula (1964) give more credit to insurgencies and their importance as non-state actors.
2.1.1. Internal and External Factors

Tse-Tung (1989) further explains the details of the components of insurgent groups and what should be considered for them to be successful uprisings and survive. He states that such uprising is inevitable when oppression is exercised by the government. Besides, there are primary factors such as the importance of the political aspiration and characteristics of the movement which contribute to its success. He vies for the necessity to have and to communicate clear and concise political objectives.

Shultz & Dew (2006) argue that it is necessary to understand the culture, values, institutions and background of those armed groups. Those insurgent groups depend on traditions and customs to gain popularity and support from the people. Moreover, the two scholars give a clear distinction between warriors and soldiers. According to them, it is crucial to be aware of and analyze military capabilities and strategies and to consider root causes, such as religion, underrepresentation and internal wars. To emphasize, Merari (1993) argues that terrorists operate by circumstances and do not have much choice; they react more than they act.

Similarly, the concept of Asabiyya: as coined by Ibn Khaldun meaning tribal solidarity or strong group feelings and identity is introduced as part of the tribal warfare (Shultz & Dew, 2006). This concept is quite essential in the Yemeni culture as part of the tribal society just as much as the feud traditions of avenging for one’s fellow tribesmen. Some concepts are hard to eradicate despite their negative impact on the society.

Salmoni et al. (2010) explore the Houthi phenomenon and its implications on Yemen’s broader conflict. The scholars’ arguments primarily revolve around the following: the context of the regime-periphery relations in northern Yemen, the social change and the Houthi
establishment in the period of 1980s – 2004, the six Saada wars, tribalism (Sheikhs vs. value system) and religion (Zaydism sect vs. Sunni sect). The scholars argue that the abovementioned have influenced the movement and the way it functioned.

Galula (1964) points out that insurgency can begin long before there is use of violence, and he compares it to civil wars though motives can prove to be different. He analyzes revolutionary war and its various elements and objectives. Also, he compares insurgency and counterinsurgency. Galula (1964) tackles an important issue that is relevant to the research at hand i.e. the ideology or cause of the insurgents and its efficiency and contribution to the success of the movement.

Allen (2008) examines armed groups from a legal perspective and the powers and authorities of the state. Based on the nature of the armed group and the threats the group poses, one can identify the type of group: organized group with a leader, resistance movement helping the state or opposing groups calling for secession or invoking the right to self-determination doctrine. The scholar argues about how the state is to approach the issue and use its national power and the applicability and enforcement of international law according to the state’s jurisdiction.

In addition, the issues of the law enforcement approach are addressed in detail. Some of those issues are the use of force against the armed groups, the right to gather intelligence and evidence on armed groups, detention, prosecution or expulsion of armed group members. Also, the concept of *jus ad bellum* is presented as the body of international law governing the use of armed force. This has assisted the researcher to inspect and scrutinize the legitimacy of

---

2 'The law of recourse to force' (Stahn, 2006, p. 925).
the approaches the government of Yemen implemented during the six wars of Saada in the North of Yemen.

Owens (2008) discusses the importance of location for armed groups to succeed. The scholar argues that geopolitics is considered to be an essential element of foreign policy and security. Moreover, he illustrates the different types of sanctuary to which armed groups may retrieve. For example, some armed groups might be able to find sanctuary in other states while others might remain within the borders of their state.

Further, sanctuary within an ethnic diaspora or cyberspace might turn out to be a more secure option. However, the choice of which type of sanctuary to seek depends to an extent on the size of the organization. Tse-Tung (1989) also lists securing a location that could enable the movement to organize and grow as an essential element of the phases through which insurgent groups go. The sanctuary in which the Houthis took cover was within the borders of the state in the caves and mountains of Saada. This has proven essential for their success and survival during the six wars (Salmoni, Loidolt, & Wells, 2010).

Curry (2008) marks influence as a key objective for most armed groups (non-state actors) no matter what type the group is; be it tribal, national governing group or local population. The scholar also presumes that neutrality is not a reality and in some cases is not the solution. Thus, the government’s resort to the use of force may be a necessity when it is within the limits of the law. Moreover, popularity should not be the aspiration in the event of countering armed groups but rather respect through keeping promises as building and developing unnecessary projects will not win the government the support it is seeking. Further, the fight on the ground is what determines the requirements to win the conflict and multinational cooperation may prove to be a failure.
Despite its crucial influence on gaining the support of the population, scholars, like Mitreski (2012), have only recently investigated how religious differences serve as a tool to fuel the conflict. To explore this factor further, Otis (2008) asserts that religion cannot be ignored when countering any armed group and discusses the reality of underestimating and overestimating its role as much as the reality of using and abusing religion. Therefore, the war becomes a war of ideologies rather than only armed or political conflict.

She also adds that religion on its own cannot determine an individual’s behavior nor can it be considered as the sole perpetrator of violence. Religion can be a two-edged sword, and that is where its power lies. It can be used to differentiate between what is assumed to be good or bad, trustworthy or not and identify a friend from an enemy. Therefore, people exploit the power of religion on others and interpret it in a way to serve their interests. It can also play a major role in spreading the ideologies of an insurgent group.

Several studies address some of the Houthi movement’s factors for success. Blecua (2015) addresses Zaydism and its influence on their ideology, agenda and the revolution of 2011. In addition, Johnson (2015) talks about the Houthi movement, but primarily from a religious perspective (the Zaydism Sect), and how the Houthis believe in their right as the descendants of the prophet of Islam to rule and how Zaydism encourages its followers to rebel against the unjust ruler as compared to its Salafist counterpart that believes in complete support to the ruler (Bonnefoy, 2009).

Holzapfel (2014) gives an account of the Yemeni revolution of 2011 as part of the Arab Spring. He discusses different elements of the Yemeni society which have contributed to the multi-polarity of the conflict and the Houthis as part of that multi-polarity. He gives a brief
narration of how the movement started and the rivalry between them and the influential Islah party which is considered to be the Islamist party in Yemen. Moreover, political representation, which is one of the Houthis’ demands, is not offered to all justly, despite the multi-polarity of the Yemeni society.

2.1.2. State and Non-State Actors

The importance of various actors to the success and durability of an insurgency lies to a great extent in the power of the people because of the recognition and legitimacy they bestow upon it. In his translated book of Guerilla Warfare, Tse-Tung, (1989) explains one of the phases that an insurgency goes through i.e. recruiting and winning the support of the majority of the populace. In addition, Moghadam et al. (2014) support the claim that insurgencies seek to gain popularity and recognition of other state and non-state actors.

Mitreski (2015) sheds light on many issues such as the alliance between the ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis despite their former enmity in the six wars in Saada implying that the ousted president might have had a hand in their capture of Sana’a. This alliance has several implications that influenced the whole issue.

Addressing the same concept of the support of other actors, Kramer (2010) embarks on the issue of modern insurgency in relation to Mao Tse-Tung’s model. He also elaborates on state sponsorship for armed groups to achieve specific foreign policies and serve their interests. This type of intervention in another state’s affairs requires that the state in hand already suffers a deep conflict. This instability creates a fertile ground for foreign exploitation of the situation. The scholar gives a number of examples of such occurrences, but the most prominent one is the one conducted by Iran and their support for other Shiite groups despite
the supporter’s denial in most cases. According to Kramer (2010), the creation and support of insurgent groups are possible, and international state and non-state actors abuse that possibility to their own advantage. Yet, the state sponsoring the surrogate group must steer clear from any connection that could put the blame on it. All the operations must be performed in a clandestine manner to ensure the evasion of liability by simply denying any connection with the said group.

Foreign assistance delivered to the Houthis is one of the main debated issues. To support this argument, the Houthis are allegedly receiving both military and financial aid from other states namely Iran, non-state actors i.e. Hezbollah in Lebanon and other independent individuals (Johnson, 2015). It is assumed that Iran supports the Houthi movement because of the mutual religious grounds and the proxy war fought in Yemen between the two extreme poles: the Sunni Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Shiite Iran (Kramer, 2010). An assumption that Boucek (2010) asserts, but he also admits the lack of evidence of such allegations.

Shultz & Dew (2006) explore the violent struggle among state and non-state actors, such as insurgents, terrorists, militias and criminal organizations, for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population directly in some cases. According to the authors, it is crucial to be aware and well-informed of the different state and non-state actors participating in the conflict. However, the focus on the state as an essential part and sometimes contributor to the conflict is lacking in the analysis of the various elements as presented in their work.

Further, in the realm of the power of the state, Curry (2008) warns of the dangers of weak states in fostering insurgencies and creating fertile grounds for them to grow. According to him, conflict is the most constant state unless total destruction of one of the sides is achieved. Based on Otis’ (2008) arguments, religious leaders can influence war and peace. They have a
power over the masses and can manipulate the sensitivities of the community much more strongly than the government could do especially when the society is religion-oriented. This is critical for the analysis of the Houthi movement and how their sect of Islam, Zaydism, empowered their movement and motivated more people to join. Zaydis believe that the people must revolt against the unjust ruler. Nonetheless, the fact that states also use religion to stir the emotions of the population to support or reject a certain ideology can prove to be as dangerous as when insurgent groups embrace it. This was the case for Yemen and the clash created among different sects of Islam to divide and rule.

In the Letter dated 20 February 2015 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014) addressed to the President of the Security Council, a report was published to address the situation in the ROY. The panel was sent to assist the committee sent to the country. The report (2015) gives a brief outline of the movement up to the fall of Sana’a and offers an insight on international non-state actors’ perspective, but it lacks accurate information of the background of the movement.

2.1.3 Strategies

Insurgents adopt various strategies to achieve their goals. However, the strategies they use may even affect the support they gain from other actors. Whelan (2016) argues that the wider context of an issue such as terrorism must be taken into consideration. He also gives a solid distinction between insurgency and terrorism: the intimidation of the audience to attain a political goal. While terrorists employ this strategy widely, insurgents tend to use other political techniques that sometimes are more pacifist. The scholar asserts that there are a number of similarities between terrorism and other forms of political violence. However, the intentions and objectives behind them are entirely different.
In a similar endeavor, Ünal (2016) agrees with Whelan (2016) and distinguishes terrorism from insurgency. He uses the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) as his case study and describes the PKK conflict as one of the most enduring intrastate conflicts. The scholar demonstrates the complexity of defining terms related to political violence because of their subjective nature. However, a number of technical characteristics are discussed to create a distinction: method vs. movement; the directness of challenge; nature of political goal; level of popular support; organizational structure and nature of management body.

In a corresponding view of armed groups, Moghadam et al. (2014) claim that terrorist groups employ various modes of warfare. They propose that this can be applied to theory and policy to find a solution to the problem. The authors argue that it can be very unproductive to assign a sole label to an armed group based on their nature, objectives or strategies. This may hinder any prospect to mitigate the severity of the reaction of that group. They also state that insurgents mix their methods and alternate between violent and non-violent strategies to gain popularity. This creates an understanding that there is not much difference between terrorists and insurgents since terrorist groups employ terrorism on few occasions only.

On the other hand, Renard & Taillat (2008) explore the mixing of methods by insurgent groups and discuss their evolution through various phases from propaganda to conventional warfare. They propose three operational poles: the terror pole, the guerilla pole and the conventional warfare. Borrowing from Mao’s guidelines and description of the guerrilla movements and how armed groups function, Renard & Taillat (2008, p. 1) claim that in most cases, armed groups do not solely rely on one pole but could also lean towards more than one depending on internal or external factors.
They use the example of Iraq’s insurgencies to demonstrate the transition of the strategies and their nature. This article gives an insight on the shift in strategies in armed groups which would support the study in regard to the transitions in strategies and methods of the Houthi movement to achieve its goal.

Merari (1993); however, categorizes terrorism as a strategy of warfare that some insurgents might adopt but not as a category on its own. He explains the various elements involved in terrorism to create a clear understanding of how terrorism functions. Closely linked to this argument, the translation of Mao Tse-Tung’s book on Guerilla Warfare by Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith is a useful account on the formation and organization of guerillas and the strategies they employ in their wars. One crucial technique that those groups employ to achieve their goals is conducting a series of attacks such as the hit and run strategy to mitigate the losses on the guerilla’s part. He distinguishes between two types of guerillas: one for the masses and the other against them. Mao is one of the pioneers in the field of guerilla warfare and his insights may prove very helpful in understanding and analyzing the Houthi movement and their strategies. Similarly, Shultz & Dew (2006) mainly describe irregular warfare, how wars are fought and the strategies employed by armed groups.

Galula (1964) presents several scenarios and strategies to destroy the insurgent movement through direct and indirect attacks against the movement and through infiltrating it and empowering the political machine. This is an indispensable source of information about insurgencies as well. Nonetheless, the more pacifist and diplomatic techniques which are utilized by an insurgent movement are not thoroughly tackled. One might argue that having a cause is sufficient to achieve one’s goals, yet a cause is merely an aim or a belief and not a strategy.
The International Crisis Group (2014) puts forward the issue of the Houthi movement from the perspective of the balance of power and the elements that may contribute to the conflict and its durability. The soft power the Houthis practiced to reach their goal was one of their strategies. For instance, their participation in the NDC and the events of the Arab Spring were a demonstration of their ability to be part of the peaceful political process. Nevertheless, the role of the state in creating the beast i.e. the movement is not addressed.

Curry (2008) argues that the need for a new approach to the issue of small armed groups is a must and declares that dependency on the old sources such as Mao and Guevara’s books might prove to be insufficient. He claims that those sources may be considered as historical accounts but not as a manual to counter such groups. He sheds new light on how to approach armed groups. This may be what is needed to deal with any insurgency. However, discrediting the old accounts of how to counter armed groups may also be problematic.

The researcher uses various contemporary articles to give a stronger update of what impacted the government that an insurgency was able to take control swiftly. Writers such as Black (2011), Ghobari (2014) and Al-Batati (2014) give comprehensive accounts of some of the events that took place which would help in understanding the issue from a Yemeni perspective.

As can be deduced, most of the literature is confined to specific elements or strategies rather than deeper structure and factors that could create an imminent threat namely, insurgent groups. The opposite may also be true since that insurgency could be employing certain strategies to disguise the wolf in the sheep’s clothing. The literature mentioned above offers insight on insurgencies and few of the strategies they employ in their endeavor. However,
combining the factors, actors and strategies together to present a holistic explanation is lacking when it comes to the Houthi movement. This is what the researcher is aiming to explore using the Houthi movement as a case study to combine all these elements to clarify the process. Moreover, the uniqueness of each insurgency should be taken into consideration. Therefore, the Houthi movement might not necessarily share all the elements and factors with other insurgencies. There is also the micro (individual and state), macro (international community) and meso (organization or Houthi movement in this case) levels of analysis will be assessed and incorporated thoroughly in the study.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will be used to connect the ideas and explain the need for this study. It will include two schools of thought: liberalism and the revolution theory. This framework will enable the researcher to explore the nature and challenges of the phenomenon of insurgencies and how the combination of all the factors, actors and strategies gives a better demonstration of what the issue is all about.

One of the early scholars of liberalism is John Locke. He argued in favor of the good nature of humans and the role of law as the legitimate governing authority (Richardson, 2012). Liberalism shone when realism was unable to account for many events that took place in the world such as the Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union (Devetak, Burke, & George, 2012). Liberals believe that through cooperation and having mutual interests, a state can avoid war.

It is true that power is a key element in the conflict in Yemen. However, this research challenges some of the principles of realism. According to realism, the state is the main and
sole actor (Rudloff, 2013) while liberalism introduces other non-state actors that could prove to be as important as the state itself. The Houthi movement is considered a non-state actor that has been able to control power and the capital of the state with barely any resistance from the state (Ghobari, 2014).

The Houthi movement has been able to accumulate weapons and the support of some people who chose to join them to create an army that marched all the way to Sana’a and captured it in a matter of hours. In the report by International Crisis Group (2014), the Houthi movement is presented as a power that sought and was able to balance the scale with the ruling and internationally recognized Yemeni government, and it utilized soft power to its favor. For instance, soft power or cooperation are practiced in their active participation in the NDC and their claims that their motivations are purely benevolent to empower political diversity and improve the political situation in Yemen.

On the other hand, feeling underrepresented, degraded and unfairly treated could create a sense of injustice which could lead to revolution according to the Marxist theory of revolution. Political instability and economic inequality motivate people to revolt. Moreover, this form of revolution starts with those who are deprived of their basic rights (Davies, 1962). Such treatment against the Houthis and the refusal by the government to give them their rightful representation created a beast from within the caves of Saada. Revolution does not only stem from economic instability, it may be provoked based on political, cultural and social grounds, and this gives rise to the revolution of an insurgency.
Chapter Three - Methodology

3.1. Research Design

In this chapter, the researcher provides details of how the study has been conducted and the methods used for the research design, data collection and data analysis. Research design is essential to the study to present a decent academic work and enhance knowledge in that field. The methods employed should serve the purpose of the study and enable the researcher to obtain the necessary data and analyze it accordingly.

This research primarily gives an account of the factors, actors and strategies of the Houthi movement from the emergence of the insurgency in 2004 to their capture of Sana’a in 2014. The researcher has integrated the various components of the study systematically to ensure that the objectives are addressed effectively. To that end, the researcher has utilized the qualitative method. Part of benefitting from a research method is to know its weaknesses and address them. Qualitative research is criticized for its lack of transparency (Bryman, 2012, p. 406). However, the researcher shall tackle this by giving a clear and concise description of the instruments used to collect the data and the criteria for choosing the sample.

The researcher discusses the case study of the Houthi movement and explores the factors, actors and strategies that enabled it to achieve its goals. The secondary data is acquired from different reliable sources online and available libraries such as the USIU library and online libraries. Moreover, the researcher has worked closely with people who have covered parts of the subject previously and benefitted from their input as sources of information. The researcher has collected primary data from online interviews with those who experienced the
events to enhance the researcher’s overall understanding of the various strategies used by insurgencies and how that reflects on the Houthi movement.

3.2. Location of the Study

This research has covered many locations starting with Nairobi where the researcher resides and other cities such as Sana’a, London and Warsaw where the researcher has interviewed many Yemeni citizens who live in the diaspora after leaving Yemen because of the unstable conditions there. The researcher has been able to choose these cities because of personal networks and being in contact with some Yemenis living there. The researcher has conducted virtual (online) field study to collect the necessary data to be able to get a better perspective on the issue of the Houthi movement.

3.3. Target Population

To explore the factors, actors and strategies that enable insurgencies to achieve their goals through the case study of the Houthi movement, the target population for the sampling has been picked carefully to include those who personally experienced the events during the Houthi movement emergence and rise to power in Yemen in that period (2004-2014). They are members of higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations and members of the civil society. The majority of the respondents were men since the majority participating in politics and activism are male adults. The male respondents’ ages ranged between twenty-five and fifty years old while the female participants’ ages ranged between twenty-five and thirty-one. The

---

3 See Appendix 4.
researcher has targeted different age groups to ensure the diversity of perceptions and views. The smaller age range in the female respondents is because young women in Yemen are more active in the political sphere compared to two decades ago, for instance. All respondents are degree holders with sufficient knowledge of the events that took place in the period between 2004 and 2014.

3.4. Sample and Sampling Methods

In choosing the sample population, the researcher has utilized the non-probability qualitative sampling method and the purposive sampling. In these methods, the sample is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objectives of the study (Steinberg & Steinberg, 2015).

For this study, the purposive quota sample population has comprised a number of respondents who experienced the events first hand and are able to give their perspectives on the factors, actors and strategies that may have enabled the insurgent group to achieve its goals. These respondents are members of higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations and members of the civil society. They are also conversant in English to facilitate communication and data sharing.

The debate on the sufficient number of respondents is perpetual and poses a dilemma for any researcher to determine the sufficient number of respondents to include in a research (Bryman, 2012). Determining the size of the sample is subject to several related issues such as time, cost and possibility of approaching respondents. The number of respondents has depended greatly on their willingness to participate in the research due to the sensitivity of the topic. Based on this cognitive reasoning, the researcher has been able to interview nine respondents (six men
and three women);⁴ in Yemen and in the diaspora to benefit from their input. All the respondents were residing in Yemen during the period of the study from 2004 to 2014. The respondents who are part of the diaspora left Yemen in search of better opportunities and to run away from the conflict.

Some might criticize this method and challenge the level of representation in the study since it depends on the researcher’s judgment. Nonetheless, due to the homogeneity of the sample (all Yemenis who personally experienced the events from 2004 to 2014), the researcher has been able to avoid the necessity to have a larger sample size. This has also enabled the researcher to analyze the interviews more thoroughly. Further, the researcher has relied on secondary data for the study to complement the data derived from online interviews.

**3.5. Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

The researcher depends on both primary and secondary data as the sources of information required to achieve the objectives of the research. The primary data has been obtained from sources such as interviews with respondents who experienced the events from 2004 to 2014. The researcher has used a semi-structured guide for the interviews⁵ that has assisted in the process of acquiring the necessary data. On the other hand, secondary data has been collected from books and reports that cover the topic of insurgencies and the Houthi movement from their emergence to the time they captured Sana’a.

Due to the current situation in Yemen and the fact that Sana’a airport is closed for over two years, a field research might have proven quite hazardous if not impossible for the researcher.

According to Hewson & Laurent (2012), research done virtually through the Internet has the

---

⁴ See appendix 4.
⁵ See appendix 2.
potential to facilitate collecting the primary data. Schmidt (1997) and James & Busher (2012) vie for online research methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, as a more efficient approach.

They argue that it reduces the costs incurred compared to the face-to-face interviews since it requires minimal physical efforts to conduct the interviews, mobilize, collect and retrieve the data. Moreover, James & Busher (2012) assert that this method is more time-efficient because the researcher can interview or interact with more than one person at the same time. Further, this method offers the possibility of screening respondents to prevent the issue of including the wrong or irrelevant population sample before opting to answer a questionnaire (Schmidt, 1997).

According to Bryman (2012), some of the issues with using virtual methods as a tool to collect data are that accessing the Internet may prove difficult since there are many people who have no Internet access or lack the skills to operate the necessary devices to connect to the web. Moreover, some respondents might not take it seriously as they would for a face-to-face interview. In addition, it can be quite hard for the interviewer to detect other important cues such as body language that could aid in analyzing the data.

Maintaining anonymity and privacy is another issue that the researcher has considered when conducting the study. Virtual field research offers privacy for the respondents to share their thoughts freely and give more candid responses (Hewson & Laurent, 2012). O’Connor, Madge, Shaw, & Wellens (2012) discuss the utilization of instant messaging apps to facilitate the process of obtaining data through online means such as synchronous interviews which have elements of the face-to-face interviews namely spontaneity and real time.
For the interviews, the researcher has used electronic apps such as Gmail, Imo and WhatsApp to communicate with and interview the respondents for their input on the topic. The means of communication has greatly depended on the preference of the respondents. The majority have preferred to use audio or video calls on WhatsApp because it is easier to connect and uses less data. Through personal networks, the researcher first approached some respondents via email to inform them of what participating in the research entailed, and see if they were willing to partake in the study. Those who accepted to participate shared their consent letters through Gmail. After that, the researcher conducted the interviews according to the availability of the respondents. The interviews were recorded using a smart phone app. The researcher has transcribed the audio recordings for reference.

3.6. Data Analysis Methods

The researcher has started the processes of data collection and data analysis simultaneously. The researcher has used thematic content analysis for the semi-structured interviews to derive main themes of the type of factors, actors and strategies that enabled the Houthi movement to achieve its objectives. Thematic content analysis is quite similar to the coding process whereby the researcher displays the data collected and notes down the recurring concepts and responses of the respondents (Bryman, 2012). The researcher then compares them to the secondary data collected on the topic.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical issues that the researcher has taken into account when conducting this research. By adhering to those ethical considerations before, during and after the study, the researcher has been able to avoid any harm that could be inflicted on the
respondents and has conducted an ethical and efficient research. In addition, the researcher has ensured that the subject discussed does not cause any conflict or stir any ill feelings for any party and has protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents and their security. Consequently, the researcher has opted for the use of fake names to refer to the respondents. Moreover, online interviews offer such confidentiality and anonymity of the participants’ identities.

The researcher has given the respondents participating in the research full access to what this research is all about and has taken their consents in advance. The researcher has ensured that the participants sign the interview consent form and verified that they are fully aware of the process by explaining it thoroughly. The researcher has made it clear to the respondents that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time with no liabilities nor consequences. Case in point, one of the respondents did change their mind about partaking in the study after signing the consent letter. The researcher respected their decision and did not proceed with the interview. Furthermore, the researcher has asked for the respondents’ permission in the event she wants to publish the transcripts of the interviews. Records of the respondents’ consent letters, the interview transcripts and recordings have been saved as part of the documentation process for this research.

---

6 See appendix 3.
Chapter Four – Findings

4.1. Internal and External Factors

In this thesis, factors are the elements, events and circumstances that enabled the Houthi movement to achieve its goals and capture Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, on the 21st of September 2014 (Ghobari, 2014). Capturing the capital city of a state is quite determinant since it is a declaration of assuming power over that state. The Houthi movement worked strategically in order to achieve its goals. As the researcher conducted the online interviews to collect primary data, certain themes kept on recurring in most of the interviews creating a clearer image of the factors that shaped the insurgent group’s experiences and aspirations.

The political, economic and social situation in Yemen from 2004 to 2014 can be characterized as critical and unstable (Clark, 2010). Much of the population was underrepresented and suffered from inequality and repression. Only the elite in the Yemeni society were privileged and had the opportunity to participate in the political sphere. The closer a person or a community was to the regime, the more they enjoyed the benefits. For many in the country, the new republics that were born after the revolutions in the North, September 26th, 1962, and the South, October 14th, 1963, did not differ much from the conditions of the old systems. Khalil (online interview, 2018) who participated in the negotiations of the Yemeni situation says that the people were utterly disappointed with the new republics. Additionally, he adds that the unification of the North and the South on May 22nd, 1990 brought more grievances and injustice that made it harder for the state to sustain its power without the use of force.
That period can be divided into several phases where different events took place and influenced the political arena and the rise of the Houthi movement. From 2004 up to 2010, the six wars in Saada, in the North of Yemen, erupted between the former government and the Houthi movement as a rebel group that needed to be controlled and contained. The government launched those wars for various reasons depending on the circumstances that governed the political arena at the time.

Publically, the former regime maintained that the wars were a necessity to eradicate the threat of terrorism which gained the former government a flow of funds and aid from the Western powers in a time when the War on Terror was at its peak (Boucek, 2010, p. 2). The six wars launched against the Houthi movement in Saada had a devastating effect on Yemen in general; particularly since the former government did not calculate its options wisely nor explored any other approaches.

The insurgent group’s influence increased gradually and triggered the wars in Saada. At first, the Believing Youth was a small group that was seeking to revive its Shiite Zaydi sect in the territory. At the group’s onset, the former regime allowed it to continue its activities in order to face the growth of the Sunni Salafist sect in Yemen. That plan backfired, and the movement grew beyond what the former regime could deal with or contain.

The Houthi movement found their sanctuary in the mountains and caves of Saada which enabled it to endure the attacks of the army of the former government. According to Owens (2008) & Connable et al. (2010), the location in which an insurgent group takes cover from the state’s attacks is imperative and critical to the survival of the group. The Houthi movement
had a great influence on the people in Saada which guaranteed it protection from assaults and strikes by the former regime.

The ousted president of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh utilized many strategies while ruling Yemen. One of these strategies was to "divide and rule" in order to control the state. According to Mohammed (online interview, 2017), who has been observing the situation closely, the ousted president Saleh was able to maintain and grow his powers through creating enmity and division among both his friends and foes. Therefore, the former regime in Yemen was corrupted and functioned according to the wishes and demands of one person.

The turning point for the conflict was the assassination of the first leader of the Houthi movement Hussein Badr-Aldeen Al-Houthi by the former government (Johnson, 2015). This created a deep impact on both his followers and the rest of the Yemeni society. Dr. Abdulkader (online interview, 2017), who was involved in political events and activism, asserts that the father of Hussein, Badr-Aldeen Al-Houthi attempted to negotiate an end to the conflict between them and the former regime. However, the ousted president Saleh treated him in a shameful way which was against Yemeni traditions and the tribal doctrine. This incident stirred a desire in the members of the Houthi family to seek revenge.

In a tribal society, like the Yemeni one, such breach of trust and disrespect for the elderly can damage one’s reputation, but Mr. Saleh was not phased and continued fighting the movement which led to the persistence of the wars in Saada. After the death of his brother and father, Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi assumed leadership of the movement by default in 2005 (Boucek, 2010). The wars in Saada continued because they served the interests of the former regime whereby the enmity between Mr. Saleh and his head of the army Brigadier-General Ali
Mohsin Al-Ahmar was growing deeper (Clark, 2010). The wars presented an opportunity to get rid of the Brigadier-General Al-Ahmar. Nevertheless, the plans and schemes of the ousted president failed.

The Saleh regime was generally able to control what the public was exposed to, so most people were rather unaware of the events taking place in Saada. The media shared what the regime wanted, and propaganda was employed to serve those ends; a double-edged sword the former government did not use appropriately nor wisely. In essence, the people only knew one part of the story, but when the other point of view was presented, it was utterly shocking, and the Houthi movement gained the sympathy of the people (Abdulkader, online interview, 2017).

Then came the period from 2011 up to 2012 when the Arab Spring took several states of the Arab world by surprise and the people demanded change and reform. The revolution of the people is characteristically based on the demands of social change and political representation (Arjomand, 1986, p. 383). Yemen was no different and joined the Arab uprising. Having been ruled by the same president for over three decades made people grow restless especially that their needs were not addressed. The poor of Yemen continued getting poorer and the rich got richer and powerful. Yemeni people took it to the streets and demanded change and the ouster of Mr. Saleh. For that one time, the majority of the Yemeni population chanted the same demands and was united regardless of their affiliations or loyalties (Holzapfel, 2014).

In 2012, Mr. Saleh stepped down with immunity from prosecution guaranteed; leaving the seat to his Vice President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi (Blecua, 2015, p. 4). This has left the country in such a dilemma and an unstable state. According to the agreement, new elections...
were to take place within two years (BBC, 2012; Ayman, online interview, 2017). However, the elections did not happen, and people grew impatient. The economic situation in Yemen deteriorated further, and people had no hope for a better Yemen under the regime of President Hadi.

Such circumstances offered the Houthi movement an opportunity to step up and promise people the change they sought desperately (Johnson, 2015, p. 16). The prices of oil went up and food was scarce, and the Houthi movement appeared to be the awaited knight in shining armor to whom distressed Yemenis looked up. People were tired of corruption and the one-man state that Yemen suffered from during the reign of Mr. Saleh. Consequently, any change by whoever was welcomed, and the Houthi movement seized that opportunity.

The Houthi movement appealed to the grievances of the people. In some instances, they shared those same grievances. For example, Saada is one of the cities in Yemen that lacked proper infrastructure and amenities, yet calls for development and reconstruction went unnoticed (Boucek, 2010). Other grievances may be combined under social change and the right to political representation. The Houthi movement made the best of that situation and according to Ibrahim (online interview, 2018), the Houthis created a bond with the people in Saada to be part of the Yemeni political arena and assume power eventually.

A factor which had facilitated the whole process for the Houthi movement was the support received from both the public and the members of the Hashemite clan. The people needed the change that the Houthi movement promised them. A number of the members of the Hashemite clan approached the matter differently. For once, the religious belief of the Zaydi sect that the ruler must be from their clan triggered their longing to their glorious days (Mohammed, online
interview, 2017). This added to the support the Houthi movement received from the members of the Hashemite clan.

Further, having a common enemy is a critical factor that enables a movement to achieve its goals (Arjomand, 1986, p. 385). It has contributed to the insurgent group’s ability to gain more support to reach far and assume power. During the Arab Spring, that common enemy was the ousted president Saleh and demands to throw him out were shared by many. Another common enemy was the United States of America (USA) and what it represented i.e. foreign intervention. The insurgent group called against that; which resonated with the people in Yemen (Blecua, 2015, p. 5). This was particularly relevant as the ousted president Saleh allowed the USA to interfere in Yemen and fight their battles against terrorism on the territories of Yemen (Lewis, 2013); killing many people along the way.

In addition, alliances and their shift played a major role in the shaping of the political sphere and how the figures in power dealt their cards. The issue with alliances in Yemen is that they are ever-changing, and they are created and destroyed with no prior notice. There were several alliances in the political arena that influenced the events drastically. Mr. Saleh was described by Dr. Abdulkader (online interview, 2017) and Mayar (online interview, 2018) as "a strategic and pragmatic man" who opted for what served his interests and sustained his power. Both respondents have had strong ties with the ousted president’s close circle. Mr. Saleh would hit different sides against each other and benefit from that conflict.

Using religion was one of the strategies to keep those threats at bay (McGregor, 2004, p. 6). During the six wars in Saada, there were times when Mr. Saleh would give the Houthi movement the opportunity to wreak havoc on the troops of Brigadier-General Ali Mohsin Al-
Ahmar. Mohammed (online interview, 2017) argues that the Houthis "took advantage of the former president’s desire to avenge the Islah party and General Al-Ahmar since he held them responsible for the popular protests that overthrew his rule in 2011 and accused them of being behind his assassination attempt."

Another alliance manifested during the Arab Spring when the Houthi movement allied with the Islah party in the Change Square, where they all camped together and chanted the same calls to overthrow the ousted president Saleh (Ayman, online interview, 2017). Nonetheless, that alliance did not last long because of the great differences in the ideologies of both sides. It only lasted as long as it was deemed necessary to serve that purpose, and Mr. Saleh was eventually ousted like his counterparts in the Arab Spring.

That alliance saw its end, in particular, when the Houthi movement allied with the current President of Yemen Hadi and began a series of dialogues to reach solutions (International Crisis Group, 2014, p. ii). President Hadi learned a number of lessons from escorting Mr. Saleh and creating alliances to destroy competition and to serve one’s interests was an important one. His main threat was the Islah party and its ambition and influence being backed by the power of its leaders’ tribe: Hashed (Clark, 2010, p. 271). Consequently, President Hadi’s best shot was to ally with the Houthi movement and reduce the power and aspirations of the Islah party (Johnson, 2015, p. 18).

Members of the Houthi movement started to infiltrate the capital city with the blessings of President Hadi, they were able to create a presence there. However, President Hadi failed to notice that the alliance was getting out of hand, and gradually he was losing Sana’a. That was when Mr. Saleh struck. He did not take defeat very well and started collaborating and
conspiring with the Houthi movement. He aided the insurgent group with weapons, finance and troops (Abdulkader, online interview, 2017). This facilitated the process of capturing Sana’a and controlling the state for the Houthi movement. The insurgent group did not face any resistance, a fact that was agreed on by all respondents, and eventually became the authority in the capital.

The Houthi movement was able to take advantage of the conflict in Yemen and as the conflict escalated, the power of its rivals weakened. In general, the Houthi movement did not have a strong opposition that could threaten its ambition and advancement. Besides, the government did not pay attention to irregularities in its manner or the way its troops kept on entering Sana’a in a maneuver to take hold of the state. The Houthi movement was able to learn from the long years they spent fighting the former regime and understood how the political sphere was functioning.

Yemen was a fertile ground for an insurgent group to find its sanctuary and prosper. The possibility of such group to grow in that environment was high because of various reasons. For instance, the fabric of the society had been weakened and could not bear the pressure due to the corruption of the government as Shaima (online interview, 2017) describes it. The people were mainly struggling to make ends meet and sustain their livelihood. The Yemeni people are known to be simple, and the illiteracy that ravished the community did not leave much space for patience or thinking ahead. People needed a solution and the Houthi movement promised them that (Maher, online interview, 2018; Mayar, online interview, 2018). Ibrahim (online interview, 2018) emphasizes that the people sympathized with the Houthi movement because it suffered under the former regime during the six wars in Saada.
The pillars of the Yemeni society were facing threats from different sides. The former regime was tackling the issue of the demands for secession in the South. At the same time, the threats in the north were becoming too overwhelming for the government to respond to. To add to that, there were the issues of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda taking charge of many areas in the country (Lewis, 2013, p. 77). The system of governance needed to be addressed as well as efforts to push for development (Policy Analysis Unit- ACRPS, 2014). The conditions in the country facilitated the process for the insurgent group.
4.2. State and Non-State Actors

Shultz & Dew (2006) assert that both state and non-state actors must be considered to attain a complete picture of the influence and impact insurgencies. Therefore, in this chapter, the researcher is to cover the various state and non-state actors that contributed to the success of the Houthi movement. These state and non-state actors played a major role to help the insurgent group achieve its goals through capturing the capital city of Yemen, Sana’a, and assuming power to rule the state.

4.2.1. State Actors

Actors in International Relations may include all the players that are involved in a political circumstance where each one of them has a role to play. States are usually considered to be the main actor in the political arena (Devetak, Burke, & George, 2012). Whether it is the most powerful is quite open to debate. States themselves vary greatly in their power and legitimacy in the eyes of the international community and their people. States rationally put their interests as a priority in their agenda and dealings with other state and non-state actors.

According to Kramer (2010), in cases where a state is supporting a non-state actor such as a rebel movement or an organization threatening the political stability of another state, that supporting state would resort to keeping its identity anonymous. This is done so as not to be held accountable or shunned by the international community. States would adopt any strategy to ensure that their security and interests are intact (Rudloff, 2013). Therefore, as the researcher was conducting this study, one controversial element was recurring, none of the aid that the Houthi movement received from other states, in particular, was in direct support or at
least publically endorsed. It was primarily done through back route means as shall be demonstrated in this research.

As mentioned earlier, interests are what govern and motivate the actions that a state may take. That is the reason why some states opted to support the Houthi Movement while others did not at different intervals. For example, during the six wars in Saada, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a key player in aiding the Yemeni regime in fighting the movement in these wars and tipping the scale in its favor (Boucek, 2010). Despite being a small insurgent group without much of a military power to worry about, the Houthi movement pushed the former regime in Yemen to seek foreign intervention from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to settle an internal conflict.

The KSA did not get involved in the war in Yemen for the sake of the former regime, but rather it participated to secure its borders since Saada is to the extreme North of Yemen sharing the same borderline with the Kingdom (McGregor, 2004). Therefore, any threat on that territory was more prone to spill over to the Kingdom, and this, in turn, would certainly create additional problems and conflict that might prove to be completely difficult to address later on. In that context, the KSA was merely acting to serve its interests.

Moreover, the KSA was keen on having the Salafist Sunnis maintain their power especially in the face of the emerging power of the Shiite Houthi movement. This resulted in the conflict that took place between the Houthis and Salafists in 2011 in the area of Damaj, where the Saudis set a religious center for the Salafist sect (Ghobari, 2011; Mohammed, online interview, 2017). That center served as a religious school that taught the Salafist sect of Islam to many people who came from various places (Bonnefoy, 2009).
Several interests of the KSA would have been jeopardized in the event the Houthi movement gained power and was able to control Yemen. For instance, it could have lost the influence it had over the former regime which it had gained through aid and endorsement. Nonetheless, not all Gulf countries shared the same sentiments. Qatar was a key actor during the conflict in Saada. It had a hand in the process and attempted mediation to put an end to the conflict, but those efforts eventually failed (Boucek, 2010, p.8).

On the other hand, there were the states that supported and blessed the Houthi movement’s development into a formidable force; however, within the limits and conditions of the superpowers. The United States of America was preoccupied with its War on Terror campaign that it launched in 2001 after the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon. The USA welcomed any help to address and execute its agenda. Therefore, the Shiite Houthi movement was the perfect solution to eradicate the many Sunni terrorist groups that infested the country such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). A good example would be the conflict that erupted in the area of Damaj whereby the USA blessed that fight between the two sects as they perceived that area to be the breeding ground for Muslim extremists and terrorists (Abdulkader, online interview, 2017)

Using religion and manipulating religious sentiments seemed to be the best remedy to get rid of those terrorist groups without having to interfere or fight on the battlefield. Consequently, the Western powers approved the movement and its territorial control without condemning its threat to the state of Yemen or other neighboring states that might have been thought to be the main contributor to terrorism in the region. As the hegemon of the world, the USA had the ability to control the expansion of the influence and threat of the insurgent group and put an
end to the accelerating power gain they enjoyed, but it chose not to get involved in an official capacity.

The most controversial state whose support to the Houthi movement was much debated is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran is one of the most powerful Shiite states in the region, and it is the main rival to the Sunni KSA in the Middle East (Gause, 2014). Many scholars claim that Iran is the primary supporter of the Houthi movement, yet there was no concrete evidence to enforce this allegation (Lewis, 2013, p. 82). Furthermore, no official declaration has been made regarding this support from neither the Houthi movement nor Iran (Holzapfel, 2014, p. 11). These were mainly speculations and theories that were based on the interpretations of what was perceived on the ground.

To delve further into that allegation, there are a number of clues that can be connected to Iran. For instance, the similarity in their religious beliefs and using the Houthi movement as a tool to control the influence of the region’s rival hegemon: the KSA. In many of the strategies and slogans that the Houthis employed, the impact and influence of the Iranian ideologies and strategies were easily spotted (Shaima, online interview, 2017; Khalil, online interview, 2018). For example, the slogans that the Houthi movement chanted such as "death to America and Israel" and "empowering Islam" reflect those of the Iranian Islamic revolution in the 1970s. The Iranian revolution established the current Islamic state and posed a major threat to the Western powers; especially to the USA and KSA (Salisbury, 2015, p. 5; Mitreski, 2015, p. 22).

The Houthi movement did not admit the support of Iran publically, but it adopted the Shiite state’s system and praised it as a successful example of how a state should run its matters and
relations with other states. One aspect that all the respondents agreed on was the financial and logistical aid with which Iran might have supplied the movement. However, the provision of military aid and weapons was slightly debated, even though according to Katzman (2018), in his report that was prepared for the members and committees of the Congress, the USA still maintained that Iran in fact provided support and supplied weapons to the insurgent group through different means as a display of might.

The issue with the provision of weapons is that Yemen is considered one of the countries with the highest number of pieces of guns. According to Root (2013), Yemen was "second only to the USA in gun ownership!" This shows that the acquisition of weapons in Yemen may not prove to be a problem for an insurgent group that was able to sustain itself in wars that lasted six years against the former government. According to Tse-Tung (1989, p. 24) and Galula (1964, p. 35), insurgent groups and guerillas are usually able to obtain their ammunition and weapons from their opponents as the principal source. For the Houthi movement, that opponent was the former government.

Notwithstanding, some American officials still insisted that Iran was an accomplice who had been smuggling heavy weapons and ammunition to the country to aid the Houthi movement in the conflict in Yemen (Schmitt, 2017). This argument is also supported by the report published by the Conflict Armament Research (2016) that asserts that the weapons that were claimed by the maritime forces operating in the Arabian Sea were smuggled to Yemen from Iran to sponsor the insurgent group.

Nonetheless, the insurgent group actually needed logistics and expertise more than it needed guns per se. The Houthi movement did not enjoy the sophisticated understanding and
capability to put a state under its mercy and control. And yet, that was exactly what it was able to accomplish successfully after long years of struggling. This kind of logistical and pragmatic aid has probably been received from an Islamic revolution with a success story.

4.2.2. Non-State Actors

According to Devetak et al. (2012), non-state actors are any player in the political arena that is not perceived as a state; it could be a movement, an organization, a multinational corporation (MNC), a group of people or even one individual. There is a wide range of who can qualify as a non-state actor that is capable of influencing the political scene and the international community and its relations. The school of thought of liberalism puts great emphasis on the importance of non-state actors as entities that may be as powerful as the state itself; if not more.

Hence, to create a logical flow for this research, the first non-state actor to be mentioned would be the one with connections and ties to Iran and its ideologies, but with more admission of support than denial. For a non-state actor, the stakes are not as high as they would be when it comes to states. Hezbollah is one of the most powerful insurgent groups in the region that has been able to influence the regime and create a rival for the state of Israel in the Arabian Peninsula. It is also a publically Iranian-backed party that has a number of seats in the Lebanese parliament (Hiltermann & Alley, 2017).

The Shiite party of Hezbollah represents a model for the Houthi movement as it aspired to gain political representation in the Yemeni government (Mohammed, online interview, 2017). Moreover, Hezbollah showed solidarity with the Houthi movement especially since they both belong to the Shiite sect of Islam. Religious affiliation and association are critical in this case
as they can grant an insurgent group a number of supporters for the primary reason of being from the same sect.

On the other hand, the leaders of the Houthi movement, namely Hussein Badr-Aldeen Al-Houthi and his successor and brother Abdul-Malik Badr-Aldeen Al-Houthi, were able to turn the odds to their favor by getting the popular support they needed to get that far. Those two leaders have been eloquent in giving speeches that could mobilize people especially those with similar ideologies (Khalil, online interview, 2018; Mayar, online interview, 2018; Ayman, online interview, 2017; Ibrahim, online interview, 2018). They were able to do so by means of employing religion and religious sentiments. As non-state actors in the political arena, they managed to penetrate the Yemeni society and achieve their goals of assuming power by capturing the capital city of Yemen: Sana’a. According to Byman et al. (2001), leadership is one of the crucial requirements for the survival of insurgent groups because of its role to inspire and motivate their supporters and followers.

The main targeted groups to whom the Houthis appealed were primarily their fellow Yemenis of the Hashemite clan and those who longed to the Imamate period when Yemen was ruled by the Hashemite and Zaydi Imams before the revolution of September 26, 1962 (Lujane, online interview, 2018). The Houthi movement was able to mobilize its supporters through religious sentiments and promises of reclaiming the glory of the Hashemite clan who can be compared to sleeping cells that awaited the rise of the Phoenix from the ashes (Mohammed, online interview, 2017).

The Yemeni tribes played their role as well by facilitating the whole episode of the insurgent group entering Sana’a. This logically leads to one of the essential contributors to the success
of the Houthi movement in achieving their objective and claiming Sana’a as their own i.e. the ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh (Abdulkader, online interview, 2017). The tribes were loyal to him, and he utilized that loyalty to serve his interests. Mr. Saleh stepped down in 2012 after being in power for thirty-three years because of the masses that chanted his exit in the Arab Spring. He found another way to claim his legacy and what he deemed to be his own. His alliance with the Houthi movement gave the insurgent group that much needed encouragement to be able to capture Sana’a in 2014. Respondents expressed their shock and surprise because of the lack of resistance against the movement when the Houthis entered Sana’a. People expected the regime to defend the capital against any entity that threatened the sovereignty of the state.

Mr. Saleh had major influence on the tribe Chiefs around Sana’a and had the power to mobilize the republican guards that were under the command of his son Brigadier General Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh (Clark, 2010, p. 281). His support to the Houthi movement changed the rules of the game, and the state found itself struggling against a threat that the new regime could not face nor tackle. By this stage, the Houthi movement grew into a formidable force.

The current President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi was another actor that enabled the Houthi movement to take charge of the capital city and assume power over the state. President Hadi’s position was not that of strength, and despite his attempts to win the insurgent group to his side, the Houthis were able to devise a coup against him in 2014 where they surrounded the presidential palace and killed his personal guards (Mohammed, online interview, 2017). That was a success for the Houthi movement which enabled it to capture Sana’a and send the
current Head of State fleeing to the South of Yemen and from there to the KSA (Mitreski, 2015, p.1).
4.3. Strategies

The Houthi movement opted for both the use of military and non-military strategies to serve its interests and achieve its objectives namely sustaining power through the capture of the capital of the Republic of Yemen: Sana’a. This was attained systematically by means of taking into consideration the rivals’ conditions and circumstances on the ground. The Houthis had no room for failure, so things had to be done carefully and strategically.

4.3.1. Military Strategies

Lacking advanced military knowledge, the Houthi movement resorted to imitating others’ techniques and experiences. The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 presented a role model for the movement. The Iranian revolution was characterized by its dependency on the might of the masses, their desire to oust the Shah, the Islamic sentiments and ideals for which it pushed and its aversion for foreign intervention (Katouzian, 2009, p. 21). It was very convenient for the Houthi movement to avail itself during the Yemeni revolution that was part of the Arab Spring in 2011. The revolution was based on the desire of the majority of the people who sought change. In addition, the Houthis called for the advocacy and upholding of the Islamic rules and regulations. They also rejected all foreign intervention as apparent in their slogans against the United States America and Israel. These slogans and sentiments were adopted from the Iranian Islamic revolution as well (Salisbury, 2015, p. 5).

Additionally, the Houthi movement copied the strategies of Hezbollah in order to be able to win people’s support and spread their ideologies through the use of media and recruitment (Mohammed, online interview, 2017). Further, the Houthi movement realized early on that the way forward was through confrontation. This was apparent especially after the wars the
Houthis fought against the former government which took their toll on them. Acquiring power was not enough, but rather putting it into use was what mattered. Every male was eligible for recruitment regardless of their age or social class as the insurgent group needed manpower through numbers (Mitreski, 2015, p. 20). Those were chiefly approached in religious centers and religious schools which the Houthis established in Saada to revive the Zaydi sect (Clark, 2010, p. 249).

The Houthi movement realized from the start that it needed to destroy the opposition and keep it at bay. It had no chance of surviving as an insurgent group if that opposition were strong. Once the movement gained enough power to tackle that issue after participating in the Arab Spring, it started creating its critical alliances. During the Arab Spring, the Islah party was the enemy of the ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh, so the Houthi movement joined and supported it against the former regime. However, when the former regime collapsed, the once allies turned against each other. That was the time the Houthis allied with President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi against the Islah party to extract its influence from the political arena. Again, as soon as that was accomplished and got the Houthi movement one step ahead, it broke that alliance for the benefit of allying with Mr. Saleh against the current regime in order to capture Sana’a (Johnson, 2015, p. 59)

This was when the Houthis operated and implemented the coup against President Hadi on the 21st of September 2014. According to Dr. Abdulkader (online interview, 2017), "Saleh presented twenty four brigades of the Republican Guard," which facilitated the process and paved the way for the Houthi movement to capture Sana’a. Leading a coup is one of the most essential strategies that some insurgent groups use in order to achieve the goal of taking over a state and assume power (Galula, 1964, p. 2; Merari, 1993, p. 220). This was facilitated for the
Houthi movement because of the absence of an effective and strong government and the weakened fabric of the society.

Alliances allowed the Houthi movement to silence and destroy any opposition that could jeopardize its quests and objectives. Besides, in the event that did not work out, the Houthis had to show might and domination to maintain power. The Houthi movement ruled with force, and when anyone threatened that or was able to cause interruption to its plans, the Houthis made sure to show those accused of such actions the right path. Ruling with an iron fist gave them the upper hand and helped them to reach that far. Insurgent groups usually tend to do so when things become too complicated for them (Tse-Tung, 1989).

Accordingly, intimidation and political violence could prove to be a very effective weapon to maintain power (Ünal, 2016; Whelan, 2016). This concept was recurring in all of the interviews, and respondents narrated incidents that happened to them or to people they knew whereby the Houthis utilized political violence, bombing of property, kidnapping and restricting freedoms. Dr. Abdulkader (online interview, 2017) and Shaima (online interview, 2017) are two Yemeni people who personally experienced detention by the Houthi movement. This was done to discourage them from continuing to express their opinions or their social activism.

There have been some recorded incidents of the killing of some tribal chiefs or the blasting of their property. In a tribal society like is the case in most parts of Yemen, the Chief of the tribe is the most important figure in that tribe. Therefore, to be able to cause damage or harm to them could send a very stern message of what the insurgent group is capable of doing to the
followers. The Houthi movement ensured that everyone was set straight according to their agenda, and no threat was tolerated and was actually dealt with quite solemnly.

The Houthi movement was smart in compensating for what it lacked as an insurgent group. As a movement that started in the caves and mountains of Saada, it was necessary to learn the rules of wars and how to win them. Therefore, recruiting military advisors was an essential task and gave them an advantage (Mohammed, online interview, 2017). The movement also depended on the political knowledge of their leaders as graduates of universities with degrees in political sciences (Ibrahim, online interviews, 2018).

4.3.2. Non-Military Strategies

In this thesis, non-military strategies are the tactics that do not include any use of force but rather depend on diplomatic and peaceful methods to achieve the goals of an entity. The Houthi movement managed to achieve its objectives by employing the most suitable strategy at the right time and based on the circumstances that surrounded it. For example, through the use of media and Television channels, such as Al-Maseera and the Hezbollah channel Al-Manar, that reached the homes of every Yemeni citizen, the insurgent group was able to be present and influential even though sometimes people were forced to watch such channels (Mohammed, online interview, 2017).

Another essential strategy to the movement’s success was getting popular support to legitimize it, especially that many people sympathized and connected with the group and its grievances. Some people felt that the group was demanding for the same things they sought (McGregor, 2004, p. 5; Ayman, online interview, 2017). The Houthi movement publically called for equality and political representation and tended to show good intentions to all
factions of the society, but in time, people grew restless and unsure of how true that was which led the insurgent group to resort to intimidation and violence in some cases (Abdulkader, online interview, 2017). Nonetheless, they maintained a large base of supporters for the most part.

Strategic planning requires awareness and quick responses. According to Tse-Tung (1989, p. 24), in order for a guerrilla movement or an insurgent group to survive, it must exploit the circumstances and opportunities presented. The Houthi movement was aware of its surrounding and how events were developing, and to make the best of that, the insurgent group responded fast in most cases. The Houthis did that through taking advantage of the unstable situation in Yemen. Additionally, they exploited the conflict that was taking place during the Arab Spring. They also managed to use the animosity among other parties such as the former regime, the Islah party and the current regime to their own advantage (Lujane, online interview, 2018).

During the Arab Spring, the Houthi movement had a strong presence in the Change Square where they had their own tents in their own corner. However, they kept to themselves and did not interact with other parties that also kept their distance (Abdulkader, online interview, 2017). The Arab Spring brought the majority of the Yemeni people together, yet it did not manage to unite them. Interests seemed to be the main motive for participating in the Arab Spring, and coming together was the way to achieve that end.

The Houthi movement utilized the common enemy strategy heavily by creating alliances with different parties. During these events of 2011, the common enemy was the ousted president Saleh, and by showing solidarity with the rest of the people, it gained more popularity. The
Houthi movement even supported the right of women to political participation (International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 12). Therefore, it appealed to the underrepresented and to those who suffered discriminatory treatment and oppression.

After the ousting of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012, he was replaced by the current president Abdo Rabbo Hadi. Then the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) opened the way for every faction in the Yemeni Society to come in one place and address the country’s dire situation and issues in order to reach mutual grounds (Policy Analysis Unit-ACRPS, 2014, p. 1). Nonetheless, that was not the case. Interests were again the ultimate goal for the various parties, and steps were taken to serve them accordingly. According to Khalil (online interview, 2018), who was part of the NDC, "the members of the Houthi movement participating in the negotiations of the NDC showed initiative and collaboration with the other parties, but at the end of the day, it was the leadership that called the shots." The insurgent movement called for a federal state, political representation and freedom of religion during the negotiations (Johnson, 2015, p. 70). The Houthi movement eventually withdrew itself from the meetings and agreements of the NDC as it did not suit their preferences. This was apparent especially when UN envoy and other participants demanded the Houthis to disarm during the time when the movement and its members were under attack (Holzapfel, 2014, p.17).

Propaganda also plays a major role in how events turn out for insurgent groups (Merari, 1993). It aids them to motivate people to join them in their struggle to achieve their objectives and show the other side in a negative manner (Moghadam et al., 2014). For the Houthi movement, propaganda worked in their favor both ways; when they suffered from it, and when they used it. The Houthi movement was subjected to the propaganda machine of the former regime especially during the six wars in Saada, yet it was a two-way strategy as the
Houthi movement counterattacked that lash on them with Youtube channels to show its stand and dilemma (Salmoni et al., 2010). The people felt sympathetic to the insurgent group, and that gained it more public support and exposure.

The demands the movement presented were quite vague and inconsistent (Shaima, online interview, 2017). They mainly depended on current issues that people were suffering from such as high fuel prices, food shortage and inequality. The insurgent group pinpointed these grievances as demands and later on as promises (Lujane, online interview, 2018). According to Otis (2008), religion and religious discourse can be powerful and influential tools that insurgent groups utilize to attain their goals. The Houthi movement addressed people’s religious and social sentiments, so people welcomed it as an alternative to the regimes that ruled the country for decades.

On the other hand, the Houthis did not count on the common people solely. There was a more useful class in the society that was their winning card in infiltrating the scene. That was the support of the Hashemite clan to whom the Houthi family belonged. The Hashemite clan enjoyed a prestigious status in Yemen as the descendants of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Before the Yemeni revolution of the 26th of September 1962 in the north, Yemen was ruled by the Imams who were from the Hashemite clan and assumed a higher rank than their subjects (Clark, 2010, p. 25 & p. 247). The Houthi family also believed in its entitlement to reclaim its birth and religious right. Consequently, when they started to gain power, the majority of the Hashemites became more capable to show their affiliation to the insurgent group contrary to how they felt under the former regime. According to Mohammed (online interview, 2017), "when the Houthis entered, [we] discovered that they coordinated with them [Hashemite clan] and took up arms and fought with them."
Leaders of insurgent groups breathe life into their followers and subjects and the survival of the movement depends on them to a great extent (Galula, 1964, p. 44). According to all the respondents, the Houthi leaders, namely Hussein Badr-Aldeen Al-Houthi and his brother and predecessor Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, had the talent of giving powerful and religious speeches that could mobilize the people. Their control over the Arabic language and the sentiments they addressed appealed to the people and kept them motivated. Being able to reach the masses through the power of words gave the insurgent group the chance to redefine its strategies and get the people on board whenever the interests were at risk. Moreover, the Houthi leaders employed other important issues in the Arab world to appeal to Yemeni people. One of the main issues they mentioned repeatedly in their speeches was "the cause of Palestine and how the foreign invasion of Israel was aiming at destroying the whole Arab world" (Shaima, online interview, 2017).

As an insurgent group that condemned foreign intervention, the Houthi movement always denied publically any foreign support from other states such as Iran, even though they praised it as a state that was able to put the world’s powers on their toes (Salmoni et al., 2010, p.121). People were tired of the influence that the USA imposed on the country and felt helpless since the former regime allowed it to intervene whenever it deemed necessary. The Houthi movement chanted and called against such unwelcomed interference in the internal affairs of the Yemeni state. So while the USA was bombing the country, the Houthi movement’s demands seemed legitimate especially that it attracted the people through peaceful means to win their hearts and support. However, the Houthis’ main target group was the underrepresented and those who were discriminated against especially by the former regime.
Chapter Five - Conclusion

The online interviews have facilitated and enriched the process of collecting primary data for this research. Respondents have been utterly generous with their time and knowledge. They cooperated with the researcher to produce this work that sheds light on the essence of the Houthi movement, and how it was able to achieve its objectives and assume power over the state. Conducting the interviews online was both an opportunity and a challenge which the researcher employed for the benefit of the study. The insights on the movement from both the primary and secondary data have provided a well-rounded examination of the factors, actors and strategies that assisted the insurgent group in their journey.

Throughout the period from 2004 to 2014, the Houthi movement maintained patience as its strongest weapon. It took the movement time to reach its goal, but it managed to secure its progress until it paid back. Every aspect in the progress of the insurgent group contributed greatly to its ability to achieve its objective and capture the capital city of Yemen: Sana’a. The researcher has put together the elements of the factors, actors and strategies to create a logical flow of how the movement matured and captured power.

The study of the Houthi movement has explored the factors, actors and strategies that enabled it to achieve its goals and take over the capital city of Yemen. The political, economic and social conditions in Yemen contributed to an extent to the success of the movement. Moreover, the six wars in Saada from 2004 to 2010 played a role in gaining the insurgent group the popular support it needed to persevere. The location of Saada in the north of Yemen offered the group protection and influence in the territory. In addition, the assassination of
their leader Hussein Badr-Aldeen Al-Houthi was an important factor that motivated the group to continue its endeavor against the former regime.

When the Arab Spring reached Yemen in 2011, the Houthis joined the people in their revolution demanding the ousting of their common enemy: the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Alliances dominated the political sphere in Yemen and the insurgent group managed its relations delicately and in accordance with its interests. The Houthi movement had no strong opposition that could jeopardize its expansion in Yemen and that offered it the chance to progress.

On the other hand, the political scene in Yemen had its share of the various state and non-state actors that contributed to the movement’s advancement. Iran had been the most controversial player even though no official admission of that support was made. Other states had been involved during the period from 2004 to 2014 in relation to the Houthi movement as well. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated in the six wars against the movement in Saada. Further, the United States of America played its part from behind the scenes.

The involvement of non-state actors was a bit more complex. The insurgent group Hezbollah showed solidarity with the Houthi movement while other non-state actors depended greatly on alliances. The most prominent alliance was with the ousted president Saleh who facilitated the process for the insurgent group to capture Sana’a and assume power over the state on September 21st, 2014.

The strategies the Houthi movement employed varied in order to serve the interests of the insurgent group. The Houthis depended on imitating others’ experiences and expertise. The Houthi movement benefited from diversifying its strategies based on the circumstances and
events at hand. Additionally, intimidation was a powerful weapon that the movement utilized when it deemed necessary to establish its existence and stand its grounds.

The concept of power is a critical and essential element that has kept recurring throughout this thesis. The former regime, the opposition, the Houthi movement and the current regime did their utmost to obtain it, and it was what motivated and influenced their actions and reactions. Power was the number one target. The complication with the Yemeni scenario is that it was influenced by the fact that the country was ruled by the same man (ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh) for over three decades even though this was under the umbrella of democracy about which he used to boost before the Western powers. The opposition and insurgent groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Houthi movement were willing to do anything to enjoy that power and the former regime was reluctant to give it up nor share it.

The Houthi movement was either able to recognize the seriousness of the situation or it might have just plunged into it head first to find itself in a one-way road with no chance of going back nor withdraw. Nonetheless, once it got enough exposure to the public, its steps were more calculated and studied carefully. The insurgent movement depended primarily on the power of religion and what it meant to the people whom it addressed. Sentiments and emotions ran high, and that was the best time to strike. What Mr. Saleh failed to predict and prepare for was the fact that he was the one who nurtured the movement that eventually took over and destroyed him.

The whole process of capturing Sana’a and assuming power over the state consisted of a chain of events where one thing systematically led to another. The Houthi movement was a practical movement, and it seemed to have not left anything to chance making the best of every single
element to its maximum capacity. It managed to gain experience, power, weapons and popular support during the six wars that the former regime launched against it in Saada. It also managed to approach the chiefs of the tribes either peacefully where the movement created an ally or destroyed competition.

The Arab Spring was simply a stroke of luck that turned the cards for the movement’s benefit. It opened the way for the insurgent group to come to Sana’a and share the glory of the revolution with the people. The events of the Arab Spring offered the movement an opportunity to show good intentions and involvement. The people were united against a common enemy namely Mr. Saleh and his regime. They were chanting together the same slogans yet keeping, at a safe distance, to their own.

The Houthis’ political and diplomatic participation increased and enabled them to be part of the National Dialogue Conference. After the Arab Spring, the NDC brought together all factions of the Yemeni society to share their grievances and ideas to reach solutions to the epidemics of the country. The Houthi delegation to the NDC was quite proactive and shared in the discussions that took place during the conference. However, when the interests of the leaders were jeopardized, the Houthis chose to withdraw and maintain that upper hand over the situation. The movement’s significant influence in the NDC was to a great extent because of its acquired power, and this made others weigh their options carefully before venturing against the insurgent group.

The Houthi movement capitalized on the alliances it created as long they made sense and lasted. The insurgent group did not linger on those that were consuming it rather than helped it. The group allied with each party on the political stage in Yemen at particular times when it
deemed necessary and broke these alliances when they had accomplished their goals. This was a very risky maneuver as it could create many enemies, yet power was too great to worry or postpone seizing the moment. Further, the group had nothing to lose but so much to gain. By then, the state lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the people who gave up hope for a better Yemen under the same regime. This offered the Houthi movement an opportunity, and the insurgent group grabbed it.

The movement’s leadership was key in its survival and mobilizing the masses to its favor. The leaders of the movement recognized the weaknesses of the people and played along those lines. Nothing was conclusive, but to have a great popular support was a major goal on its own. The movement did not enjoy the numbers that could enable it to achieve its goals, so it targeted the people that would give its mission the momentum and support it required. Some may describe the leaders as preachers of the Friday prayers of the Muslims as did one of the respondents: Khalil (online interview, 2018).

Religion gave the movement power, leverage, authority and capacity to persuade people that they were on the right path, and that their efforts where going to be rewarded eventually. Death was not to be feared but to be sought. To maintain power and full control over the territories it occupied, the Houthi movement assumed the role of the law, and it became the one and only authority in Saada at first and then in Sana’a.

It is very critical to realize the importance of the phenomenon of non-state actors as major players in the political arena. Ignoring non-state actors does not aid the state, but it actually gains these groups power and influence. The way the former regime addressed the Houthi movement from the start weakened its legitimacy and enabled the insurgent group to grow
further. It might have proven more beneficial for the former regime to involve it and keep it at a safe distance to ensure that the group did not become a nuisance and a threat that helped bring that regime down.

Insurgent groups cannot be put under specific categories, and this thesis shows the viability of that argument. Each insurgency is governed by the circumstances, environment, strength of the state and the other players that share the same political, social and economic sphere as it does. The Houthi movement was able to achieve its objectives and capture the capital city and assume power there due to the various elements and events that took place from 2004 to 2014. The way the movement acted and reacted was primarily an outcome of the situation then and the options it presented.

This thesis also demonstrates that it can be rather challenging to judge or assess the nature and actions of insurgent movements because of the conditions in which they function. The researcher presented the factors, actors and strategies after collecting data through online interviews which facilitated the process of reaching those in distant places and who experienced the events personally. Thematic content analysis of the data brought about the results as mentioned above creating a representation of the Houthi movement as an insurgent group in the Middle East.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix 1: The Map of the Republic of Yemen (Source Nations Online Project)
Appendix 2: Virtual Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Researcher: Sarah Jamal Mohamed

Date:

Time:

This Virtual Interview is conducted for academic purposes only. The identity of the respondents is confidential for security purposes unless they give permission to use their details. It is part of a research conducted at the United States International University – Africa as part of the requirement fulfillment for an MA Thesis in International Relations under the title:

FACTORS, ACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF INSURGENT GROUPS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A CASE STUDY OF THE HOUTHI MOVEMENT IN YEMEN

2004 - 2014
The Questions

* Who are the Houthis and what are their demands?

**Section 1: Factors that Enabled the Houthi Movement to Achieve its Objectives**

* How would you assess those demands?

* Why did people join the Houthi movement?

* What motivated the Houthis to reach that far?

* What qualities do the leaders of the Houthi movement have?

**Section 2: State and Non-State Actors that Were Involved**

* Why were the Houthis fought by the government in the six wars?

* Were they helped by other state and non-state actors?

* How did the Houthis interact with the people of their territories and with the cities they occupy?

**Section 3: Strategies Adopted by the Houthi Movement to Achieve their Goals**

* What did the Houthis do to achieve their goals? How would you describe those strategies?

* What about the use of terrorism and political violence?

* Has the Houthi movement lived up to its promises?
Appendix 3: Interview Consent Form

Research project title:

FACTORS, ACTORS AND STRATEGIES OF INSURGENT GROUPS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A CASE STUDY OF THE HOUGHTHI MOVEMENT IN YEMEN

2004 - 2014

Researcher: Sarah Jamal Mohamed

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. For USIU-Africa, it is a crucial requirement that interviewees explicitly agree to be interviewed, and they must agree on how their responses will be used. This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your participation.

The researcher shall collect the data for academic use. Records of the interview shall be kept, but in the event the interviewee does not want to be identified, confidentiality will be guaranteed and no identification shall be added. The data shared by the interviewee will be analyzed and only with the consent of the interviewee quotations will be included in the final work. The interviewee will have full access to their transcript and will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time in the event there is any risk.
By signing this form, the interviewee agrees to voluntarily and at no cost partake in the study and share their knowledge to the best they know. He\she also agrees to permit the researcher to include the transcript to the final work. In case the interviewee does not want their transcript to be included in the final work, they have the right to do so at any time. The interviewee may contact the researcher for any inquiry in the future on:

Email: sarahjamal8713@gmail.com

Phone No.: +254717100166/ +254780848460

I hereby consent to the abovementioned.

**Respondent’s name:**

**Date:**

**Signature:**

NP: This form can also be signed by sending an email or a message to the researcher of the same.

Name of the respondent is only needed for purposes of differentiation of participants and shall be omitted in the copy for the study.
# Appendix 4

## List of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Means of Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mohammed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>WhatsApp (18.12.2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ayman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>BA degree</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Imo (18.12.2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Shaima</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>Diaspora</td>
<td>WhatsApp (27.12.2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mayar</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>Diaspora</td>
<td>Imo (02.01.2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lujane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>Diaspora</td>
<td>WhatsApp (17.01.2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Maher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>BA degree</td>
<td>Diaspora</td>
<td>WhatsApp (18.01.2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ibrahim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>BA degree</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Imo (29.01.2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Khalil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>Diaspora</td>
<td>WhatsApp (02.02.2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>