IRAN’S GRAND STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A CASE STUDY OF YEMEN

BY

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UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA

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UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA

SUMMER 2019
STUDENT’S DECLARATION
I, 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.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as university supervisor.

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Abstract

Considering the events that preceded the toppling of Mosaddeq and the eventual Islamic Revolution, Iran’s foreign policy has shifted from engagement to assertiveness. The perception of hostility and threat to the survival of regime became the defining framework for the pursuit of the grand strategy of Iran in the Middle East and in response to the rest of world. Thus, nuclear capability, spread of Islamic revolution and expansionist geopolitical influence became the strategy for its regime security. The involvement of Iran in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Bahrain have been largely captured by several literatures. Therefore, the research seeks to understand how Iran articulates its grand strategy in the Middle East as well as unpack the United States of America-Saudi Arabia-Iran triangle in the Yemeni crisis. Largely the study utilized qualitative discourse to unravel why and how Iran applies its grand strategy in Yemen as a case study. By and large, Iran’s strategy in Yemen does not differ that much from those of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. It is a strategic and comprehensive goal to achieve its expansive national interest and maintain hegemonic influence in the Middle East. The study recommends that both state actors and non-state actors in Yemen should consider a political resolution than ongoing military confrontation, the policy makers in Iran and Saudi Arabia should allow Yemenis to solve their internal problems without interference. Finally, Yemenis are facing humanitarian challenges in a dire situation, the international organizations should sanction both Iran and Saudi Arabia for their aggression.

Keywords: Grand Strategy, Revolution, Sunni, Shia, Foreign Policy, Regime Security
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I thank all my friends especially Mr. Emanuel Zanika for giving me insights on the term Grand Strategy and how it is applied in theory and practice.
Finally I appreciate the feedback I got from the respondents in Yemen and other parts of the world.
DEDICATION

To my father and mother who sacrifice everything just to make sure I am successful.
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<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>British Petroleum</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>IRGC</td>
<td>Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps</td>
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<td>JCPOA</td>
<td>Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action</td>
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<td>IAEA</td>
<td>International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State in Iraq and The Levant</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Syria and Iraq</td>
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<td>M16</td>
<td>Secret Intelligence Service</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>WMD</td>
<td>Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Iran’s foreign policy trajectory requires the understanding of its history and the development of Islam in the Middle East from the era of Prophet Muhammad to the emergence of the two major sects: the Sunni and Shia. The two sects have been at loggerheads for dominance in the Middle East and other regions of the world. The sectarian differences between the Sunnis and Shias tend to lean towards political rather than religious narratives as often manifested in their foreign policy agenda.

The rancor between the two sects has a long history traced to over 1400 years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The death of Prophet Muhammad and the succession struggle that ensued between the different interest groups would later lead to the rise of sectarian leaders. Some of the followers wanted Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib to succeed the Prophet while others pledged their loyalty to Seyid Abu Bakr who was the Prophet’s close friend and father in law. However, Abu Bakr eventually became the first caliph of Islam. Ten years after the death of Abu Bakr, the same succession controversy reoccurred. Again, Imam Ali became a strong contender but Seyid Umar was favored and subsequently, Seyid Usman became the third caliph.

Afterwards, Imam Ali took the leadership unopposed. The Shias refused to recognize the first three caliphates but see them as imposters. In fact, some Shias cursed the three claiming they were usurpers of power. However, the Sunni Muslims continue to recognize and respect the four as legitimate caliphs. Because of that, the two sects have been in perpetual supremacy struggle for leadership in the Muslim world (Sunha, 1978). The historical leadership and succession skirmishes was to become the source of the split in the Muslim world. Since then,
the tension between the two sects has escalated and became heightened since the Iran’s Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The contemporary repositioning of Iran’s foreign policy began when Mohammed Mosaddeq, the 35th Prime Minister was ousted and replaced with Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1953. Mosaddeq was overthrown through a coup d’état. The political event brought the Iranian people in direct resistance and resentment against the West for interference in its domestic affairs. The coup d’état was alleged to have been orchestrated by the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the United Kingdom’s Secret Intelligence Service (M16) in response to the nationalization of British Petroleum (BP). The nationalization saw the confiscation of assets belonging to the international oil companies which drew a spat of resistance from the international oil cartels. Thus, the 1953 episode sowed the seed of suspicion and discontent that will later redefine Iran’s relations with the West. As a result, Iran sees United States of America, United Kingdom and its allies as arrogant and deceitful (Milani, 2018).

Furthermore, Shah’s regime was seen by the Iranian people as the stooge and puppet of the West. Hence, his rule suffered legitimacy crisis. The tension in the domestic politics and resentment against his government made his rule authoritarian and repressive. However, Shah enjoyed the backing of USA and the UK. The Shah’s rule lasted for 26 years until he was deposed by the monumental built up of opposition and the militant Islamic Revolution fueled by the anti-American sentiments. The discontent continued until the Islamic Revolution of 1979 which saw Shah’s regime toppled. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to power as the grand Islamic leader after the ousting of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and turned Iran into a theocracy state known as Islamic Republic of Iran. The rule ended the 2,500-year tradition of
monarchy. The idea was conceived to curb the state weakness and the overbearing interference of the West in Iran (Hunter, 1992).

The Islamic Revolution was embraced as a revivalist movement for the restoration of Islam and Shia’s values. Thus, the new Iranian constitution states that, God first and the Holy Quran as the only source of Sharia law. Hence, as an Islamic republic it was to be led by a supreme religious leader based on the religious traditions (Hunter, 1992).

The tense relations between the USA, UK and other countries of the West will later redefine Iran’s foreign policy in its broader grand strategy. Since the revolution, Iran’s grand strategy is predicated on regime security (survival) and the need to preserve the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, the personality of Ayatollah, the supreme leader embodies the preservation and security of the regime. Hence the Grand strategy is constructed on mistrust, fear and suspicion.

The strategy envisages that the West and its allies whose perpetual desire is to defeat the regime and install democracy must be resisted in all fronts.

Subsequently, the tension between the Sunnis and Shias began to manifest and became worse during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 that lasted for eight years. The conflict saw the Arab States in the Middle East rallying support behind the then President of Iraq Saddam Hussein. After the death of Khomeini, Rafsanjani became a president in 1989 and sought to reform Iran from being perceived as a radical state. Rafsanjani wanted to appear as a moderate in the eyes of the world as he pursued Iran’s foreign policy (Ansari, 2000).

The increasing external threat to the regime and the internal combustion within Iran has made its foreign policy posture to be assertive and aggressive. Iran fears that external actors in collaboration with internal actors will destabilize the regime. Thus, building national strength, social, economic, political, and technology advancement of nuclear power is pursuit
deliberately for the overall preservation of the system and as deterrence to the enemies of Iran. To achieve this, Iran is deliberate in its attempt to break the coordination of major powers against it and to frustrate any international consensus that seeks to neutralize Iran (Bahgat, 2006).

After the Iran-Iraq War which lasted for eight years from 1980 to 1988, the war saw the Sunni community rallied support in the Middle East behind President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. However, Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, depleted the support he enjoyed in the Middle East as many of the Arab states saw Saddam Hussein as a destabilizing force compared to Iran which was viewed as a mutual enemy (Segal, 1988).

Additionally, the September 11 2001 terror attack by the Al Qaeda in the United States of America aggravated the need to uproot undemocratic regimes as that is blamed for encouraging terrorism. Thus, the war on terror strategy beamed its light on Saddam Hussein as sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East and the amassing of Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). Hence, U.S.A (abbreviate from the first word) and its allies invaded Iraq in 2003 that eventually led to the death of Saddam Hussein. The West had courted Saddam Hussein as a counterbalance force against Iran in the region. Consequently, the elimination of Saddam Hussein in the Middle East as a geopolitical force favored Iran’s quest for influence. Iran began to spread its foreign policy wings monumentally into several countries of the Middle East. Hence, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria came under Iran’s sphere of influence after the invasion of Iraq and death of Saddam Hussein (Taft & Buchwald, 2003).

By 2011, the Arab Spring brought disruption and reordering of the old order of autocracy across countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. Thus, Iran leveraged on the disorder to tacitly meddle in the domestic affairs of Bahrain citing its support
for the Shia’s revolutionaries in the country. In Syria for example, Iran committed to support President Assad its old ally. This research seeks to understand Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East with focus on the Yemeni crisis and its support for the Houthi an affiliated Shia group (Mabon, 2012).

1.2 Statement of Problem

Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East has always been greeted with controversies. Iran’s strategy to export its revolutionary ideologies across the Middle East and to exert geopolitical influence in the region continue to define its foreign policy. Iran’s foreign policy is often seen as predatory and uses the Middle East as a power vector for global influence. The interplay between coercing Iran to give up its nuclear program and the reality of its regime security (regime survival) has been the lynchpin of Iran's foreign policy in the region. Iran fears that if it gives up the nuclear program, the USA will intimidate and overthrow the regime like it has done in other places. A typical example often cited by Iran is the Libya’s experience. Muammar Gaddafi was toppled and killed after the intervention of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a scenario in which Iran believe would have not happened if Muammar Gaddafi had resisted the temptation of dismantling its nuclear capabilities. Therefore, Iran sees itself as a countervailing force against Saudi Arabia, the West and Israel in the bid to advance its nationalist and revolutionary values while pursuing geopolitical power in the Middle East (Yossef & Cerami, 2015).

As part of the geopolitics of the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia are fiercely entangled in the struggle for the soul of Yemen. Saudi Arabia is known to have intervened in both Bahrain and Yemen in the past before the current crisis in Yemen. Saudi Arabia has always considered Yemen its private backyard since its creation in 1932, thus feel insecure with the presence of
Iran. The interventions were motivated by what Saudi Arabia called the move to protect the Middle East from the “Persian subversion”. Opponents of Iran portray it as a nefarious hegemonic power behind the scene instigating Shia Houthi in the civil war. More so, Iran is accused of using the Yemeni crisis opportunistically to justify its expansionist ambition in the region for influence. Therefore, Saudi Arabia continued to meddle in the domestic affairs of Yemen, while Iran continue to moot the intention to create a sphere of influence through its proxy the Houthi of the Zaydi Shia sect.

It is important to contend that Yemen is at a geostrategic location for Iran’s energy and regime security using energy as a geostrategic tool grand strategy. Significantly, the Persian Gulf possesses the 55% of the world crude oil reserves and Iran dominates the Persian Gulf. In addition, Iran wants to use Yemen crisis as a bargaining chip to resolve nuclear standoff and have its sanction lifted. Some of the key issues in the Yemeni crisis involves geopolitics and alliances, control of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, oil, religious sectarianism and the proxy war on terror. Besides, the emergence of multiplicity of actors (state and non-state), has increased the complexity of the conflict. The interest of external players in Yemen is not unconnected to the security concern on the Bab el-Mandeb strait which serves as an important route for the shipment of oil and gas in the region. Moreover, the fragility and eminent state collapse of Yemen has turned it into a safe haven for terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and has attracted the attention of security players around the world. Thus, the instability in Yemen is creating a third force in the country, which Saudi Arabia justify its intervention a “War Against Terror” (Shay, 2017).

Thus, Iran’s grand strategy and its involvement in Yemen is tied to economic security and regime survival. Also, Iran perceives its Sunni neighbours as threat to its overall interest in the
region. Therefore, Yemen serves as a ground for struggle for influence in the Middle East and balance of power as Iran depicts other Arab countries in terms of their alliance with the West and the threat to its regime security and stability (Gause III, 2014).

Some of the driving force of Iran contemporary strategy in the region is motivated by the need to defend its regime and allies especially Syria which stood by it during height of the Islamic Revolution. Additionally, Iran’s strategy is also expressed in its effort to support Hezbollah, to fight against regional Sunni extremism and to prevent the emergence of anti-Shiite regime in Syria should Bashar Al-Assad fall. Undoubtedly, Iran sees itself as the protector of Palestinians against Israel’s apartheid regime in the region. Thus, Iranian Shiite revivalism continue to challenge the Sunni status quo in the region and to establish a new (dis) order in the Middle East.

The research seeks to unpack Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East with specific focus on its involvement in the crisis in Yemen. The study will also underscore the implication of the America-Saudi-Iran triangle in Yemeni crisis

1.3 General Objective

The research seeks to articulate the discourse on Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East with Yemen as a case study.
1.4 Research Objectives

The study seeks to attain the following objectives:

1. To analyze Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East;
2. To assess Yemeni’s internal dynamics and how it promotes Iran’s grand strategy;
3. To examine Iran’s foreign policy in Yemen and how is at conflict with the interest of other actors.

1.5 Research Questions

The study set the following questions to answer the research problems:

1. What is Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East?
2. How is the internal dynamics in Yemen promote Iran’s grand strategy?
3. How does Iran’s foreign policy in Yemen counteract the interest of other actors?

1.6 Justification of the Study

The study seeks to accentuate how Iran utilizes its grand strategy to create a national revival for prestige and power, economic growth and the establishment of stability and order domestically. On the international arena, how Iran advances the rhetoric of a peaceful nuclear program on one hand, and on the other hand uses strategic containment and engagement to curtail United States encroaching influence in the region. Iran also uses flexibility in Syria, Iraq and the pursuit of cooperation in Afghanistan.

The study’s emphasis is on the expediency of looking at Iran’s approach to the management of nuclear crisis as a transactional (lifting sanction) and transformational (internal reforms in Iran) strategy. It analyses Iran’s foreign policy as it tilts toward being resistant and revolutionary in nature. Furthermore, it tries to situate Yemen in the chessboard of Iran’s grand strategy and how that is operationalized within Iran’s foreign policy in the Middle East. It
highlights how Yemen became a contested sphere of influence in the Middle East over the decades of struggle by regional and Western actors. The Yemeni crisis is viewed as the struggle for hegemonic control in the region and geopolitical influence pursuit by the two divides of the Sunni and Shiite alliances. It also seeks to find out if the Yemeni crisis is a push back against Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East. For instance, Iran has been accused of instigating Houthis to reject the United Nations peace plan and also providing military and logistic support to the crisis. Thus, Iran’s involvement must be seen within the larger context of its strategy to challenge the existing order in the Middle East to secure more geopolitical advantage.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study is organised into five chapters; chapter one introduces the general background of the study. It also states the problem statement, research questions and the objective of the study. In chapter two, the study reviews literature on Iran from the era of the Islamic caliphate to the overthrow of Mosaddeq, the emergence of Shah and the Islamic revolution of the 1979 and the defining paradigm of its foreign policy. Chapter three sets the landscape for the research design and methodology for the conduct of the study. It deals with qualitative design, methodology of data collection and analysis as well as ethical issues in research. Chapter four dealt with findings on Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East and Yemeni crisis as a case study. It also discusses and analyse the findings of the study. Then, chapter five makes conclusion, provides some policy recommendations and areas for possible future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This literature review is thematically divided into three sections. The first section deals with the ancient history of the Islamic world and the emergence of Sunni and Shia sects. The second section highlights the history of Iran, oil and the rule of Mosaddeq. The third part of the review covers the coup d’état and the emergence of Shah and his rule. The fourth section addresses the 1979 Islamic revolution and how it defined Iran foreign policy. Finally, the Iraq invasion of 2003 and the emergence of Iran as a dominant force in the Middle East.

2.1 The Islamic World: Sunni and Shia Nexus in International Politics

The division in the Middle East pre-colonial states began to emerge in A.D. 632 after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The difference was on the issue of who would succeed the prophet as the Caliph-meaning the deputy of God. Invalid source specified. According to Sunha (1978), some of the followers wanted Imam Ali to be the next leader after the prophet while others preferred Seyid Abubakar, prophet’s close friend and father in law. However, Seyid Abubakar became the first caliph. Ten years later another controversy emerged after the death of Abubakar, the majority voted for Seyid Umar as the third caliph. Subsequently, Imam Ali became the caliph after the death of Umar. While the Sunni tradition recognized all the caliphates, the Shia only Imam as the only caliph. Some Shia cursed the three claiming they were usurpers of power. Since then the two sects have struggling for supremacy in the Muslim world. Sinha posited that the Shias recite 'Tavarra' cursing Ali's three predecessors while their counterparts the Sunnis cannot tolerate the three caliphs being cursed and this has been the main cause of conflicts between the two strands of Islam.
Corduan (2012) also had his share of contribution when he said that, “An understanding of the events that occurred right after Prophet Muhammad’s death is crucial to an understanding of the contemporary Muslim world”. Those events after the death of Prophet Muhammad serve as the source of the major divisions in the Islamic world between Shiites and Sunnis. Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2009), after Prophet Muhammad died without declaring or endorsing to his followers who would succeed him created confusion on who should lead the Muslim community, the disagreement over what rule should be employed in appointing a successor divided the Muslims and created major divisions till now.

Whereas Sunni wanted the successor of Muhammad to be elected, the Shia wanted the heir to come from Muhammad’s family line through Prophet Muhammad’s son in law. At the backdrop of these differences however, since A.D 632, have much in common. Daniel and Mahdi elaborated this fact when they said that “they use the same Koran, believe in the same notion of God, venerate same prophet, pray in the same direction to the same God and fast the same numbers of days” (Condruan, 2012).

In contemporary times, the tension between the Sunnis and Shias got worse during Iran-Iraq War of 1980. The war lasted for eight years. Arab States in the Middle East rallying support behind in President Saddam Hussein of Iraq against Iran. However, after that, Hashemi Rafsanjani became a president in 1989 through election and pursued a moderate foreign policy compared to his predecessor. The invasion of Saddam Hussein’s of Kuwait in 1990 gave President Rafsanjani an opportunity to be seen as a better ally than Saddam (Ansari, Iranian Foreign Policy Under Khatami, 2011). Consequently most of the Gulf states supported the USA’s invasion of Iraq in 2003.
The city of Lucknow in India has showed a history of strained relations between Sunni and Shia Muslims. This city, according to Sinha (1978), is the only city with a large Muslim community where there have been no Hindu Muslim riot but between the two Muslim sects of Shia and Sunnis. There has also been a surge in the activities of extremist and violent non state actors in countries such as Lebanon, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, with a clear and unmistakable anti-Iran, anti-Shiite platform in the world. Zarif (2014) added by saying that a campaign has promoted Islamophobia, and Shiite-phobia, Iran phobia and depicted Iran as a serious threat to regional peace and security in the Middle East. Iran is the heartland of Shia Islam in the Middle East. The orchestrated campaign has supported anti-Iran claimants in the region; subsequently tarnishing Iran's image and undermining its stature by arming Iran's regional rivals; actively supporting anti-Iran forces, such as the Taliban and other extremist groups; and fomented disagreements between Iran and its non-predominantly Shia Muslim neighbors.

2.1.1 Mossadeq and the Re-Installation of the Shah

Iran came into the limelight of international politics during the reign of Mohammed Mossadeq. Mossadeq the 35th Prime Minister of Iran was highly regarded and loved by Iranians because of his loyalty and nationalistic posture. As a populist leader, he frowned at foreign intervention and exploitation of Iranian oil, and supported democracy and civil rights. His anti-imperialistic sentiments and the move to stop the domination of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in the oil sector through the policy nationalization angered the United Kingdom (Louis, 2004). on the other hand, Zahrani (2002) argues that, since the coup of the 1953 that saw Mosaddeq toppled by the connivance of USA and the UK, the aftermath left the Middle East in shock and created suspicion and lack of trust. Mossadeq removal was attributed to challenging the monopoly and dominant role of British Oil Company in the extractive industry. The monopoly
gave undue advantage to foreign companies which itself was a threat to the sovereignty of Iran. His attempt to nationalise the oil assets incurred the wrath of the British government and its American ally to overthrow a democratically elected government.

This happened when he was elected as prime minister in parliaments where he cleverly insisted that he would not assume the office he had been elected into unless the parliament also approved an act he had proposed that would ensure the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry which passed. Britain responded fury to the nationalization of oil went ahead to warn European companies doing business in Iran to pull out or face retribution. To prove how serious they were, the still potent British navy began interdicting ships carrying Iranian oil on the grounds that they were transporting stolen cargo. These move with the fact that the Western oil giants, which were siding with London, owned almost all the oil tankers then in existence, managed to blockade Iran's petroleum exports almost completely (Takeyh, 2014).

The USA under president Truman tried to be a broker between the two opposing sides but eventually, Mosaddeq and his allies rejected every U.S. proposal that preserved any degree of British participation in Iran's oil sector. Territorial integrity and sovereignty became the key driver for Iran’s foreign policy as it is approached with a great sense of aggression and expansionism.

The British argued that Mosaddeq does not have the right to nationalize an asset funded by the British government. Britain feared that if that is allowed, it will have ripple effect on other British assets in the Middle East like the Suez Canal in Egypt and president Gamal Abdel Nasser would follow suit (Louis, 2004). The U.K’s M16 to justify the British aggression against Mosaddeq by accusing him of promoting communist and giving undue advantage to the Soviets. The British diplomats were expelled from Iran in 1952 for interference in the
domestic affairs of the country. By 1953, the British M16 with the assistance of America’s CIA overthrew the government of Mosaddeq. The event marked and heightened the rise of anti-west sentiments in Iran (Louis, 2004).

Obama in his visit to the Middle East was clearer when he alluded to the fact that USA played a decisive role to oust Mossadeq and install the Shah. “In the middle of the cold war, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected government in Iran” he said, Takeyh (2014) maintained that this statement was, “a public acknowledgment that the United States shared some of the blame for its long-simmering conflict with the Islamic Republic”.

Various scholars have described Mosaddeq as a nationalist and Takeyh described him as a champion of Iranian anticolonialism and nationalism and managed to draw together and unite many disparate elements into his political party called the National Front.

Mosaddeq had a hard time with the parliamentarians because the Majlis (parliament) became the main seat of his opposition as he was unable to end oil crisis. The prime minister then dissolved the Maljis leading to the all the deputies of National Front to resign. The legislature was crippled, and with the oil crisis facing the country, Mosaddeq then resorted to threatening the USA to get funding and aid. President Dwight Eisenhower wrote to him that the only path out of his predicament was to settle the oil dispute with the UK (Takeh, 2014).

Washington considered a plot hatched by Britain to oust Mosaddeq and were working with some figures in Iran who were in opposition by then. The plot to overthrow Mosaddeq began with the CIA and MI6 launching a propaganda campaign aimed at raising doubts about Mosaddeq, paying journalists to write critical stories of Mosaddeq, charging that he was very corrupt, greedy for power, and even of Jewish descent— had a crude attempt to exploit anti-Semitic prejudices, which the Western intelligence agencies wrongly believed were common
in Iran then. The main reason for this was "to cause the fall of the Mossadeq government" and replace it with a military regime "which would reach an equitable oil settlement, enabling Iran to become economically sound and financially solvent, and which would vigorously prosecute the dangerously strong Communist party (Little, 2004).

General Zahedi was used by the Shah to stage a coup but it failed. Mosaddeq was On August 19, the army chief of staff, General Taqi Riahi, who had stayed loyal to Mosaddeq until then, telephoned by General Taqi Riahi to confess that he had lost control. Royalist military units took over Tehran's main radio station and several important government mainstream ministries. Seeing that, according to Takeyh (2014), Mosaddeq went into hiding in a neighbor's house but later surrendered only to be tried and jailed three years for treason. It should be known that the USA’s clandestine actions in the Muslim world did not begin with the Mosaddeq regime rather, according to Little, it had been initiated during the second world war with the office of strategic services that was began by William J Donovan who was a lawyer.

The regime of Mosaddeq came to an end by August 1953. The U.K tagged him as not only stubborn but irrational. That perception necessitated the ‘Operation Ajax’ to overthrow him and install the Shah’s monarchy, who was viewed pro-Western ally, however, the Iranian saw Shah as the puppet of the West (Ruehsen, 1993). Richards (1975), adds that, apart from the nationalization of the oil company, there were other underlining including as the power struggle between Mosaddeq and the Shah.

On assumption of power, Shah denationalized the oil company and renamed it the British Petroleum. Furthermore, U.S.A aid started to flow after it was temporally stopped following Mosaddeq’s government policies considered as unfriendly. The U.S.A was believed to have given Iran 73 million dollars in aid.
Eventually Mosaddeq, his closest ministries and some members of the Tudeh Party were arrested to pave way for Shah to constitute his government. The role played by Britain and America helped to sow the seed of national sentiment in Iran. However, the Shah and his U.S.A sponsors realized that Iran’s reliant on U.S.A for primary support undercut the long term sustainability of his regime.

Furthermore, in order to please the West and to stabilize his throne Shah initiated the White Revolution also known as Modernization Revolution in 1963. The revolution was focused on land issues, nationalization of forests, sale of state owned enterprises to the private sector, profit sharing plan for industrial workers, eradication of illiteracy, and the promotion of the rights of women. However some of the political leaders like Asadullah Allam the leader of Mordom Party saw the White Revolution as a tool for the Shah to stabilize power and to secure legitimacy for his dynasty (Ansari, 2001).

Shah continued to exert power in the region which raised concern among the states in the Middle East and the United States of America. For instance, his decision to hike oil price, expand the nuclear program and the military build-up to assert control over the Persian Gulf and the crackdown on opposition was viewed negatively domestic, regional and international observers. Shah’s over-bearing and despotic disposition have been attributed as impetuous to the Islamic revolution which brought Khomeini to limelight (Ganji, 2012).

Khomeini, a highly respected figure in the Shia sect became outspoken and objected Shah’s policies in several public statements. Shah was accused of westernization of Iran at the detriment of Islamic culture. Subsequently Khomeini was arrested and detained for two months before he was moved to a house arrest. The action incited a mass revolution demanding his
release, the government surrendered to the pressure and eventually released him but forced him out Iran, he exiled to Turkey then to Najaf in Iraq (Milani, 2018).

In addition, Takeh (2014) maintains that, the interference of the U.S.A and UK in Iran’s internal affairs played a key role in primarily ruining the democratic institutions in Iran under Mosaddeq. The impact of ousting Mosaddeq eventually turned Shah into a dictator. The ousting of Mosaddeq brought the Shah to leadership. Shah’s idiosyncratic and poor governance incited the revolt against his dictatorship which culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

However, a journey back to the beginning of the Shah is necessary. Saikal in his book dubbed The rise and Fall of the Shah major presents a very important theme and contention which is that the Shah pursued with strong determination certain goals and policies that were either contradictory or beyond Iran's resources and capabilities. His major goal was to strengthen the institution of monarchy and, at the same time, to change Iran into a very prosperous world capitalist power (Saikal, The Rise and Fall of Shah, 1980).

The goals and policies of the Shah became the very reason that eventually stimulated the downfall of the Shah because they created a lot of enemies for the Shah within Iran itself and from international forces alike. This is because Iran’s goal of being a regional hegemon was not congruent with its resources and capabilities. The Shah was contradictory in leadership because on the one hand, it promoted regional economic and political cooperation; while, on the other, he tried to uproot any development that was not in the Iranian regional security interests (Saikal, The Rise and Fall of Shah, 1980). In his analysis, Saikal gave a moving conclusion that the Shah failed to deliver a democratic Iran despite their promises to do so on various occasions.
The White Revolution like it or not was, of course, the Shah's most significant attempt to transform Iran according to his vision, and had vital internal and international repercussions (Kazemi, 1981). This is true because even according to Saikal the Shah succeeded in his oil policy, mostly because "the White Revolution created a degree of economic and political stability in Iran" (p. 130). The Shah had a vision for Iran as a very great civilization and a regional power. But the goal was overrated because the Shah’s "achievements appeared more impressive on paper than they were in reality" (Saikal, p. 201).

It is essential to discuss the white revolution in detail because it formed the part of the thesis of the Shah’s leadership in Iran. History records few instances wherein a king has led a revolution against his own courtiers, generals, aristocrats, and religious leaders and Muhammad Shahin shah just did that in Iran (Shahbaz, 1963).

It’s worth noting that he derived no gain from this revolution but the main beneficiaries of the white revolution were Iran's impoverished majority of fifteen million hitherto landless peasants, the wretched of Iran. The land reform was most vital to the majority poor because the landowners initially had been enjoying absolute power over the poor in Iran. It is good to have a picture of the process of this reforms. The Shah presented to the Iranian Congress a six-point program pulling together the various measures that could implement land and electoral reforms in Iran. The Congress played a central role of approving the points by acclamation and was then exhorted to go out and stump for its approval by the public (Shahbaz, 1963).

The approach was successful but radical departure from Iran’s approach due to the endorsement that had been given to the Shah’s program in a referendum in January on 26th 1963 where the rural people voted without control from landlords. When the land reform program was proclaimed both foreign and domestic critics were skeptical. They would not
believe an iota of that program as they thought that it would be blocked from happening but the Shah was systematic.

The opponents opposed these reforms on the basis of constitutionality but a letter from the Shah sealed the deal and made it clear that he meant what he stood for. It read in part that, order made this clear in the following words: "The interests of the nation override all other considerations. If we concern ourselves with impractical regulations and lose the favorable opportunity available to us now, we shall commit a great sin. The progress and development of the nation should be given priority over adherence to impractical laws and personal tests. With speed the government should intensify its drive against corruption and uproot it in the shortest possible time." (p.19).

The electoral system was changed by replacing small holders and workers for nobles and allowing women to participate in the elections. Shahbaz in his analysis claimed that the achievements during the White Revolution exceed by far the accomplishments of Iran's neighboring countries over the years of their revolts. This is because the poor were no longer forced to support the tyrannical system of landlords and this is seen in the Shah’s statement that read, "appeals: "My dear nation ... from now on we together shall turn the pages of history. With God's help we shall build a most progressive and vigorous country. The shackles of slavery and bondage are broken forever" (p.20).

2.1.2 The Iran’s Revolution

The Islamic revolution of 1978-1979 epitomizes the overthrow of monarchy, resentment of pro-westerner values and the installation of Islamic regime. It was predicted that the revolutionary turmoil in Iran following the revolution would paralyze country. Since the
revolution, Iran has grown stronger and emerged as an important player in the Middle East and globally. Thus, Saikal argues, is evident in the 2015 international nuclear agreement (Saikal, 2019).

By consolidating power, Shah grew into a dictator cracking down on his critics. The nationalistic resistance against began to grow into a revolutionary movement. Khomeini and his sympathizers took advantage of the students uprising and turned it into a full blown revolution.

Khomeini emerged as a spiritual leader to overthrow Shah in what is popularly known as the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran (Downes, 2018). Khomeini came to power after ousting Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from power and turned Iran into a theocracy state known today as the Islamic Republic of Iran. The revolution closed the 2,500-year tradition of monarchy in Iran and replaced it with a supreme religious leader according to the Shi’a traditions (Hunter, 1992).

Since the revolution, Iran foreign policy experienced drastic paradigm shift to assertive and aggressive posture in the Middle East and the perception of interference by major powers in its domestic governance ultimately to cause regime instability. The posture, thus defined Iran’s grand strategy of regime security (Calabrese, 2016).

Bakhash (2011) adds that apart from Iran’s foreign policy being dominated by ideological orientations it was no different to the geostrategic interests that was pursued by the Shah’s monarchy. He further argues that the difference was that during Shah’s administration Iran was an ally to U.S.A and the West, and had good relations with Israel.

By the mid-1990s, Iran started developing it long range missile that will go beyond Iraq, this development led to the emergence of hostile response from Israel and other countries in the
Middle East who felt threatened by the new military capability of Iran. This became the turning point in the global view about Iran in the military and intelligence community (Hitchcock, 2013).

Both Iran and Israel saw Saddam Hussein as common enemy. However, after his death, Iran aggressive foreign policy in the region became a concern and security threat to Israeli as well as the international community especially after the inspection and uncovering of the nuclear site that raised eyebrows and concerns (Kaye, Nader, & Roshan, 2011).

The post-cold war era ushered some systemic changes in Iran’s foreign policy. The changes led to unstable external environment and would force Iran to be less hospitable, thereby posing foreign policy dilemmas and security challenges (Hunter, 2010).

2.1.3 The Fall of Iraq and Iran’s Regional Influence

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the United States of America and its allies and the death of Saddam Hussein played paved the way for Iran’s dominance in the region. That also helped Iran to normalize relations to some point with a number of Arabs countries in the region. Iran gradually spread its influence in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria (Ansari, 2000).

Another important event in the geopolitical influence of Iran in the region is associated with the Arab spring. In 2011 during the Arab Spring whereby chaos and revolutions erupted in Tunisia and later spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. The spring started in the city of Tunis when Mohamed Bouaziz street vendor protested against the poor public services, inequality, poverty and corruption by setting himself on fire. The action was met by uproar in Tunis and other Arab states result in the ousting of the Tunisian president Ben Ali who later fled to Saudi Arabia (Asongu & Nwachukwu, 2016). The Arab Spring also had huge impact
on Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. Mubarak and Gaddafi were toppled while Syria was engulfed in protracted civil war. The Arab Spring mostly affected the Sunni Muslim states. It gave Iran advantage as it tried to meddle in Bahrain’s internal issues citing support of the Shia’s revolutionaries in Bahrain. Iran also stood with Syrian as a strong ally of President Assad (Yossef & Cerami, 2015)

In Yemen, the Houthis capitalized on Spring in collaboration with protestors to demand the fall of Saleh. The Houthis’ demand turned into an insurgency and spread into big cities of Yemen especially in Sanaa (Durac, 2012). In response, Saudi Arabia supported her Sunni allies and marshalled support to invade Yemen to fight Houthis an ally of Shia in Iran. The external interference by Saudi Arabia and Iran turned the conflict into a proxy fight between Sunni and Shia in Yemen. Saudi Arabia saw that as an opportunity to contain the ever-increasing influence of Iran and Shia sect in the region as witnessed in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Fraihat, 2018).

2.1.4 Iran and the Grand Strategy

Danner asserts that grand strategy as a concept is primarily connected to the western world history. He defined grand strategy as “the general, long-term security and foreign policies of a territorial state”. Invariably, grand strategy embodies state’s national interest and how it is applied in the economic, political diplomatic, military, financial, informational sector of a state as a for statecraft (Danner, 2018).

One of the strategies of Iran also is to export the revolutionary Islam ideologies across the Middle East and mobilize Muslims against Israel in defense of Palestine for strategic geopolitical influence in the region. Oil diplomacy and state survival became the cornerstone of Iran’s new foreign policy. Iran hails itself as defender of the Muslim community while
championing the establishment of a new Islamic political system across the Middle East (Bakash, 2011).

Like in all strategy, Iran’s is shredded in the schema of denial. It also practices the principles of an offensive strategy. The strategy is based on the idea that “attack the other fellow in the flank or rear instead of the front…surprise him by any means…attack his morale before you attack him”. Thus, the state’s actions are coordinated to maintain balance of power against its perceived adversaries (Martel, 2015).

Iran strategy is framed as socialist, revolutionary Islamic and Third-Worldist in its approach since the late 1970s has become central to it post-revolutionary foreign policy practice. Thus, it pursues the externalization, objectification, internationalization and introjections of its culture and values to promote its identities, interest and preference in the international system (Adib-Moghaddam, 2007).

Beeman (2005), however posits that the nuclear program of Iran which seeks to guarantee regime survival has become the center of its foreign policy dispute with the West. Thus, Iran's Strategic Weapons Programs has informed speculation about its motive on the Middle East as well as threat to the international community. Thus, Iran continued to pursue policies that will ensure its regime security and in an expansive strategy in the region.

Zarif (2014) argues that, Iran finds itself in a fundamentally crisis-ridden region. The decades-long occupation of Palestine and the ongoing conflict there has taken a destructive toll on the well-being and development of the entire Middle East because of a series of protracted external military interventions, most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq. He claims that the decades-long occupation of Palestine, "the Arab Spring" also called by others as "the Islamic Awakening" and the terrorist groups in the Middle East have presented Iran with a challenge that any state
must device means to survive. Given the entire overall regional picture and the dynamics at work between local and external players in regards to Iran especially the USA, Iran today has to grapple with a number of major challenges in its external relations.

The current dispute between Iran and USA where Trump referred to Iran’s revolutionary guard as a terrorist organization is not any different from the hitherto CIA operations from the ouster of Mossadeq whose main interest was to meddle in Iran’s internal affairs and ensure regime change.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Regime Security and Neorealism Theory

The study will apply regime security and neorealism theories as tools for theoretical analysis of Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East. The influence of the realist school in the conceptualization of the national interest is beyond doubt. In the realism paradigm, power and state interests drive state behaviour.

The theory was used to analyse how Iran applies the grand strategy in Yemen. The regime security theory enabled the study to understand why and how Iran is involved in the Yemeni crisis with respect to its motivation.

Waltz’s neorealism (structural realism) as a theory of International Relations argues that the reaction of a state to pressure can be attributed to systemic factors and the dictates of other external forces in international system. Thus, states are constrained by the choices they make. Accordingly, Waltz (1988), posit that the perception of anarchy in the international system by the state and its desire for survival compel states to seek self-help and rational action. It is this self-help that Iran relies on to pursue the development of nuclear capability and expand its
spheres of influence in the region (Waltz, 2012), and the aggressive expansion of its interest in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Iran views Israel and Saudi as threats to its existence. In this zero-sum game of survival where states seek to gain relative to other states, they seek high politics which is hard power making military security the key focus of international politics hence bringing into play the regime security theory.

According Koblentz (2013) regime security theory fits into the neoclassical realist paradigm. The theory envisages that domestic threats to a regime can influence its security policy as external threats. Hence, the theory emphasizes how internal security threats motivates state security strategies, foreign policy and the development of lethal weapons. It contends that states whose foreign policy is centered on regime security acquire and retain power through means that are not democratic, thus, continue to face frequent regime insecurity as a result of illegitimacy, political chauvinism, poor social cohesion, institutional deficits and domestic instability (Mohammed, 1995). The regime security theory argues that a state tends to perceive its isolation from other major powers and pressure to reform its domestic institutions.

The state is therefore considered despotic, repressive and authoritarian with no recourse to fundamental human rights abuse. The state in this case, is protective and fear interference in its domestic affairs from external actors through the use of persons within the state. The imperative of foreign power encroachment to destabilize the state and topple the regime becomes the defining and driving factor for the state policy. The state acts rationally in its domestic foreign policy decision making to maximize its utility (Allison, 1971).

For regime survival, the state may develop nuclear capacity in response to military threats around it. The threat can also be explained in terms of the proliferation of superior military capabilities around it from greater powers or their proxies. In essence, superpowers such as
Unites States of America and others countries tend mount pressure on, and try to dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear power. The foreign pressure is expressed through the imposition of sanctions such as removal of security guarantee, arms embargo and foreign aid. America, Britain, Germany and others who serve as patron demand democratic reforms (Solingen, 2007). This demand is what the regime perceives a threat to its survival. Thus, in search of support, the state aligns with other authoritarian states around it for material and moral support. The theory also provides the explanation on why states are motivated to acquire nuclear weapon.

Therefore, neorealism and regime security theory are very complementary in explaining Iran foreign policy. While regime security looks at the internal dynamics and perceived threats, the neorealist theory focus on the foreign policy behavior of Iran in the Middle East as it builds up aggression and alliances in the region.

2.2.3 Literature Gap

The literature that exist on Iran’s grand strategy largely focuses broadly on Middle East with the respective involvement in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. However, in Yemen, the involvement of Iran is still very tacit and a nascent development that motivates this research. Information about Iran’s role in Yemen is still very contested and largely remain on policy briefs, newspapers, television and social media.

Hence, this study seeks to provide knowledge on why Iran’s grand strategy has changed in the Yemeni crisis and how it is applied in the Yemeni crisis serves its regime security, compared to its grand strategy in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. Therefore, the research will explore and underscore Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East and Yemen through a qualitative enquiry.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the techniques and methods for carrying this study. The outline includes the research design, sampling method, data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation, ethical consideration, and scope and delimitations.

3.1 Research Design and Methodology

This study was designed as a qualitative research. Research design has been defined by Creswell as plan and procedure for a study. The plan embraces three major components, namely, philosophical underpinning, strategies for inquiry and the deliberate choice of methods for how data will be collected, analysed and interpreted (Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, 3rd ed., 2009). On the other hand, methodology is viewed by Bryman as the overall process of how research is conducted (Bryman, 2012). Kothari adds that, methodology is the systematic strategy for dealing with research problem through a scientific approach (Kothari & Garg, 2014).

Therefore, this research was designed as a qualitative inquiry based on the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism and interpretivism. Both constructivist and interpretivist approach seek to explain the connotation of experience through understanding, description and discovery of meaning. Hence, qualitative findings tend to highlight the participants’ experiences, culture, intentions, attitude and social construct about the subject matter being understudied. Conceptually, qualitative research embroils the exploration and understanding of how a group or individual construct meaning to social, economic or political problems. The qualitative research design emphasizes data collected from participants’ experience and
analyse deductively from different themes (Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, 3rd ed, 2007).

The study utilised the qualitative approach in which phenomenological techniques were used to understand Iran’s grand strategy in the Middle East with particular focus on the Yemeni crisis and the complex role of external actors. Essentially, the phenomenological and a case study approach to the study was used to identify patterns and themes vital to understanding Iran’s grand strategy, its implementation of foreign policy by providing meaning and experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the design was critical to understanding the internal and external dynamics as a social and political reality of the Iranian grand strategy in the Middle East with reflection on the Yemeni crisis.

In view of the expediency of ensuring validity of data and findings, the study adhered to the importance of worthiness, conformity, credibility and dependability of data of the study. Hence, sufficient details and triangulation of data was used to reinforce findings through the use of multiple sources of data in the study. Consequently, this approach empowers the researcher to avert discrepancy of information and to clarify the possibility of bias (Darawsheh, 2014).

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The study utilized primary data from interviews (semi-structured) and observation. Essentially, the interview was used to provide an in-depth phenomenological description of the reality and issues in the Yemeni crisis and how Iran’s grand strategy interplays with other forces to influence the internal dynamics in Yemen. The process of interviewing participants was guided by an interview protocol. An interview protocols is usually a guideline for directing qualitative
researcher to conduct interview such as what to do, say before and after the interview to obtain informed consent for the purpose of collecting relevant information from the interviewee. The protocol also outlines the list of questions/bullet points to guide the interview. The researcher explored several ways to collect the qualitative data such as:

1. Face-to-face interview, skype, and telephone;
2. Personal notes and observation;
3. Peer reviewed journals and books;
4. Newspapers, magazines and reports;
5. Visual contents such as photograph, video, audio, maps and other objects;
6. As well as some selected social media discussions (Netnographic source).

Netnography is a form of data collection. An online research tool derived from an interpretive method which originated from ethnography, it relies on digital social interaction and communication context such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp etc.), (Kozinets, 2014).

For secondary data collection, the researcher used the library of the United States International University-Africa in Nairobi. The researcher recognizes that the library houses relevant books and numerous subscriptions for prominent journals that really enhanced the research on Middle East, Iran, Israel, Iraq, internationals relations and foreign policy.

3.3 Sampling Method

The study sought to use the purposive sampling technique to collect primary data. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample in which “members of a sample are chosen with a purpose to represent a location or type in relation to the criterion” (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 77). In that regard, the study conducted 10 online
interviews across academics, diplomats, think tanks, Middle East media correspondents from Yemen and the diaspora. Due to the sensitivity of the research the number of the respondents has depended on their willingness to participate in the research.

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study used the following data analysis approaches namely; content analysis, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), discourse analysis and infographic presentations of findings and conclusion. To utilize the techniques, data collected from interviews was categorized thematically using data coding, assigning labels and themes to be interpreted through interpretive methods.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The importance of ethical consideration in any research can never be overemphasized. Therefore, this study recognized the importance and seriousness of issues associated with violating research ethics. Some of the general safeguards to ensure compliance are suggested by Gibson and Brown (2009) as:

1. Informed consent;
2. Avoiding harm;
3. Confidentiality;
4. Integrity and professionalism.

Furthermore, the study was also guided by the three basic principles of research ethics; respect for human persons, beneficence, and justice (National Institutes of Health, 1979). To ensure the attainment of ethical guidelines, the researcher sought the necessary approvals from Institutional Review Board (Leavy, 2017). Thus, approval was obtained from United States International University-Africa Ethics Review Committee.
Importantly, interviews were carried out in a manner that guarantees the safety of the participants as informed consent are sought and granted. Thus, participants were briefed and debriefed at the beginning and end of the interview respectively. Where a participant does not want his real name mentioned, anonymity was applied to promote confidentiality. Therefore, information considered harmful to the participant was and will not be made public (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The research was also conscious of the need to avoid in its entirety unethical practices such as plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of data.

3.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the study starts from the historical tracing approach which sought to underscore the Islamic world from the death of prophet Muhammed to the formation of the modern state of Iran. In addition, it also looked at international politics during the era of Mosaddeq to Shah and the Islamic revolution of 1979. Thus, it focused on the revolution, regime security as a defining factor in the crafting of the Iran grand strategy in the Middle East and Yemen. The study acknowledged the security volatility in Yemen and the challenge of primary data collection in the field was actually insurmountable. Therefore, the research heavily rely on conducting interviews through telephone and skype especially for participant in Middle East. Also, some of the participants who were targeted include diplomat, embassy staff, media, think tanks, academics and Yemeni Diaspora in Kenya. With this approach, the research envisaged that constraint of distance and volatile security situation in Yemen for data collection would be addressed. The researcher utilized the technique of snowballing to reach many credible informants and obtain relevant information. It is also important to note that, the researcher is highly proficient in Arabic and has travelled widely in the Middle East region. Thus, this
experience really helped to enhance the reading and analysis of Arabic texts and other media contents that greatly enriched this research.

The greatest challenges faced in this research are noteworthy. Firstly, the translation from Arabic to English consumed much of the time which derailed my research a great deal. Secondly, majority of the respondents were from rural areas whereby they have complained of poor internet network. This implied that I had to send the questions first then get the response after some time.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to analyze Iran’s grand Strategy in the Middle East, the internal dynamics of Yemen that promoted Iran’s strategy and how Iran’s grand strategy is at conflict with the interests of other actors in the Middle East.

4.1 Iran’s Grand Strategy in the Middle East

Calabrese (1994) suggests that in order to understand Iran’s contemporary foreign policy it is equally important to comprehend and analyze its security environment after the 1979 Revolution. The United States’ relation with Iran was never the same as it was with the Shah’s regime, it was further escalated by the demonization of the USA as an essential external enemy of Iran by Khomeini. In addition the US’s support of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War was perceived by Iran as a threat to its national security, hence the tension and hostility between the two states were on the rise since then. However they avoided direct confrontation for their own interest because they both depended on oil so as to safeguard the stability of the region.

The importance of building network of proxies became very expedient for Iran after the war with Iraq in which they were effectively utilized against the regime of Saddam Hussein (Windrem, 2019). The proxies, like in other parts of the region, have been used by Iran to take advantage of chaotic situation caused by war to promote its interest and balance of power against its rivals.

The increasing influence of Iran in the Middle East is made possible through the use of array of non-state actors for example Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hizbu Sha’bi in Iraq.

The groups partner with Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Force in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Iran’s effort is intended to build land corridors across the region
to facilitate movement of fighters and military logistics to conflict areas. Critically, the support of non-state actors is central to Iran’s strategy to tackle the competing presence of the USA in the region (Jones, 2019).

The 1979 revolution of Iran mark the beginning of its desire to export its revolution to other countries. It is inherently connected to a deliberate rhetoric to strengthen its regime and grand strategy in the Middle East and elsewhere. This, is at the center of it rivalry with Saudi Arabia. (Ahmed, 2018)

Therefore, the internationalization of the revolution is tilted towards the support for Shiite groups in the region intended for cultural and political influence (Grare, 2007). Accordingly, Iran has overtly supported Shiite groups around the world (Vatanka, Iran and Pakistan: Security, Diplomacy and American Influence., 2015). Some of the well-known cases includes but not limited to Hezbollah in Lebanon, Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Hamas, pro-Iranian Shi’ite militias in Iraq, the Syrian regime and the Houthi rebels in Yemen (Frantzman, 2019).

The IRGC otherwise known as *sepah-pasdar-e enqelab-e eslami* was established shortly after the 1979 revolution. It was to serve as a force for the protection of the revolution. The IRGC is ascribed as “the guardians of the revolution and the fighting sons of Islam” (“Khomeyni Calls on Soldiers,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, in FBIS-MEA., 1979) This was to mitigate the suspicion about the loyalty of the national army that was formed under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The revolution advances the importance of clergy in the national governance led by the supreme leader (Ostovar, 2016).

Thus, the IRGC became very powerful due to the legitimacy it earned as the vanguard of the revolution (Uskowi, 2019). The IRGC comprises of the land force, navy, air force and Basij (an auxiliary militia which concern itself with internal security, moral policing and the
suppression of dissidents). It also manages commercial activities alongside the office of the Supreme Leader.

The IRGC coordinates for states and sub-state allies outside Iran through the department of special operations (Misaq Unit). The irregular army is saddled with the responsibility of training, intelligence, equipping and financing state and non-state allies. The collaboration between the IRGC and its allies have led to the assassinations, bombing, cyber-attacks and the provision of economic and humanitarian aid (Cordesman, 2014). Primarily, it is instrumental in the expansion of Iran’s influence in the region.

Some of militia groups under the sponsorship of Iran includes but not limited to Rasulallah Corps (Arabian Peninsula), Ramazan Corps (Iraq), Ansar Corps (Afganistan), and Levant Corps (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel) (Uskowi, 2019). The militia groups have helped Iran to checkmate and counter balance any attack from its enemies in the region from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and stretching to the Mediterranean Sea (Ali S., 2018). The IRGC personnel are estimated to over 125,000 forces and IRGC amassing in excess of 15,000 soldiers (Military Balance, 2019).

The operations of the IRGC has continued to expand and stretching to other regions. Iranian agencies like Ministry of intelligence (MOIS) have facilitated the establishment of relations with states and non-state actors in the Middle East and South Asia (Coats, 2019). Important to note, the proxy groups are not Shia but mostly are. For instance, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are both Sunni organizations (Uskowi, 2019).

For instance, in the fallout of the Iran-Iraq war, it was believed that Iran actively supported a Shia militant group in Iraq. They were trained inside Iran as well as developed a training infrastructure along the border for capacity building and logistics supply for the foreign fighters.
against Iraq’s government. One of the groups in Iraq that enjoyed support from Iran include the Badr Brigade an armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Since the war, records indicated that about 5,000 of Shia foreign militias using IRGC unions were killed. This shows the massive mobilization of foreign militia groups drafted into the war by Iran. This has been very consistent with the strategy of Iran in the region (Ali A., 2018).

Also, the IRGC has an established link with Lebanese Hezbollah and Amal Movement in Lebanon. Iran provided the financing, training, equipment and ideological guidance to the groups. They were expected to imitate the Iran model their operations based on Tehran ideals (Ostovar, 2016).

An important history in the rhetoric of Iran is the period that marked the shift from having the west as ally. Prior to the revolution, Iran was under a monarchical rule of Mohammed Reza Shah who was considered a puppet of the West. Thus, since 1979, Iran relies on the anti-west dominance trajectory to reject foreign influence and supports militia groups to fight the West as freedom fighters as noted in its constitution. For instance, the preamble of the constitution states that, Iran will adhere to ‘Islamic principles and norms, which represent an honest aspiration of the Islamic Ummah (Community, i.e. the elites in the Islamic Republic of Iran system)’.

The first major display of Iran’s grand strategy was tested in the war with Iraq in 1980-1988. Iran had engaged in the war in defense of its territorial integrity following its claim that Iraq invaded its territory. Iran’s grand strategy to pursue dominance and the imposition of its will
after defeating Iraq. Since then, the experience of Iran-Iraq enable its strategy to undergo modification that will respond to other challenges. This, demonstrates the efficacy of the idealistic revolutionary sentiments tended towards the resistance of any influence of “imperial powers” in Iran and sphere of interest (Fred, 1987).

The relations between Iran and the USA had a fitful trajectory especially after the 1979 revolution. The Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to pursue a revolutionary rhetoric that pragmatically promotes its national interest in the Middle East and around the world for self-defense, self-preservation and political influence (Kamel, 2018). While Iran seeks an unfettered space to promote its values abroad, it is very unwelcoming to others to pursue theirs in Iran and its affiliated states (Shahram, 2000).

According to Lawrence Freedman, a grand strategy can be conceptualized as ‘a conflict was anticipated, alliances forged, economies geared, people braced, resources allocated and military roles defined’ in which Iran is believed to have practiced since 1979 (Freedman, 2013). Therefore, Iran’s grand strategy is hinged on the revolutionary pursued of a pragmatic national interest especially with the United States, Europe and other countries. Martel noted that, the grand strategy as a concept is rooted in the Greek word strategic. The word focuses on how military sets goals and set to achieve them (Martel, 2015). In addition, to the conceptualization of the idea of grand strategy, Edward Luttwak (2003) posit that, it is contextually relevant in military circle with a broader impact on national interests international and economic activity.

Adib-Moghadam identified four aspect of cultural Iran’s foreign policy namely the rejection of western influence, promotion of 1979 revolutionary idea, embedded foreign policy decision-
making processes and the exceptional challenge of foreign policies in international affairs. Therefore, Iran’s pursuance of its grand strategy is hinged on the idealistic revolutionary mantra (Arshin, 2005).

Iran has managed to reinvent its grand strategy by expanding its non-Middle East allies especially among developed states such in Europe and China. This is demonstrated in the pursuit of trade and business for economic recovery and development. This realignment is intended to undermine the US harsh relations to Tehran. Tehran took advantage of Europe’s strong belief in diplomacy and engagement unlike US’s sanctions and lack of engagement. Thus, Iran’s approach to diplomatic and economic ties became compartmentalized. This therefore, did not disrupt the pursuance of the element of its revolutionary grand strategy.

Recently, the display of Iran’s grand strategy was seen particularly in the round up to the signing of the 2015 negotiated Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran on one side and five states- the US, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China on the other, while Germany acted on behalf of the international community. The JCPOA negotiated to curtail Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for lifting sanctions imposed on the regime.

4.2 Iran and the JCPOA Agreement: 2002–2012

Events before the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action suggested that, Alireza Jafarzadeh believed to be a member of one of the exiled groups disclosed a worrisome details of the nuclear program pursued by Iran. The revelation raised the alarm that Iran had reached high level of acquiring nuclear power without the international community and UN regulatory body-the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) knowing. Jafarzadeh detailed the manner in which Iran pursues the nuclear enrichment program and the potential for nuclear weapon proliferation. This once again proved Iran’s tacit approach to rolling out its grand strategy for
national interest and to challenge any threat to its sovereignty (David, 2012). The revelation led to intense pressure on Iran by the international community to scale down the nuclear program. It first, EU3-France, United Kingdom and Germany formed an EU effort in a bid to curb the nuclear program. The talk between Iran and the EU3 was centered on lack of transparency rounding the nuclear program. However, US was not akin any diplomatic option (Robert M. Shella II, 2013). Rather, it took the path of sanction through the UN Security Council. The EU3 resisted US approach and pushed for more dialogue and diplomatic channels to scale down the Iranian nuclear program (The European Union Centre of Excellence, 2008). The lack of cohesive effort between EU3 and the US helped Iran to showcase its grand strategy by rejecting foreign influence and balancing its national interests. Eventually, following long negotiation, the 2015 JCPOA was reached and signed.

The event of the September 1, 2001 attack, US decided to pursue a policy which promotes war on terror. President George Bush pushed for pre-emptive response against countries believed to pose threat to international security. Iran alongside countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and North Korea were fingered as states sponsoring and supporting terrorism. Therefore, the US increased pressure on the countries to abandon the pursuit of WMD (Steve, 2018).

Subsequently, after the revolution, US continued to impose sanctions against Iran for being perceived as unfriendly. Jimmy Carter 1979, under Executive Order (EO) 12170, blocked Iran’s property and interest (Executive Order 12170, 1979). Ronald Reagan also in EO 12613 in 1987 banned US import from Iran (Executive Order 12613, 1987). Bill Clinton also, through the 1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) designated the two countries as supporting international terrorism, development of unhealthy nuclear capabilities and posing hindrance to the Middle East Peace Process (1996).
The ILSA especially constrained Iranian oil and gas resources for funding WMD and international terrorism. Iran was accused for supporting militias in the region especially Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah (Kenneth, 2006). The ILSA also imposed sanction on other non-complying states and individuals (Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, H.R. 3107, 1996).

The US designation of the IRGC as a terrorist group was set to challenge the core of values of the Islamic Revolution which has been considered by the USA as a channel for the propagation of terrorism especially in the Middle East region.

The post Iran-Iraq war’s outcome seemed to be favoring Iran, but at the same time costing Iran’s own stability, the war opened for more USA military presence in the Persian Gulf especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a strong ally of Iran. After the Iranian Revolution, Iran shared a strategic importance with the USSR unlike the previous regime of Shah who was closer to the West. The USA’s presence was met with fear and ambiguity by Khomeini’s regime, they viewed USA as a threat to their interest and a potential barrier of spreading their revolution’s ideologies. In addition some political analysts even alleged that the US supported Pakistan and Saudi Arabia by creating the Taliban militia in Afghanistan with Wahhabism ideology to counteract Shia’s ideology and to destabilize Iran, hence preventing its expansion in Central Asia (Hunter, 2003).

USA’s presence in the region gained momentum after the horrendous events of September 11, 2001. The USA turned its troops with the support of the international community against Taliban by initiating a campaign to fight terrorism, this did not improve environment security of Iran albeit cooperating with the USA in eliminating the threat of global terrorism, hoping in
return for an improved relation with the USA. The enhanced military presence of USA and its allies in the region ignited the feeling of encirclement into Iran. In addition President George Bush in his state of the nation in 2002 mentioned Iran in the “Axis of Evil” together with Iraq and North Korea, this speech by the president meant to isolate Iran politically and economically at least from the European countries and other USA allies in the region (Hunter, 2003).

Subsequently the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 that led to the ousting of the former President Saddam Hussein had its consequences, if anyone was to emerge a winner it was Iran, his elimination gave impetus Iran’s military presence to expansion across the Middle East. The former Saudi Arabia Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud Al Faisal reaffirmed that, “All Arab countries assisted Iraq not to be occupied by Iran (in the Iran-Iraq war), but now we are handling the whole country of Iraq to Iran without reason” (Barzegar, 2008, p. 88).

As a result, today Iran controls and manipulates Iraq’s politics through different Shia militias. Also in Lebanon’s politics through Hezbollah furthermore Iran has become de facto military occupier in Syria.

Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, known as pragmatist president, was the first president to take over the leadership of Iran after the death of the Supreme Leader Khomeini when there was ambiguity on ideological strategy and long term sustainable goals. Rafsanjani was a strong critic of Khomeini’s foreign policy, he preferred to pursue the country’s national interest against the policy of spreading the fundamental Shia ideology in the region, especially in the Central Asia. For him Khomeini’s policy was creating more enemies than friends, of which he believed it was irrational for Iran’s own security and integrity. During his era Rafsanjani refused to support the Shia’s revolution that erupted in Iraq proclaiming that was Iraq’s internal issue that had nothing to do with Iran. Furthermore he created political and economic presence
by playing to its geographical advantages in offering rail, sea and land outlets for the landlocked states making Iran the most favorable route of exporting energy from the Central Asian countries (Menashri, 2007).

Whilst improving Iran’s economy through national interest, Rafsanjani stood firm by ascertaining the sovereignty of the three islands (Greater and Lesser Tunbs) that were seized from Oman in 1971 by the Shah, a day before the United Arab Emirates got independence from Britain. The three islands are located at the threshold of Hurmuz Strait a geostrategic position that has control over the entryway of the Persian Gulf (Henderson, 2008).

As Iran was still recovering from the Iran-Iraq war he improved the economy and infrastructure, through private and foreign investment he increased production and growth. He compromised the ideology zeal to create demonstrable economic outcome, in order to achieve this, he had to forge a tactical alliance with the Deep State that was led by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, Khomeini’s successor. Before becoming a president, Rafsanjani was the speaker of the Majlis he made changes to the constitution by scrapping prime minister’s post and arrogating its power to the presidency. However during his second term in office Rafsanjani’s relation with Khamenei deteriorated over the debate of Supreme Leader’s power, hence Khamenei snubbed him in favor of the speaker of the Majlis, as a result he failed to pass any bill in the Majlis, therefore he was bound to fail and so did the economy of Iran (Tazmini, 2009).

Nevertheless Rafsanjani’s choice of not rerunning for the top government post did not hinder the policy of pursuing Iran’s interest and de-ideologization policy as the new elected president in 1997 Sayed Muhammad Khatami continued from where his predecessor left.
Khatami just as his predecessor tried very hard to reform Iran’s social structure, unfortunately the intersection centers of power and different deep policies did not allow him to achieve his ambitions and campaign pledges, with no strategic partner since after the revolution, all these factors played to his disadvantage to an extent that most of the foreign analysts concluded that his reforms were ineffective. His main challenges of not attaining and implementing liberalization procedures came from the judiciary and political oriented traditionalists who controlled cultural, political and economic source of power (Tazmini, 2009). The IRGC had to get rid of both Khatami and Rafsanjani in order to limit their political influence and decision making power by exposing Rafsanjani’s financial status and eventually accusing him of corruption hence endorsing Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as their preferred candidate for the presidency. President Ahmadinejad’s held to power ensured the expansion of economic power and political influence to IRGC (Ahmadi, 2013).

Dobbins, Nader, Kaye and Wehrey (2011), maintained that in Iran, Ahmadinejad had the support of the Deep State, he was declared a winner during the 2009 presidential election few hours after the polling stations had closed, igniting allegations of foul play by his competitors and their supporters, hence sparking violence and chaos. Consequently the Supreme Leader declared the protests as illegal threatening to jail the former Prime Minister Hussein Moussavi the main challenger of Ahmadinejad and whoever supported him. Unlike other two former presidents who preferred détente policy, President Ahmadinejad who came to power in 2005 was more of conservative, showed determination to take Iran’s foreign policy to its real revolutionary dogma, simultaneously winning the support of the Iranian Deep State (Menashri, 2007).
According to Filiu, (2015), the term Deep State is a concept that emerged from Turkey, whereby mysterious cooperation between state intelligence, institutions and organized crime appear to run the system behind the show. Despite Iran being a democratic state with presidential elections held after every five years, many believe that the state is run in the shadow of the Supreme Leader.

Ahmadinejad’s policy towards acquiring nuclear power and interfering with Lebanon and Iraq internal issues, in addition by supporting Hamas Movement in Palestine with unnecessary sentiments against Israel and the USA regarding the Holocaust, was met with uproar by its neighbors in the region. According to him Israel is an illegal entity, he went ahead by calling European states hypocrites, asserting that if they are honest they should voluntarily hand over some of their provinces to the Zionists to constitute their state there. Although his critics believed his rhetoric was meant to divert attention from the economic issues to an external in order to conciliate the public opinion and to solidify Iran’s position in the Muslim World (Menashri, 2007).

Eventually Iran was able to dominate oil routes in the Persian Gulf. Its actions attracted backlash in the international community and justify the fear that its pursuance of nuclear power will threaten other states in the region.

The current Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s foreign policy as described by the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohamed Javad Zarif (2014), he maintains that in this era of globalization, policy making process has been complicated because of the high rise number of non-state actors such as multinational corporations and individuals, hence affecting both developed and developing countries. Moreover, he contends that the Iran’s foreign policy is pegged on the following key areas: preservation for its independence, national security, sovereignty of its
territory, accomplishing long term sustainable development, improving its regional and global reputation, improving multilateral relations with its neighboring countries, minimizing tensions and disagreements with other countries, promoting peace and security and lastly fostering cultural interaction.

The current dispute between Iran and the USA where President Trump’s administration designated Iran’s revolutionary guard corps as a terrorist organization is not any different from the hitherto CIA operations to the ouster of Mossadeq whose main interest was to meddle in Iran’s internal affairs and ensure regime change.

4.3 Iran’s Strategy In Lebanon

Ruhollah Khomeini was quoted stating that, “The defense of the Islamic country, the defense of the honor of Muslims, is a divine religious obligations that is compulsory for all of us” (Ward, 2005, p. 561). Many believed it was a statement justifying Iran’s spread of its ideology and interference in other countries, his thought on defense underscores Iran’s effort to improve its military forces hence preparing them psychologically to the concept of martyrdom.

While in Lebanon, Imam Musa Sadr a prominent Shia leader born in the city of Qom located in the South of Iran, was sent to Lebanon earlier before the 1979 revolution, his ambition of mobilizing the Shia community was successful in a short time, in 1969 he founded the Supreme Islamic Shia Council, an entity designed to represent the Lebanese Shiites, four years later he formed the political organization called (Harakat al Mahroumin) literally means “Movement of the Deprived”, moreover he established many social organization and youth clubs. In 1975 he formed the military wing called the Amal Movement, the movement used to conduct its activities secretly before it was introduced to the public as a militia. In 1978 a few months
before Iranian Revolution, Imam Musa Sadr disappeared in his visit to Libya, its alleged that he was assassinated at the orders of late Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi (Siklawi, 2012). In 1982 as Lebanon was burning into civil war, Iran took advantage of the political vacuum by sending the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps to Lebanon in June that year, under the cover of combating Israel. Hezbollah which means “Party of God” established in Beqaa Valley, its establishment was mainly to fight off Israel’s invasion of South Lebanon, a product of IRGC who enjoyed Iran’s political and military support, it has been Iran’s key tool in expanding its wings, influence and ideology in the Middle East. After the civil war ended, Hezbollah were the only armed non-state actors to be allowed not to surrender its weapons, whereby all other militia organizations were forced to lay down their arms and converted into civil political parties, this decision was justified due to the continuing Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon (Dingel, 2013).

Simultaneously the Amal movement weakened and fragmented after Imam Musa Sadr was killed. Some members of the movement were attracted by the IRGC and later trained by them, they were eventually incorporated with Hezbollah (Siklawi, 2012). This was Iran’s golden opportunity to position itself as the defendant of Islam and the Palestinians and to expand its influence and military might in the region.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Hezbollah enjoyed a lot of support from Iran’s supreme leader Ruhollah Khomeini who promised to support all Shia’s across the Middle East. Hezbollah was officially commenced under that name in 1985, its leading figures are usually selected by Iran, Sheikh Tufeyli was the first leader of Hezbollah he was later replaced by Abbas Musawi who was in 1992 killed in his by Israeli helicopter, since then Hassan Nasrallah
was the leader of Hezbollah. Therefore they consider the Iranian supreme leader as an Iman and commander in chief (Seliktar, 2012).

The main aim of the Iranian Revolution as previously stated was to get rid of the West influence in the region especially the influence of United States of America, few years after the revolution Hezbollah bombed the US Embassy in Beirut. Later in October 23rd 1983 the same year they attacked French and American military headquarters (Soussi, 2018).

As a result the USA and France left Lebanon, a move that was welcomed by Iran so as to fill that vacuum left by the West. They even went ahead and took western hostages in Lebanon including USA university professors who were later released after the ransom was paid to Iran.

The attacks did not just stop in Iran but they were extended in other regions like Saudi Arabia, where they attacked the USA house complex in Dhahran (Soufan, 2015). Hezbollah is also accused to be behind the suicide attacks of the USA Embassy and Israel Jewish Community in Argentina (Weiss, 2019).

In 1992 Rafik Hariri a Sunni Muslim became Lebanon’s prime minister with the full backing of the USA and Saudi Arabia, a successful businessman who transformed his fortunes obtained from Saudi Arabia through his construction companies into billions of dollars (Bosco, 2009).

A year before Hezbollah’s war against Israel the prime minister was assassinated on his convoy in the streets of Beirut, and Hezbollah was accused of killing him (Aljazeera, 2018).

An action that is believed to strengthen Hezbollah position in Lebanon through use of force, they amassed almost fifteen thousand troops. They are solely independent from the national army of Lebanon. Furthermore Iran provides social and welfare services to strengthen Hezbollah’s position and to gain more support from the Shia population and Lebanese community that includes hospitals, clinics and even schools whereby students are taught Iran’s
ideologies. It’s believed that Iran contributes over $200 million dollars per year to Hezbollah (Feltman, 2019).

The Iranian spiritual leader was always against the two state Palestine-Israel solution that was initiated in 1991 at the US sponsored conference in Madrid that assembled Arab states, Israel and Palestinian delegations. Hezbollah used the same slogans that were chanted during the Iranian Revolution; “death to America, death to Israel” by doing so they were able to manipulate and gain sympathy from other Muslim movements around the world especially the Hamas movement from Gaza, Palestine (The Jerusalem Post, 2006).

In partnership with Hezbollah, the IRGC strengthened the military capabilities of the group and influenced its involvement in politics and governance. Hezbollah has received a lot of stock of precision equipment missiles, drones and rockets. In the inventory of Hezbollah’s army, Iran has helped them to acquire weapons and systems such as Fateh-110/M-600 short-range ballistic missile, M113 armored personnel carriers, T-72 main battle tanks, Toophan anti-tank guided missiles, Shahab-1 and Shahab-2 short-range ballistic missiles, Kornet man-portable anti-tank guided missiles, Katyusha rocket launchers and Karrar unmanned combat aerial vehicles (Reauters, 2017). Hezbollah has become one of the sophisticated armed group with advance military capabilities. It has used Karrar armed drone against the Islamic state locations in Syria. It also has stockpiles of chemical weapons courtesy Iran’s support (Gideon, 2018).
According to the IRGC Secretary General in 2016 in defense of its support for Hezbollah he stated that:

“Hezbollah’s budget, salaries, expenses, arms and missiles are coming from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Is this clear? This is no one’s business. As long as Iran has money, we have money. Can we be any more frank about that?” (Gideon, 2018).

Apart from the military advancement Hezbollah has also increased its political influence. In 2018 parliamentary elections it increased the number of seats in the parliament (Reuters, 2018). In 2019, it also got influential positions in the Ministry of health (Reuters, 2019). In recent times USA has raised concern over the unfettered influence of Hezbollah and the possibility of laundering money for terrorist purposes (AFP, 2019).

**4.4 Iran’s Strategy In Syria**

Iran and Syria even before the Arab Spring forged a reciprocal style relationship, in a sense that Syria was a pass through of arms from Iran to Lebanon, supports and tolerates Hezbollah’s actions, in return Syria uses Hezbollah as a tool to facilitate its political and policy agendas in Lebanon (Wege, 2011).

In Syria, Hezbollah mobilized thousands of Iran trained fighters and also backed Russian Air force capability to support the regime of al-Assad. They also repelled the fighters being supported by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other Arab governments. Iran aided local militias including Hezbollah’s role in the Syrian crisis. Iran also supported military advances and airstrikes by Syrian military and Russia (Reuters, 2019).

Terrill (2015) adds that since after the Iranian Revolution, Syria and Iran have been allies, in fact he asserts that against the odds Syria was one of the two Arab countries to have supported
Iran diplomatically and arms transfers during the Iran-Iraq war. Furthermore they had other mutual foreign policy interests; like containing Israel’s regional ambitions, the support of Hezbollah in Lebanon and constraining Western influence in the Middle East.

March 2011 in the midst of Arab Spring the Syrian people came out in numbers to demand the removal of the president Bashar, who in return used excessive force to counter the protests, as a result some Syrian picked up arms and joined the Free Syrian Army (Terrill, 2015).

Bashar who himself is from Shia faction of Alawi, was a member of the axis of resistance as known by Iran and a key regional ally, his regime was on the brink of falling apart, as protestors were approaching his palace in Damascus. Consequently Iran deployed Shia militias from Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition Hezbollah sent over eight thousands soldiers to help securing Assad’s regime. Hence this was the first creation of what is now known as National Defense Forces, to fight along Assad’s forces against the Free Syrian Army (Lund, 2015).

NDF played an important role in saving Assad’s regime from collapsing. Together with the Assad’s forces used all means of shutting down the opposition by targeting civilians with chemical and all sort of illegal weapons. An action that caused an uproar from the international community.

The commitment of Iran’s President Rouhani in supporting Assad despite their financial and economic challenges due to United Nations, European Union and USA economic sanctions was met with anger by the middle class Iranians who argued that Iranian government should improve the lives of its own people rather that supporting and interfering with Syria’s internal problems (Terrill, 2015).

Nevertheless Iran couldn’t afford to lose an important ally in the region to the hands of Sunni Free Syrian Army and other terrorist militias who were supported by Iran’s main opposition
especially Saudi Arabia at any cost. In addition Syria is a trans-border route for Iran to access Lebanon at the same time a geo strategic position of posing threats to Israel, an enemy Iran plan to eliminate as they claim as one of their strategies of championing Palestinian’s course. Among others, Iran supplied light and heavy weapons to Assad’s regime and militias. Estimated 3,000 IRGC members were on ground in Syria to plan and execute military operations such as the retaking of Aleppo. It also coordinated military effort with the regime and the Russians for airstrikes and naval patrol on the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, Hezbollah mobilized about 8,000 militias to Syria. Hezbollah helped training and also supported Shia and other militia groups in Syria with arsenals such as rockets and missiles (Uskowi, 2019).

The Shia and others groups in Syria are collectively known under the umbrella body known as Al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah fi Suria (the Islamic Resistance in Syria). Among those group comprises of Al-Ghaliboun: Saraya al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah fi Suria (Translated as the Victors: The Companies of the Islamic Resistance in Syria), Quwat al Ridha (Ridha Forces), Daraa and Quneitra; and Liwa al-Imam al-Baqir (or Baqir Brigade) (Philip, 2018). The IRGC has continued to facilitate the training of thousands of fighters in Syria alongside Hezbollah. Hezbollah strength in the region was demonstrated by the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. Hezbollah sites it operation in public urbanized areas which can be difficult to easily target it. As stated earlier, one of the fundamental responsibility thrust of the IRGC is providing support to largely Shia militia. It mobilized over 15, 000 militants from the Fatemiyoun Brigade from Afghanistan to fight in Syria with pro-Assad forces. Fatemiyoun Brigade forces were very active in the battles in Damascus, Aleppo, Daraa, Homs, Hama, Latakia, Dayr az Zawr and
Palmyra. In addition, IRGC-QF also mobilized and trained around 2,000 fighters recruited from Pakistan (Ali S., 2018).

More so, it has supported several groups in Afghanistan, and Palestine, South Asia, Africa and Latin America. Iran’s relationship with these groups is very complex and complicated. According to report, since 2011, the number of fighters under Iran proxy network has increased from 110,000 to 180,000 in 2018 (The Soufan Group, 2019).

4.5 Iran’s Strategy in Iraq

The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein further gained Iran an opportunity to strengthen its stake and taking advantage of the vacuum in Iraq. The subsequent establishment of the Shia-dominated government in Iraq is an indication of the strong in-road Iran has made into Baghdad. Additionally, the 2011 Arab spring created further opportunity for Iran and weakened regimes that were hitherto resistant to Iran. Also, the withdrawal of USA forces in Iraq helped to stamp its presence with the Iraqi government welcoming Iran’s assistance.

In 2011 the former USA president Barrack Obama withdrew USA forces from Iraq under the rule of the then prime minister Noor AL Maliki a Shia himself who was backed by the Iranian regime, the Maliki government started to marginalize the Sunni Muslims in favor of the Shia Muslims a move that triggered mass protests from the Sunni sect, many believed it was the reason behind the emergence of terrorist militias such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and Hizbu Nusra (Mannina, 2018).

The terrorist groups gained ground and took control most of the towns and cities including the city of Mosul from the Iraqi government (Wilson Centre, 2019). This played into Iranian’s
favor to intervene in Iraq by sending the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to help the Iraqi government fighting off the terrorist groups.

The Revolutionary Guards were able to remobilize the Shia militias in Iraq under the entity called “Hizbu Sha’abi” meaning the party of the people, and many other militia groups such as Badr Militia and Kataib Hezbollah that were under the Quds Force general Qassim Soleimani (Hannah, 2019).

Some of these militias renamed their entities in order to participate in the political process after the call from the USA that all militias to be dismantled (Karam, 2019). Iran used these groups to suppress Sunni minority and other terrorist activities. According to World Population Review (2019) Shia’s population in Iraq is estimated to be around 65% and 35% Sunni Muslim.

4.6 Iran Strategy In Yemen

In an online interview Asalwy (2019) and the rest of the respondents maintain the in Yemen, Iran supported the Houthi security forces to take over Sana’a the capital of Yemen through the IRGC by providing money, weapons and other forms of assistance without much counter balance response from the USA. As all respondents maintained that, Iran’s influence in Yemen is apparent and massive.

The IRGC has also been fingered in providing aid to Houthis. Iranian weapons including missiles, drones have been used by the group to create insecurity at the Bab el Mandeb Strait and land targets along Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates borders (Coats, 2019).

In an online interview, Fouad Asalwy, Abdulrahman Zeyad, Abdulbasit Alqaidy, Samir Hamud, Abdallah Doblah, Morad Hamid Ashaabi, Mohamed Abdulkadir (2019) all affirm
that, there are hundreds of evidence proving Iran’s influence in Yemen, like intelligence support by the experts from Lebanon and Iran.

Also the supplying of drones, ballistic missiles and rockets in parts through smuggling via a governorate called Ma’reb, Jawf and other governorates which are under the Houthis rule, which they are eventually used to attack Saudi Arabia like the recent attacks on civilian airport of city of Abha, oil pipelines and industrial premises in Saudi Arabia (Aljazeera, 2019).

Abdulasit Alqaidy (2019) in an online interview suggests that another proof of Iran’s influence in Yemen is that, they observe the same religious celebrations that are observed in Iran during the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadhan like the Usbu ul Quds “Jerusalem Week” with solidarity to Palestinians, and other traditional activities like yelling, slapping on the chest, crying when mourning the death, they also glorify Shia leaders and celebrate their birthdays. He supported his arguments by saying that Houthis signed a trade agreement with Iran to initiate twenty eight direct flights per week from Tehran to Sana’a the first of its kind.

He further explains, before that Yemen had no direct trade link with Iran or whatsoever, even there were no Yemenis or Iranians immigrants residing in either of the countries, in fact Houthis were boasting around about the trade deals via Hezbolla’s media of which they broadcast from the southern suburb of Lebanon, not just that but they are also glorifying and praising the Iranian Revolution and chanting the same slogans the supporters of Khomeini in 1979 were chanting like; Al mowt Li Amreeka Al Mowt Li Israel which translates to “Death to America, Death to Israel” through the media outlets they seized from the government in the capital.

Training were also provided by IRGC and Hezbollah for the Houthis in both Yemen and Iran. The proliferation of weapons and support provided by Iran increased the threats posed by the
Houthis. Houthis use of Borkan-2H mobile, short-range ballistic missiles to strike Saudi Arabia targets was overwhelming and impactful threatening Saudi Arabia. The missiles were believed to have been smuggled into Yemen in parts from Iran the assembled. Iranian components of the missiles were seen from the wreckage (UNSC, 2017). Iran is suspected to have used land route to transport the materials to Yemen (Michael, 2018).

In an online interview Alaquidy (2019) suggests that, those people saying that Iran is not supporting Houthis militarily by claiming that they are using arms left behind by the old regime are lying, he affirms that Yemen never had the new advanced drones and ballistic missiles before. Furthermore he continues by saying that the Iranian Embassy is the only one open in the capital city Sana’a.

4.6.1 The Successes and Challenges of Iran’s Grand Strategy in the Middle East

Iran has faced several ups and downs in the execution of its grand strategy in the Middle East. Its success has been based on both Hard Power and Soft Power. Since the Iranian revolution, Iran has capitalized on people to people diplomacy to expand its ideology to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and now Yemen. Iran’s shia ideology has been successful in Lebanon and Iraq because it created the Hezbollah and Hizbu Shaabi militia groups respectively in the aforementioned countries. Consequentially, the two militia groups have dominated the political landscape of these countries leading to the recent win in the Lebanese parliament and a sustained run of the Iraq’s government. As an effect of the Arab Spring, Iran managed to save the overthrow of Assad’s regime using its militia allies. The Houthi’s in Yemen are not an exemption as Iran used them to safeguard its interest by threatening Saudi Arabia’s security through funding and smuggling of weapons like ballistic and drones. As a result, the Iran allied militias have been able to safeguard its regime security from external aggression.
On the other hand Iran has also encountered several hindrances to the implementation of its grand strategy in the middle east. Due to the exportation of its ideology and the persuasion of nuclear power, Iran has attracted sanctions from some of the European countries and the US which later led to huge economic scars.

Iran has not been able to deploy ground forces in Yemen as they did in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq because of Yemen’s geo-strategic position which is surrounded by Iran’s enemies. The support of Houthi’s has unified the position of the US and middle east countries against Iran’s role in Yemen.

**4.7 Iran’s Grand Strategy and the Internal Dynamics in Yemen**

The contemporary political history of Yemen indicated that the long century rule of the Imamate was brought to an end in 1962 by the Arab Nationalist Revolutionary Movement. The movement was formed within the Yemen’s armed forces. The Zaydi Imam Mohammed al-Badr was removed, a republican state was formed with the support of Egypt. The clash between the republican and the royalists were supported by the U.K, Saudi Arabia and other regional powers. By 1970, the republican won the war that founded the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). On the southern Yemen, the leftist revolutionary nationalist war was coming to an end. The British withdrew in 1967 and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was formed. Effort to unite Sanaa and Aden led to the signing of pact after the war between the south and North. By 1978, Abdullah Saleh as a young military officer took over power in 1978 with the support of some clan such as Sanhan. By the end of the cold war the PDRY and YAR formed alliance to ensure the unification of the two sides of the southern and northern side (Dresch, 2000).
Mohamed Abdulkadir in online interview argued that Iran is playing with Houthi’s emotions by promising them to bring back the family that used to rule Yemen before it was overthrown by the 1962 revolution. He went ahead by claiming that, Iranians are known historically for their cunning and malicious behavior will use all tactics to ensure their policy of expansionism succeeds even if is to forge alliance with the demon. He continued by saying Iran uses different approaches to pursue their strategies depending on the regional and international power balancing (Abdulkadir, 2019).

Yemen is located at a very strategic location in the region, in north they share borders with Saudi Arabia, in south with the Gulf of Eden, in West with the Red Sea and Oman to the East. It has an estimated population of 25 million people and an area of 527 km². In addition it oversees the channel of Bab el-Mandeb which links Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean making it of economic and strategic importance (Doostmohammadi, Mousavi, & Beigloo, 2012).

The Bab el Mandeb Strait is strategically located and an important route for oil shipment in the region. An estimated 5 million barrels of oil pass through it every day. The strait is bordered by the southern end of the Red Sea, which is sandwiched between Yemen and Djibouti (Keith, 2018). Iran’s involvement in Yemen primarily to increase it geostrategic influence along the Red Sea and to challenge Saudi Arabia and the UAE (International Crisis Group, 2018).

By the end of 2016, Iran had intensified its involvement in Yemen and support for Houthis due to the Saudi Arabia and UAE involvement in the crisis. Among the support Houthis enjoyed from Iran include 122-millimeter Katyusha rockets, aerial drones, anti-tank guided missiles, sea mines, unmanned explosive boats, RDX high explosives, Misagh-2 man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), radar systems, ballistic missiles and mining equipment (Michael, 2018).
Before the unification of South and North Yemen south was colonized by the British since 1838 and got its independence in 1967, whereby the North was under the rule of Ottoman Empire before gaining their independence in 1918. In Yemen however Ali Saleh who ruled the Yemen Arab Republic also known as North Yemen since 1978, before the unification with People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen also known as South Yemen in 1990, confronted the revolution with resistance and violence just like other toppled presidents, eventually agreed to step down for his deputy Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi in 2012, after the intervention of GCC states who brokered a deal for him to step down guaranteeing him safe haven and immunity (Fraihat, 2018).

Nevertheless before the Arab Spring Saleh was fighting Zaidi Houthi’s Shi’a militias who he accused of orchestrating to topple his government and implement Shia’s sharia law in 2004. Houthi’s movement was initially established by Hussein Badreddin Al-houthi in the northern part of Yemen, Saada who since then grew in size, as they were just fighting Saleh, Saudi Arabia waged war against them claiming that they are threat to their borders citing security reasons and went ahead to claim that Houthis were supported by Iran since they carry same ideologies (Fraihat, 2018).

During the revolutions Houthis capitalized the revolution and merged with protestors in demanding the fall of Saleh, since then Houthis from the hideouts and expanded in the big cities of Yemen especially in Sanaa and became a very integral non state actor in Yemen politics. In 2015 Saudi Arabia and her allies consisted of nine countries formed a coalition and invaded Yemen to fight Houthis adhering to calls by President Hadi who lacked military capabilities to fight the militia and safeguarding his legitimacy as a president, furthermore the allegations were still there that Iran was behind the group to cause the havoc in the region.
especially for Saudi Arabia who could not afford to allow a fierce rival to gain more influence in the region after already spreading her wings in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Fraihat, 2018).

The fear of widespread eruption against incumbent in North Africa and the Middle East was predicted long before the Arab spring. Yemen’s vulnerability was very obvious. The fear that Yemen will follow the line of Somalia and be fragmented into several segment parts was very strong. This vulnerability was compounded by the presence of Al-Qaeda and other Jihadist groups who took advantage of the fall out among political leaders. Effort to broker peace led to the resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh after he was granted immunity from prosecution (Almasmari, 2012). The brokered peace prevented the total breakdown of law and order. However, decline as a result of corruption and weak central government made very difficult to enforce law beyond the cities. The 2014 coup against Mansour Hadi by the Zaydi Shia Houthi rebels led to state collapse. Consequently, Yemen became socially, politically and geographically fragmented state controlled by several groups. Thus, the inherent regional divisions and international interest further created the lack of cohesion in Yemen and the eventual civil war.

Yemen’s protracted internal divisions and poor national cohesion has blamed on its vulnerability to foreign influence and weakness. Although there are many remote reasons for the current Yemeni crisis some of the immediate triggers can be linked to issues such as:

1. **Fuel Subsidy Crisis**: The Hadi’s government was pressured by the International Monetary Fund to curtail fuel subsidy in order to reposition the economy of the country for growth. By July 2014, the lifted subsidy on fuel. The general discontent and agitation that followed saw the people’s frustration. The Houthi movement took advantage of the chaotic situation and organized mass demonstration to demand the
reversal of the policy. Rather, a counter protest was staged by Hadi’s supporters and al-Islah- a Muslim Brotherhood affiliated political party (Al-shamahi, 2015).

2. **Houthis Took Over power:** The Houthis took control of Sana’a and refused to accept UN peace deal brokered to restore governance and peace. Hadi was forced to resign and the Houthis declared state control (BBC, 2015).

3. **Division and Split in the Armed Forces:** The military became divided along political and ethnic loyalty. Those aligned to Saleh sided with the Houthis while other elements within the military took stance against the Houthi-Saleh. The southern separatist took advantage and call for secession (RFERL, 2011).

4. **Saudi Arabia’s Military Intervention:** In a bid to stop the Houthi after reaching Aden and forcing Hadi into exile in Saudi Arabia it launched a military campaign. It was intended to roll back the Houthi’s encroaching power and restore Hadi as the legitimate administration in Sana’a (McGregor, 2016).

4.7.1 **State Actors and Non-State Actors**

The state actors in Yemen are the government of Yemen itself, the Saudi-UAE coalition and Iran, other remaining actors in Yemen are non-state actors, a situation that is creating a major problem whereby it’s not easy to account any of the factions the responsibility for the dire situation which is facing Yemenis.

**The Houthi Movement**

The formation of Houthis began in the 2000s when Huseein al-Houthi a cleric founded the group as a breakaway from the Believing Youth Movement. The Houthis movement began as a religious and cultural movement among the Zaydi Shiite community of northern Yemen. The Zaydi group are a minority compare to majority Sunni in the country. The group became incline
to the radical ideals of the Zaydi revivalist movement. In an online interview Mohamed Abdulkadir (2019) professes that in fact, majority of the Shias in Yemen are from Zeydi sect which is the oldest Shia sect than Irani’s Ithna Shari, they are descendants of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), they have been always working together and closer to the Sunni sect than Ithna Shari, and have always been in conflict with them.

From 2003, the Houthi became politically active raising opposition against the government of Saleh for supporting the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003. Since then, the Houthis remained sustained in their quest for power and opposition to Saleh. After the fall of Saleh’s government it continued to oppose the UN-backed transition government (Laub, Yemen in Crisis, 2016). Hussein al-Houthi grievances were focused on the decision of Saleh’s administration cooperating with America on the “war on terror” following the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in US. Rather than pursuing a more peaceful dialogue, al-Houthi was killed by the Yemeni security forces after weeks of violent fighting. The killing of al-Houthi sparked the insurgency in Sa’dah in the Zaydi north of Yemen (Harnish, 2010).

Houthis play a big role in facilitating Iran’s strategy in the region in return they back Houthis politically, diplomatically and financially by selling Houthi’s oil to the oil traders and financing other Houthis activities like moving its members and activists from one country to another lobbying and campaigning for the movement. They also train Houthis negotiators for the mediations that were taking place. Iran collects contributions from organizations in Iran and other Shia organization from other countries for Houthis to facilitate them in the social and military activities (Asalwi, 2019).
Al- Hirak

Another important group in Yemen are the Hirak. Hirak came out of the agitations on the civil service workers frustration and among the southern military ranks and file who were forcefully demobilized after civil war. The agitation grew into a secessionist movement to challenge Saleh’s unfriendly handling of the peaceful movement on their grievances: call for improved pensions, creation of jobs and return of the land seized after the 1994 war. The brutality of military forces and the police transformed the group into a southern independence movement (Salisbury, 2016).

Ali Abdullah Saleh

Saleh was the former president. He was deposed in 2011 following protest due to discontent. Saleh had control over the security forces, ethnic networks and the General People’s Congress (GPC)- a political party. Saleh tactically formed alliance with the Houthis to oppose the transition government of Hadi. He felt marginalized in the transition process. So, the alliance was to allow his regain prominent role in the affairs of Yemen (Laub, 2015).

Iran

Iran has been viewed as a state that is ideologically driven. Thus, it uses proxy occupation of Yemen to checkmate global oil supply and subdue its Sunni neighbors (Nathalie, 2018). Iran’s role in Yemen has been a debatable issue over the nature, goal and extent of the involvement. Critics have suggested that even before the 2011, Iran has been interfering in the domestic affairs of Yemen supporting the activities of the Houthi rebels to subvert the legitimate government in Sana’s. Evidently, the Iranian media and political support were obviously
offered to Houthis and the Southern movements. Yet the argument remained speculative although the Iran’s was not doubtful. In online interview Abdulrahman Ziyad (2019) added that Iran has opened schools and universities for the Houthis and converted them from Zeydi sect to Ithna Shari, hence successfully turning the tables by turning Houthis against Saudi Arabi’s Wahhabis and Sunni Muslims in general.

The Iranian involvement in Yemen is believed to have constituted a negative and complex security situation in the Middle East. The roles are considered both institutional and overt approach in which non-state actors are supported by Iran. Iran relied on factions to promote its sect and ideology as well as the desire to promote political change and balance of power. Thus, by maintaining offensive policies, Iran seeks to achieve zero-sum equation in its national security interest. The political instability, weakness and fragility of Yemen only pave the way for Iran to increase its influence to an aggressive expansionist strategy.

Abdallah Dobleh (Dobleh, 2019) maintains that Houthis are an extension of Iran’s strategy in Yemen just like Hezbollah in Lebanon and ‘Hashad el Sha’bi’ in Iraq. He adds that Iranian leaders are not hiding on the fact that they are supporting the Houthis militia (Ansarullah), when Houthis took over the capital city of Yemen Sana’a, they claimed that the capital city was the fourth city they have incorporated to their list of allies as ‘axis of resistance’. Mohamed Abdulkadir (2019) added that in fact Iran is the only state actor that is supporting Houthis. Iran also used the Shiite Twelver sect Yemen to promote its interest. Many of them had lived in Iraq but during the international sanction imposed on Iraq Iran took advantage to maintain strong affinity with them. They were sponsored to visit Iran for conference, celebrations of
Iranian revolution anniversary. The purpose was to challenge them into following Iran’s experiences to pursue change in their country (Riedel, 2017).

Between 2004-2010, Iran increased its support in Yemen remarkably by supporting the Houthis. The role of Iran became very open during the revolution that ousted Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011. Iran stepped up its strategy by taking advantage of the chaotic situation to strengthen alliance with the Houthi rebels by providing monetary, technical, logistic and military support (Vatanka, 2015).

After deposing the government in 2015, Iran signed a joint economic agreements with the Houthi rebels to promote cooperation on oil, aviation, electricity and sea shipment. Based on the agreements, Iran readily offered to establish electricity generation plants in Aden, Hodeida and Taiz provinces. It also offered to credit line to support its infrastructural development and send experts. Also content in the agreement was the establishment of direct flight air flights between the two countries. The agreements became the turning point in Iran’s open support for the Houthi rebels (Abdulkadir, 2019).

Iran became the primary international source of support for the Houthis. Like Hezbollah in Lebanon, it enjoyed military training and arms from Iran. It became complex with Saudi Arabia perceiving the Houthis as Iran’s proxy in the region. As a primary opposition to Hadi, Iran used the Houthis to challenge Hadi’s support from Saudi Arabia and US thereby stamping its influence in Yemen (Aladni, 2019).

**Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia conducted coordinated tactical air attacks on some parts of Yemen to scale down the encroaching force of Houthis against Hadi’s government. Saudi believe Houthis
control of Yemen will threaten its national security especially at the southern border. The emergence of the Houthis is seen again as a looming contest against its hegemonic dominance in the region by Iran. Adding Yemen to the list of Iranian allies like Baghdad, Beirut and Damascus became worrisome to Saudi Arabia. Thus, Saudi’s interest in the Yemeni crisis is more or less taming the influence of Iran around it sphere of influence. Saudi seeks to maintain its long-standing strategy of “containment and maintenance” in its southern border by keeping Yemen weak and subserviently under its influence. In this sense, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of mostly Sunni States such as Kuwait, UAE, Morocco, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan. The coalition further consolidated Saudi Arabia’s leadership in the in the Gulf Cooperation Council bloc (Abdulkadir, 2019).

However Qatar was forced to withdrew its forces from the northern part of Yemen after three Gulf states and Egypt imposed embargo on it, causing a huge crisis among the Gulf states as Oman and Kuwait refused to follow the suit by cutting ties with Qatar and rather staying neutral.

**The United States of America**

The United States has been involved in the Yemen crisis by supporting the Saudi Arabia led coalition. The USA has provided both military logistic and intelligence support. In 2015, the USA sold arms worth $1.3 billion to Saudi Arabia (Zachary, 2016).

The Trump administration has scale up its pressure on Iran to destabilize its proxies across Middle East. The increasing growth of the proxies armed with sophisticated weapons and political influence posed a great threat USA interest in the region. Despite the relative military power of Iran, it has used the proxies to push off its adversaries and extend its power and
political authority. The proxies for example have provided extended defense for Iran from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf of Oman. Making it adversaries to rethink before contemplating any attack on Iran. Nevertheless USA’s blind support of Saudi Arabia through Trump and Kushner is under scrutiny after Saudi Arabia was accused of killing its prominent journalist Washington based Jamal Khashoqgi in his country’s embassy in Istanbul. The tension was further escalated after the recent Democrat’s election win over the Republicans. USA’s both houses Senate and Congress condemned Saudi Arabia of violating human rights in Yemen and they have since threatened to pass bill to stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia (Asalwi, 2019). Saudi Arabia has consistently blamed Iran for the hostility of the Houthis. For example, Saudi Arabia accused the Houthis in collaboration with Iran for the attack on its oil pipeline pumping installation. In response, Saudi Arabia retaliated against the Houthi forces in Yemen.

The complex network of Iran allies makes decision-making calculus very complicated for the USA to respond to attacks perpetrated by the Iran’s allies. Iran has been able to amass a lot of political influence through the widespread network of its allies in the region.

Iran is very strategic in rolling out its national and international goals. It arms Shiite groups which subsequently evolve into a political movement demanding political space in the parliament, cabinets and roles in critical national decision making processes. Essentially, Iran nurture its allies and proxies to take over state power through continues overt strategies.

The militias are positioned to attack foreign interest considered to be an enemy of Iran. Iran-backed Hezbollah attacked the USA embassy in Beirut in 1983 which forced Ronald Reagan to pull American troops out of the country. Again, between 2003-2010 during the US war in Iraq there were reported cases of lethal roadside bomb attack carried out by Shiite militia linked
to Iran. Since the war, the militia has continued to exert a lot of influence in the social and political sphere of Iraq.

4.8 Iran’s Foreign Policy in Yemen and How is at Conflict with the Interest of Other Actors.

Monier (2015) asserts that, the post Shah Iran was always epitomized as a source of chaos and instability in the Middle East by the media and majority of the Arab states. Omar Mustafa (2019) believes that, Iran uses its medical centers that are spread all over cities of Yemen to instill revolutionary ideologies then send them to Iran and Lebanon to get proper training. He proclaims that Iran wants to incorporate Yemen into one of the states they have rule over and influence just like they did to Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. According to him the situation in Yemen is different, the geo strategic position and state actors involved in the Yemeni crisis forced Iran to look for other strategies to apply. On Iran’s foreign policy counteracting the interest of other actors, he maintains that Iran wants to have total control over the Yemenis whereby Saudi Arabia and its allies want to have control over its resources.

UAE wants to take control over the main sea port of Adan and Socotra Island in the southern part of Yemen. He argues that UAE is a political opportunist working with both Saudi Arabia and Houthis at the same time, backing his argument by asserting that the good proof is the alleged surprise pull out of UAE forces from most of the northern part of Yemen and leaving Saudi Arabia fighting Houthis alone in the north. Furthermore he maintains that Iran uses UAE’s sea ports in smuggling weapons to Houthis (Alyamani, 2019).

In an online interview Sameer Hamoud (2019) asserts that, Iran’s greed of expanding its influence in the region is aligned within the context of the history of Persian Empire who used to have influence in the Middle East. He maintains that Iran also have their eyes on the two
Holy Cities in Saudi Arabia that is Mecca and Medina for its holiness and as a center of Muslims from all different sects. Iran wants to repeat the successful expansionism policy in the levant (Iraq) and apply it in Yemen. Ahmed Mohamed (Mohamed, 2019) adds that the two holy cities are very important to Iran because Shias live there as well especially Medina where Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was buried, in addition they also believe that whoever controls the two cities will eventually control both Arab and Muslim World just like the way Saudi Arabia does now.

Furthermore the thrust of regional power between the Saudi Arabia and Iran and the geopolitics of the region are also contributing to the unfortunate situation in Yemen and the Middle East in general. The fact that Iran’s expansionist policy to which it has spread its wings and influence in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon had Saudi Arabia worried and accusing it for interference in Yemen citing that Houthis are used by Iran to undermine the sovereignty of Yemen.

Mohamed Abdulkadir (2019) argues that, Iran’s strategy in Yemen is to scale down Saudi Arabia’s Sunni influence and replace it with Shiitism, as well to have control over the Red Sea and the strait of Bab el Mandeb the threshold of southern Suez Canal in order to have strategical influence on the countries and sea ports bordering along the Red Sea, as a result Iran will be able to hustle and frustrate countries that uses the sea as an entrance and obtain energy from and through the strait of Bab el Mandeb and Hormuz.

In addition Saudi Arabia accused Houthis of working with Iran to invade the Saudi Arabia borders in the southern part of Saudi Arabia. Thus justifying its intervention in Yemen. Murad Hamid Asha’abi (2019) maintains that Iran successfully seduced Houthis by supporting them in their wars “six wars” against the late President Abdallah Saleh’s regime. The reason behind supporting Saudi Arabia is to encircle them at their southern border with Yemen after
successfully encircling them from its northern border via Iraq and the west of Saudi Arabia in the city of Alqasim and the Shias living in Bahrain so as to destabilize the security of Saudi Arabia. Asha’abi added that Iran believes the southern part of Yemen belongs to Shia since they are the majority people living there in other way they are helping Houthis fighting for their land.

The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia was on record when he stressed that the interventions in Yemen would not take more than a week, but because of their inexperience of war they are still fighting in Yemen a decision many believe was taken without a good strategy. Additionally Saudi Arabia and its allies are not affectively targeting the Houthis as the result their forces mainly target the innocent civilians despite being assisted by the intelligence of the USA.

Salman Bikeyri (Bikeyri, 2019) recaptures the moment when both Saudi Arabia and its UAE coalition arming Houthis, the late President Saleh’s clan and other clans after his removal from power by the revolutionaries to fight off the Sunni Islah Party that is associated with the Muslim Brotherhood from the capital city of Sana’a. Saudi Arabia and UAE consider the that Muslim Brotherhood as a threat for their Kingdoms, as they were behind most of the Arab Spring revolutions by throwing out of old regimes, in the name of liberalization and democratization of the Muslim and Arab World, if these revolutions were to succeed it would create domino effect in most of the gulf countries. Hence they fought a Sunni Muslim Islah party in favor of Shia Houthis.

Abdul Malik Aladni (Aladni, 2019) maintained that, Saudi Arabia and its allies are extorting Yemen society by forcing them to choose between Houthis and them. He supports his claims by stating that in the island of Socotra in the southern Yemen there are no Houthis or any
militias that is threatening but still UAE deployed its forces there for the intention of invasion. He further added that they are justifying fighting for legitimacy for President Hadi to push for their own dirty agendas.

They have sabotaged the infrastructure for example the oil pipeline in Shabwa governate to stop Yemenis from exporting its oil and gas and freezing of sea ports from functioning. They also encroach Yemen’s sovereignty and causing instability by supporting Alqaeda in fighting Houthis. UAE on his part has created a transitional council to facilitate a cessation agenda of southern Yemen from the northern part.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Conclusion

Iran changed its war strategy after the Iran-Iraq War by creating local militias in countries it wants to have influence rather than sending it troops. Iran is an aggressive regime, its philosophy is all about spreading its ideology to other Muslim countries.

Iran’s grand strategy has continued to be viewed as a post-revolution phenomenon hinged on the pursuance of the regime security. It is made possible by increasing hostile relations with the West and its neighbors in the Middle East and Yemen seems to be the best option when it comes to threaten Saudi Arabia’s stability.

Iran is very strategic in rolling out its national and international goals. It arms Shiite groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen which subsequently evolve into a political movement demanding political space in the parliament, cabinets and roles in critical national decision making processes. Essentially, Iran nurture its allies and proxies to take over state power through continues overt strategies.

By and large, Iran’s strategy in Yemen does not differ that much from those of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. It is a strategic and comprehensive goal to achieve expansive Iran’s national interest and maintain hegemonic influence in the Middle East.

The study has also demonstrated that Iran’s Grand Strategy has greatly influenced the emergence of the Houthis to power in Yemen and consequently the crisis, as study has also set a new framework for understanding how Iran’s expansionist strides and cultural export is largely influenced by the grand strategy. Finally, the grand strategy of Iran is primary focused on the preservation of the ideals of the 1979 revolution and regime security. It targets the building of strong allies and proxies across the world such as in Yemen and elsewhere.
5.2 Recommendations

- Yemenis are facing humanitarian challenges in a dire situation, the international organizations should sanction both Iran and Saudi Arabia for their aggression.
- Both state actors and non-state actors in Yemen should consider political resolution than the ongoing military confrontation.
- Policy makers in Iran and Saudi Arabia should allow Yemenis to solve their internal problems without interference.

5.3 Suggestion for Further Studies

Iran grand strategy is evolving and expanding beyond the Middle East which hitherto was its main focus. Therefore, it will be expedient to begin focusing on Iran’s Grand Strategy in Africa.

The research also calls for a renewed focus on Iran’s affiliates not only in the Middle East but also in Africa as Iran continue devolve the use of its grand strategy in peripheral states.

The study sees an opportunity to study the role of Iran in the emergence of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) a proxy in Nigeria. The recent crisis between the group and the Nigeria government highlights the complexity and dynamics of Iran and Saudi power play. The Nigerian government is engaged in a violent clashes with IMN and has subsequently banned and tagged it as a terrorist organization posing threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria. Thus, the hegemonic struggle between Iran (Shia) and Saudi Arabia (Sunni) not unconnected to the crisis.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Map of the Middle East

Appendix 2: Virtual Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Does Iran have any influence in Yemen?

Are there any evidence proving Iran’s presence in Yemen as we have seen in Iraq, Lebanon and Iraq?

Why has Iran changed their strategy in Yemen as they don’t seem to be facilitating Houthis as they have with Hezbollah and other militias in the Middle East?

What does Iran want in Yemen?

How does Internal dynamics in Yemen promote Iran’s foreign policy?

How is Iran’s foreign policy at conflict with the interest of other state actors in Yemen?
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

23rd April, 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

REF: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH – MUSTAFA MOHAMED ABDULKADIR
STUDENT ID, NO. 654933

The bearer of this letter is a student of United States International University (USIU) -Africa pursuing a Master of Arts in International Relations.

As part of the program, the student is required to undertake a dissertation on “Iran’s Grand Strategy in the Middle East: A Case Study of Yemen” which requires him to collect data.

Please note that information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be used for academic purposes.

Kindly assist the student get the appropriate data and should you have any queries contact the undersigned.

Yours Sincerely,

[Signature]

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