Ideological Contention or a Pragmatic Power Rivalry? A Deductive Approach to Understanding the Rivalry Between Saudi Arabia and Iran

Taha Doueidar
7237242
Dr. Peter Jones
GSPIA
University of Ottawa
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Abstract

There are not many problems in the Middle East getting more attention than the rivalry between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Their competition for dominance has permeated throughout the region, making it a critical aspect in almost all major conflicts. The emphasis on religion in political discourse and domestic media implies that ideology is a driving factor of contention. Many journalists and academics have taken this as evidence of an "Islamic Cold War" in the region, as the Cold War was fundamentally an ideological conflict. This paper tests this common hypothesis by drawing out observable indicators from the Cold War and using them to analyze the case of Saudi Arabia and Iran. I argue that ideology is not a driver in the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. They are involved in a classic geopolitical rivalry based primarily on territorial disputes, regional security, and economic issues. My argument is structured around three observable differences; firstly, the Americans and Russians did not have a history of conflict. It is unique to the Cold War because Arabs and Persians have been fighting since antiquity, well before the emergence of Islam. Secondly, American liberalism and Soviet communism were inherently conflicting ideologies that advocated contradictory systems of governance. This is a feature that Wahhabism and Khomeinism do not share. Lastly, the US and Soviet Union had ideologically consistent foreign policies. In the case of Saudi Arabia and Iran, we observe pragmatic foreign policymaking and continuous ideological concessions to progress their geopolitical agenda. These three characteristics of the Saudi-Irani rivalry indicate that we are observing less of an ideological conflict and more of a classic geopolitical rivalry.

Key Words: *International Conflict; Middle Eastern Affairs; Islamic Cold War; Geopolitics; Foreign Policy; Ideology*

Table of Contents

Introduction

Saad Hariri shocked the world on November 4, 2017, when he announced his resignation as Prime Minister of Lebanon from Riyad, Saudi Arabia. He expressed concerns for his life and blamed Iranian-Hezbollah relations for the Lebanese political deadlock. News sources quickly attributed this obscure resignation to Lebanese religious sectarianism and the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran. It was depicted as another flare-up in the fierce "Cold War" consuming the region. Over recent decades, the Saudi-Irani rivalry has gained significant attention as it continues to permeate and exacerbate regional conflicts. Their indirect confrontation and supposed ideological contention have led many to conclude it is a "cold war." Such an assumption is understandable as these were fundamental characteristics of the 20th century conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the conclusion remains inaccurate because the impact of ideology in the Saudi-Irani conflict remains highly contested within academic literature. The analytical risk of prematurely applying the cold war label is that it sets an ideological lens through which we will interpret the conflict, potentially limiting our consideration of possible confounding variables.

Research Question and Main Argument

The following discussion questions the role of ideology in the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. I do so through the question: what impact do ideological factors have on the conflict between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran? Subsequently, is this sufficient to conclude the presence of a cold war in the Middle East and its surrounding regions? I argue that the role of ideology is overstated and outweighed by more pragmatic factors, such as historical rivalries, economic competition, and territorial disputes. Three main observations form my argument; firstly, the Americans and Russian did not have a history of conflict before their ideological re-alignment in the early 20th century. It is unique to the Cold War

as power struggles have consumed the Middle East since antiquity, and the Arabs and Persians have been fighting well before the emergence of Islam. Secondly, American liberalism and Soviet communism were inherently conflicting ideologies, which advocated contradictory systems of governance. Due to their expansionist nature, the two could not exist at the same time and space. Wahhabism and Khomeinism do not necessarily oppose one another in this manner. They originate from the same religious foundation and do not advocate directly opposing systems of governance. Thirdly, the foreign policy of the Americans and Russians followed their respective ideological beliefs, particularly in their engagement in proxy warfare. Saudi and Iranian foreign policy is more pragmatic and driven by realpolitik factors, such as regional power balancing. To an extent, Iran is more anti-American/Western than it is anti-Saudi/Sunni. These characteristics of the Saudi-Irani rivalry indicate that we are not observing an "Islamic Cold War," it is a classic geopolitical rivalry.

Scope and Methodology

My analysis is not a direct or comprehensive comparison between the Cold War and the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran; such a task is beyond the scope of this paper. I use the Cold War to draw observable indicators to structure my analysis. The conflict serves as an excellent generalizable case study to assess the role and impact of ideology in a different case, as it is our best-known and most well-researched ideological conflict. Due to the vast literature on both cases, I narrowed my scope of analysis by conducting a systematic literature review and identified three key factors that international relations scholars believe indicate that the Cold War was an ideological conflict. Firstly, a nonconflicting history up to the point of ideological re-alignment. Secondly, ideologies of international governance, which directly oppose one another. Thirdly, ideologically aligned foreign policies and engagement in proxy warfare. These will serve as my framework to analyze the role and impact of ideology in the Saudi-Irani rivalry.

The methodology utilized in my research is a qualitative small-N case study. It is the best method to gain detailed knowledge about a subject (Gerring 2007, 1). Given the historical nature of this topic, I rely on qualitative data from primary sources, such as news reports, eyewitness accounts, and political discourse. Additionally, secondary data from scholarly journals and books, as they contain a plethora of historical information and aid in the theoretical understanding of this conflict. Certain limitations impacted my research and analysis, the first of which was sources. While there is a rich and diverse literature on Middle Eastern politics, pre-Islamic work remains relatively limited compared to that of the Islamic, colonial, and post-colonial periods. Moreover, the Arabs during the pre-Islamic period had little to no physical or written evidence of their relations with others. I was therefore required to rely on literature informed by Hellenic, Roman, and Persian sources. It was not until the later Islamic empires – beginning with the Umayyad but increasing during the Abbasids – that we began to see the emergence of written material from the Arabs. It is critical to note this degree of bias in the sources because a significant portion of my analysis is within the pre-Islamic period. The second limitation was those posed by time and resource restrictions. Narrowing my analysis required me to scope out other case studies of proxy warfare and potential indicators of ideological impact, such as art, literature, and mass media.

Structure of Analysis

The discussion below begins with a brief theoretical overview of international conflicts. It outlines the academic progression of Cold War thinking and compares it to the current debate on the Saudi-Irani rivalry. The proceeding sections organize around the three observable indicators of an ideological conflict described above. Section one describes the non-conflicting relations between Russia and the US before their ideological re-alignment. It then traces Middle Eastern politics into antiquity to show the conflicting relationship between the Arabs and Persians before

the emergence of Islam. Section two explains the ideological development and adoption of liberalism and communism and compares it to that of Wahhabism and Khomeinism. Lastly, section three focuses on foreign policy and individual cases of proxy warfare to illustrate the realpolitik nature of Iranian and Saudi regional engagement. My discussion concludes with some final remarks on recent regional developments and points of consideration for the future of this rivalry.

Theoretical Approaches

Theoretical progression within the study of international relations and geopolitics can be traced through the analytical development of Cold War thinking. Realist assumptions and their emphasis on realpolitik dominated the Cold War scholarship in the 20th century. The traditionalists or orthodox thinkers view the conflict in a reactionary manner; the Soviet Union was increasingly threatening, and the US justly reacted for national security purposes (Westad 2013, 64). A primary proponent of this position was George F. Kennan, a US Foreign Service worker who advocated for US containment of Russian expansionism in his famous *Long Telegram* (Kennan 1946). The revisionists countered the traditionalists by emphasizing the expansionist foreign policy of the US and the response by the Russians (Williams 1962; Fleming 1961; LaFeber 1976). They increased in popularity throughout the Vietnam War, as their position that promoting liberal democracy is an imperialistic, militaristic, and racist Western project to colonize and influence the non-Western world, resonated with those against the continued US intervention. The post-revisionists emerged as a middle ground between the traditionalist and revisionist schools. Pioneered by John Lewis Gaddis and his 1972 text *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, they are more fluid in their answer to what caused the Cold War – blaming both the US and the Soviet Union at various stages of the conflict. They viewed the global aspirations of the US and the Soviet

Union on relatively equal ground and that the US' desire to export liberal democracy left little room to accommodate the security concerns of the Soviet Union (Gaddis 1983, 173).

Despite these various approaches that emerged, the scholarly debate remained dominated by the realist considerations of economics, military power, and balance of power politics. The significant shift in the scholarly debate occurred when the Cold War ended. For decades scholars and journalists primarily relied on open-source materials from Western states. The end of the conflict brought an influx of new documents, transcripts, and other primary data and shifted previous understandings of the conflict. The most significant discovery was the impact of ideology on Soviet decision-making, particularly at the beginning of the Cold War (Hanhimäki and Westad 2004, xii). As a result, in the 1990s we observed a shift towards a more constructivist approach to understanding the origins of the conflict. The more documentation and analysis conducted, the more scholarly consensus formed around the Cold War being an ideological conflict.

Such progression and consensus do not exist within the academic literature on the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. There is a rich scholarship on the relations between these two states and generally, theoretical positions tend to fall between realism and constructivism. Realists working within an international conflict medium, such as Stephen Walt, emphasize the material, military, and technological conditions of rising powers; the classic "security dilemma". States become threatening as they begin to increase their power and these conditions may cause alliances to form to balance their power (Wohlforth 2012, 51). An example of this would be the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to balance Iran's Axis of Resistance. Walt refers to this as "offensive power" in that "large offensive capability is more likely to provoke an alliance" (Walt 1985, 11). There have been many developments since Walt originally proposed these ideas, but their underlying assumptions remain. Constructivism considers these material factors as well, but they

emphasize the significance of ideas and shared knowledge (Flockhart 2012, 84). Social and ideological considerations are necessary for understanding material forces, rules, and norms.

We observe this theoretical division in the current literature on the Saudi-Irani rivalry. Henner Fürtig, for example, in his 2002 work *Iran's Rivalry with Saudi Arabia between the Gulf Wars* emphasizes the impact of the Sunni-Shi'a divide and the competition for religious leadership, alongside the economic competition. Frederic M. Wehrey *et al.,* in their 2009 RAND report recognize the impact of ideology but argue that it is not a driving factor in the conflict to the same extent as economic competition. There are other less common hypotheses that are not attributed to the above-mentioned realist and constructivist camps. Sharam Chubin and Charles Tripp, in their 2004 text, *Iran-Saudi Relations and Regional Order*, argue that structural constraints limit the cooperation between the two states, making them more prone to conflict. Others have taken a unique approach, avoiding the traditional geopolitical theories, such as Simon Mabon, in his 2013 work *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power and Rivalry in the Middle East*. He focuses on structural constraints, but rather than looking at economic/military power and ideology, brings forth the idea of regime survival and considers the impacts of the modern state system in the region.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been covered extensively within the academic literature, however, gaps remain. Particularly, there is little work focusing specifically on the role of ideology in the conflict. Most discussions either emphasize ideology as a driver or reject it and focus on other geopolitical factors. There has yet to be a work that deductively considers the question of whether this is an ideological conflict, giving equal weight to any position that best explains the case. This is precisely the purpose of my paper, to view this conflict through an equal comparative lens, and give serious consideration to the possibility that ideology is a driving factor in this conflict, similar to the US and the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

Origins

The presumption that the current rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran began after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 is historically incorrect. A popular narrative has been that the Iranian state shifted its ideology to a form of Twelver Shi'aism, referred to as "Khomeinism," which opposed and threatened the Wahhabist of Saudi Arabia. The issue is that the Arabs and Persians have been in conflict for generations, well before the modern state system. This is significant because the non-conflicting history between the Americans and the Russians is a fundamental characteristic of the Cold War. Prior to the presidency of Woodrow Wilson and the rule of Joseph Stalin, American–Russian relations were calm. It was not due to the absence of material and military capability; their foreign policies were simply not threatening to one another. This absence of conflict is a significant indicator of ideology being a driving factor in the Cold War. The ideological shift of the Americans and Russians offers a causal explanation for the conflict. Moreover, it sets a baseline state of relations and a potential counterfactual. We can ask the question; would the Cold War have occurred if the US and the Soviet Union did not have opposing political ideologies? The answer is ambiguous, realpolitik factors may have brought these rising powers into conflict, a presupposition held firmly by power transition theorists. However, it is not clear that it would have been as severe or reached its breadth without its ideological foundation.

The following section explains the foreign policy priorities of American and Russian policymakers to illustrate the absence of conflict between them before the onset of the Cold War. I then compare it to the origins of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, arguing that the latter has a history of conflict over various geopolitical factors, not necessarily ideological. Before the emergence of Islam, in which both Wahhabism and Khomeinism are rooted, the region was a conflict zone for imperial powers seeking territorial control. The Arabs and the Persians were

among these groups and were able to consolidate power that lasted generations. Thus, an analysis of the pre-Islamic period provides useful insight and illustrates the conflicting history of these groups in the absence of their contemporary ideological structures. Far too often, journalists and academics begin their analysis of Middle Eastern relations after the emergence of Islam. While it is an inflection point in the region's history, much of what occurred before it has had lasting impacts. For example, in 1971, Mohammad Reza Shah commemorated the memorial of Cyrus the Great at the 2,500–year anniversary party of the Persian Empire (Curtis 1971). His words of admiration were an attempt to unite the Iranian public during a backlash to his rule, and to glorify "pre-Islamic" Persian history at the expense of his primary critics – the religious establishment.

American-Russian Relations Before WWI

American Foreign Policy in the 18th and 19th Century

The orientation of pre-WWI American foreign policy was non-threatening to the Russians. Many believe this to be an outcome from the period of "virtuous isolation," when US policymakers refrained from engaging in global politics to protect the special essence of American society. History proves this to be false, the US had a very active foreign policy prior to the 20th century and foreign affairs were commonly discussed by political officials (Mead 2002, 6). It was rather due to their non-European foreign priorities. US foreign policymakers were concerned about three issues, the first being international trade and propping domestic production. American society was largely agrarian, in the late 19th and early 20th century nearly half the American population worked in farming and agriculture, and it accounted for upwards of 83 percent of exports (Mead 2002, 14). Their economy was also linked to the international financial market, as the actions of foreign investors impacted their domestic markets. For example, the US endured an economic crisis in the late 1850s, with substantial drops in prices on the New York Stock Exchange, decreases in

production, devaluing of local properties, and increases in unemployment (Stampp 1990, 213). The reduction in prices on the New York Stock exchange was due to the impact of the Crimean War on European banks. French bankers took a major financial loss and withdrew their money in the Bank of England. Interest increased in London and investors sold their American securities, increasing supply, and decreasing their value on the US market (Stampp 1990, 221). Ensuring the stability of their international trading partners was vital to the health of the American economy.

Beyond economics and international trade, the US was concerned about continental expansion and its local security. The 19th century is generally regarded by historians as the "golden age" of American foreign policy, as they were able to secure its immense territorial landscape (Immerman 2010, 51). Most notably the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803 and Florida in 1819. At home, the Americans still had to contend with the French and British in Canada. The War of 1812 was a failed attempt by the US to expand territorial control. While there were some American victories, such as the Battle of New Orleans, the small gains did not make up for the immense costs. Interestingly, the Russian's played a role in mitigating this conflict. The Americans wanted a resolution, but the British were unwilling to negotiate. Czar Alexander successfully persuade the British, resulting in the Treaty of Ghent (Immerman 2010, 62). The Russians aided in a positive outcome for the Americans, as they regained most of what they had lost in the war. If American officials held any views of the Russians at this time, it was likely more positive than negative.

The final foreign issue was South and Central America, which William Henry Seward considered integral to the economic development and security of America (Immerman 2010, 88). The following decades saw multiple attempts to take control of Cuba. The issue was that Spain saw this as an integral part of their empire as well and was resolute in maintaining control. Both President Grover Cleveland and William McKinley attempted to use diplomatic pressure to force

the hand of Spanish policymakers. These efforts were unsuccessful, leading to the Senate officially declaring Cuba as independent and requiring the immediate withdrawal of Spanish forces (Smith 2013, 47). Madrid engaged in a fierce battle with a rising superpower that sought to expand its control and influence. These three foreign policy priorities indicate the preoccupation of American policymakers before the 20th century, which had little impact on Russian priorities.

Russian Foreign Policy Before WWI

Russian aspirations likewise had little impact on the Americans. The development of a "great power" has long been a desire of many Russian officials. Unlike the Americans who have many natural geographic barriers and distance from other major powers, Russia has many vulnerabilities and a long history of being invaded. Their expansionist policies and a desire to gain regional influence and control can be traced back to the sixteenth century under the reign of Ivan the Terrible. In this period Russia increased its territory by an average of 50 square miles every day for hundreds of years (Kotkin 2016, 2). However, this came at the cost of long-term insecurity from multiple invasions due to a lack of natural borders (Radin and Reach 2017, 8). A sense of insecurity and desire for control developed and became ingrained in Russian policymaking.

The political developments in continental Europe during the 19th century kept Russia's focus local. Napoleon Bonaparte was engaged in a fierce attempt to take control of Europe and Russia played a fundamental role in the defeat of the French army. Tsar Alexander I, before having the ability to celebrate his victory, began drafting the rules that would unite European leaders (Mazower 2012, 7). The Concert of Europe developed out of these meetings, and it became what balance of power theorists regard as the first true multipolar period in international relations. It was quite successful for some time, but this did not necessarily mean easy times for Russian policymakers. The Concert required a lot of attention from Russia, as it was a balancing act with

Great Britain, France, Prussia, and Austria. None of them were strong enough to unilaterally defeat the others, and the costs of an attempt far outweighed the benefits. Thus, there was compliance in the absence of any formal institutions and consultation on decisions making.

The downfall of the Concert of Europe increased the sense of instability for the Russians. They faced a new reality as the 20th century approached, Europe became increasingly divided, with sub-continental nationalist movements arising. Out of all of this stood Russia's biggest concern, the unification of the German state. It inarguably disturbed the balance of power in the region and posed a significant threat. With high turmoil at their doorstep, American foreign policy was the least of Russia's concerns. Until American involvement in WWI, it had little impact on European power structures. It was not until both states experienced an ideological shift that tensions rose.

Arab-Persian Relations in the Pre-Islamic Era

In the absence of Islamic structures, it remains highly likely that Saudi Arabia and Iran would be in conflict because they are the modern manifestation of a reoccurring historical phenomenon. Differences impact the comparison between modern and historical Middle Eastern affairs. The modern state system, the presence of borders (both physical and nonphysical), international intervention, and the presence of oil are all unique to modern Middle Eastern affairs and will be discussed later in detail. However, the historical trends of major powers fighting for control over the region set the foundation for the modern conflict we are observing today. Different forms of Persian control were constantly in conflict with the Romans and Arabs until the emergence of Islam. The Arabs gained control and ruled through the different Islamic caliphates but continued to fight against the Persians. The last iteration of this trend was the ongoing conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Although different in culture and religion, these dynasties and empires throughout history have had a keen interest in regional control and expansion.

The region has an incredibly diverse history because of these different Empires, who often struggled to consolidate and maintain their rule. Additionally, the people were nomadic as it was rare that a singular area was capable of sustaining life year-round, some regions endured multiple months with little to no rainfall. Thus, control over fertile and highly sustaining lands was key to the geopolitics of the region, and there was a competition over resource control (Macdonald 2015, 27). This is evident by the development and movement of both the Romans and the Persians towards regional coastlines, the Romans to the Aegean Sea and the Persians to the Caspian Sea (Whittow 1996, 30). Additionally, the region was a major transport route between Europe and Eastern kingdoms, such as India and China. There were a lot of incentives towards regional control and expansionism, which continued with the Arabs and the Persians (Fisher 2015, 5).

The Roman-Persian Conflict

Before Roman and Persian control, Arabia had somewhat of a balance of power between different localized Hellenistic kingdoms. The Ptolemaic dynasty ruled Egypt, the Antigonids ruled Macedonia, and the Seleucids controlled the rest; all of which had a tracible history to the conquest of Alexander the Great (Fisher 2020, 23). Significant changes in the region began with the formation of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty or the "First Persian Empire." Cyrus the Great successfully toppled the Babylonian King Nabonidus, disturbing the regional balance of power (Macdonald 2015, 17). This changed the course of history as a new Persian power emerged.

The Achaemenid dynasty was significant in that they were the first singular power to hold stable control over most of the Middle East, from modern-day Turkey to Pakistan and parts of North Africa (Parker and Parker 2017, 36). They established sophisticated systems of governance, including a legal system and federal units ruled by individual governors. Like the Achaemenid dynasty, the Romans had a desire for territorial control. This led to a series of conflicts that

ultimately ended with the defeat of the final Achaemenid king Darius III at the hands of Alexander the Great in 331-330 B.C. (Macdonald 2015, 65). Alexander the Great and his successors continued to make many attempts to control Arabia. Documented evidence shows Julius Caesar's adopted son Octavian, who led the Roman state after defeating Antony and Cleopatra in 31 B.C., ordering an expedition into Arabia for imperial expansion (Macdonald 2015, 65). The region was very attractive because of the high traffic of luxury goods, such as perfumes, silks, and spices from India and China (Hoyland 2001, 24). The benefit was that anyone using this trading route was subject to the rules and regulations of the power that controlled it.

The conflict between the Persians and the Romans continued over the centuries. The rise and growth of the Parthian Empire – which rose after the fall of the Achaemenid dynasty – gave the Persians a strong position as they were able to gain control over Mesopotamia, modern-day Iran, and Afghanistan, which were of the richest areas in the region (Parker and Parker 2017, 97). Unlike the Achaemenians, they had no control over the Mediterranean coast, the Arabian Peninsula, and North Africa. Internal governance conflict and the pressure from the Romans set their fate like the Achaemenid. The Parthians signed a peace treaty with the Romans in 218 A.D. to mitigate further losses. To the surprise of the Romans, what emerged from the Parthian rubble was a reincarnated Achaemenid dynasty under the Sasanians, who posed a challenge to territorial expansion. They consolidated their rule by grounding it in the traditions of the Achaemenid – adopting Zoroastrianism and a similar regional-rule-based system (Parker and Parker 2017, 100).

The rise of the Sasanian Empire was one of the most significant developments in pre-Islamic Arabian politics. They structured their foreign policy largely within the context of the ongoing conflict with Rome (Shayegan 2013, 806). Word came to the Romans about the broad territorial claims of the Persians, which increased their concerns (Gariboldi 2016, 47). It became

clear that the peace treaty signed by the Romans and the earlier Parthians was no longer in place. Ardašīr I, the first Sasanian King, began to launch multiple offensive attacks on Roman-controlled territories in Northern Mesopotamia. These offensives were followed by Julian the Great's Persian expedition, his motivation for which was to "destroy this pernicious people, on whose sword the blood of our relatives is not yet dry" (Gariboldi 2016, 47). Julian reoriented the Romans towards a more offensive policy to the Persians, compared to the past policy of containment. Both sides shifted towards a more centralized and absolutist form of government with their sights on regional control (Hoyland 2001, 27). The result was over a century of back and forth until the fragmentation of the Roman Empire and the defeat of the Persian armies by the Arabs.

The Role of Arabs in the Roman-Persian Wars

The Arabs never officially formed an empire in the pre-Islamic period. Regional power structures mainly reflected the Roman-Persian conflict. Despite their lack of imperial dominance, Arab polities and political elite were well known and increasingly had a greater impact on the rivalry between the Persians and the Romans. Arab elite used these two powers to their advantage to gain greater control and influence in the region. As their dominance began to increase, the relationship between the Arabs and Persians became more hostile. The fall of the Sasanians, along with their culture and religion, created a deep hatred towards Arabs (Keynoush 2016, 3).

The struggle for control between the Romans and the Persians included somewhat of a frenzy for influence and support by the peoples of the region. They courted the Arabs heavily, and the Arab elite used this to their advantage to increase their position within regional power structures (Hoyland 2001, 27). This resulted in relationships between the Arabs and each power. They would assist in battle, maintain territorial control, and conduct raids on behalf of both the Persians and the Romans. Byzantine records of Roman military strategies discussing the utility of

Arab soldiers provides evidence of this (Macdonald 2015, 85). Moreover, the experience of Anastasius I Dicorus, the Roman emperor who came to power after the death of Zeno in 491 A.D., discusses the threat of raids by Arab Persian allies (Edwell et al. 2015, 218). The roles of Arabs became prominent to the extent that the Persians and the Romans set guidelines on the usage of Arab allies in a peace treaty in 561-562 (Edwell et al. 2015, 215). The nature of the relationship between the two powers began to change as the Arab allies gained more autonomy, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the Arab alliances with both the Romans and the Persians.

The regional powers did not conduct their relations with the Arabs as a whole, nor is there evidence of a collective perception during the early Sasanian-Byzantine period. This characteristic of their early relations is crucial to understanding the role of Arabs in the pre-Islamic period. The Romans and Persians preferred to establish alliances with individual leaders from different clans and dynasties. Moreover, different Arab groups had varying relations with one another, depending on their geographic location. For example, the Ḥujrid in northern Arabia had a personal relationship with the Naṣrids of lower Iraq, which was within Sasanian-controlled territory (Fisher 2011, 4). The Romans had strong relations with the Jafnids who migrated from Yemen to Roman-controlled territory in the Levant. The basis of their relationships was mostly territorial, rather than ideological. Both the Persians and the Romans viewed Arabs as allies and potential threats.

It is not clear the extent that Arabs were allied to the Persians and Romans, as mentioned earlier, limited Arab sources restrict our understanding of the entire relationship. What is clear is that the Arabs became increasingly autonomous over time. This is a well-recognized political phenomenon occurring throughout history; the political and financial support from the dominant powers offers the means for the subordinate group to develop characteristics like the dominant power. In the case of the Jafnid dynasty, for example, this includes the formation of different

political/social structures and the emergence of a political elite (Fisher 2011, 81). A second reason for this is that the major powers began to sever their alliances with Arab groups. In a peace treaty in 561-562 A.D., both agreed to not use Arab allies for fighting anymore (Fisher 2011, 119).

The self-interested nature of the Persians and Romans caused growing skepticism and resentment among Arab political elite. The Sasanians replaced their long-time allies, the Naṣrids of lower Iraq, with the Tayyi' who were controlled by the Persian commander Nakhirjan (Hoyland 2001, 30). After the poisoning of Nu'man ibn Mundhir in 608 A.D., by the Sasanian king Khosro II, the Naṣrids came to resent the Persians. The result of these types of actions by the regional powers was clashes between the Arabs and the different empires. For example, the Battle of Dhu Qar in 604 A.D. was between Arab tribes and Sasanian soldiers (Hoyland 2001, 30). Moreover, the Arabs began developing and implementing their own geopolitical strategies in the region. The Jafnid and Naṣrid dynasties entered battle in 546 A.D. without any involvement or strategic planning by the Romans or the Sasanians (Fisher 2011, 118). By the end of the sixth century, the Arabs had developed a distinct political and military identity in the region. They strategized for their own development and engaged in many conflicts with the imperial powers.

The Roman Empire fell and with this came the success and dominance of the Arabs. Drivers of failure include political disunity, poor resource distribution, and the increasing strength of surrounding threats (Whittow 1996, 75). While the Persians were victorious, centuries of battle substantially weakened their forces. Shortly after, an Arab Islamic army formed to defeat the Persians in the mid-seventh century. Their victory at Nahavand symbolized the emerging regional dominance of the Arabs, and they continued to fight with the Persians for generations. Unlike the non-conflicting history of the Americans and the Russians, we are observing a historical trend in the region, one that revolves more around power, territory, and economics than it does ideology.

Ideological Development

On August 22nd, 1918, Vladimir Lenin sent a letter hoping to reach the American working class and motivate them towards the communist revolution. He referred to the American elite as "modern slaveowners" and accused them of thwarting the first socialist republic (Hanhimäki and Westad 2004, 4). It triggered a response from American officials, leading to an investigation by US Attorney General Palmer where the FBI rounded up hundreds of suspected radicals throughout the US. This was a period in which both powers were going through an ideological transition – the Americans to Wilsonian liberalism and the Russians to Marxist Leninism – creating unprecedented tension. They temporarily put their positions aside during WWII, but after eradicating the Nazi threat, they held conflicting ideologies of governance within an international power vacuum. Resolute in seeing the dominance of their ideology, they entered a struggle for global supremacy.

Comparing the ideological development of both conflicts reveals three differences that illustrate the inherent pragmatism of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Firstly, at their philosophical roots, liberalism and communism are conflicting ideologies. They could not coexist because they propose two radically different systems of governance, which include contradictory ideals and beliefs. It is unique to the Cold War and does not exist between the Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia and Khomeinism of Iran. They both originate from the same religious source (the Quran) and have coexisted throughout history. Secondly, there was a genuine adoption and belief in the ideologies of the Cold War. The US and the Soviet Union truly believed they knew what was best for the international community and were willing to endure the high costs of expansionism. In the Middle East, ideology is more strategic and was used to gain legitimacy during fundamental periods of nation-building. Lastly, the Bolshevik Revolution was a clear inflection point in the relations between the Americans and the Russians. The establishment of the Soviet Union and the

increased adoption of Wilsonian ideals created tensions before WWII. The defeat of Nazi Germany and the fall of Pax-Britannica catalyzed their pre-existing ideological tension to the Cold War. This causal connection between neutrality and conflict is not present within the Saudi-Irani rivalry. For decades after the 1979 Iranian Revolution – and the subsequent shift to Khomeinism – both Saudi Arabia and Iran went back and forth between cooperation and non-cooperation.

Conflicting Ideologies & Order Building

The Cold War was a manifestation of a generational philosophical debate. The ideologies developed sequentially: each began with a philosophical origin that developed through the work of an "internationalist actor" – someone promoting the philosophies within the international realm. Karl Marx popularized and internationalized communism, and Giuseppe Mazzini did the same for liberalism. Marx and Mazzini were opposed, and it is "in their arguments, one sees the outlines of two visions of internationalism… each would find a superpower backing in the twentieth century" (Mazower 2012, 52). To understand the Cold War, we must consider these philosophical origins and Victorian roots. It becomes clear that it is the ideologies that were opposed, not necessarily the actors representing them; a fundamental difference with the Saudi-Irani rivalry.

American Liberalism and International Communism

Liberalism originates from a diverse set of ideas and philosophies. American liberalism, specifically, can be traced back to the work of the 17th century philosopher John Locke who emphasized limited government intervention, individual freedoms, and the need to protect humans' natural rights. His philosophy was grounded in human nature, where all humans have "perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit" (Lock 1690, chap. 2 para.4). The purpose of laws and government is to protect these rights against violations and malicious acts by other individuals. These are formal freedoms, such as the

right to property and participation, rather than substantive rights, such as equality of condition (Engerman 2010, 21). Adam Smith and his *Wealth of Nations* was highly influential in the development of American liberalism as well. He supported a market-based economic approach, specialization, the division of labour, and limited government intervention in the economy.

In the 18th and 19th century, we began observing revolutions in Western states, most notably France, Great Britain, and the US. Monarchs, authoritarians, and colonial rulers began to fall and made way for Parliamentary and Congressional democratic systems (Ikenberry 2020, 13). Additionally, political and social movements emerged advocating different ideas of international relations. One of the main actors was Giuseppe Mazzini, an Italian nationalist who was a part of the Italian unification movement. He opposed isolationism, authoritarianism, and imperialism as he had a deep appreciation for the preservation of individual national identity and believed in the supremacy of democracy. Mazzini envisioned an international society of democratic nation-states, and he is regarded as one of the first actors to seriously consider the concepts of international cooperation and nationalism (Mazower 2012, 48). His beliefs were in line with what we currently label "democratic peace theory", which suggests that democracies are peaceful and do not fight, thus, if there is an international system of democracies, that system would be stable and peaceful.

At the time this directly rivalled Marx's socialism, which rejects the emphasis on nationalism and views democracy as incredibly flawed. There is a duality to the teachings of Marx, there is communism as a set of theoretical principles and communism as a governing system emerging from the demise of capitalism (Chattopadhyay 2014, 37). This paper is more concerned with the latter and how it became an international ideology of global governance. Nonetheless, both have their origins in the works of Marx and Fredrich Angles. It begins with the *Communist Manifesto*, which was a special request by the Central Committee of the League of the Just. What

was originally supposed to be a manifesto for the League became a generalized work for the entire world (Dean 2017, 2). The basic premise was that the current economic conditions have created a class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The demise of capitalism will be internal, and a revolution of the working class will bring about a new society of "free individuals". Communism frames history as a struggle between the working class and the elite, the oppressors and the oppressed, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Dean 2017, 21). A tone expressed by Lenin, when he told America workers "we are banking on the inevitability of the world revolution" (Hanhimäki and Westad 2004, 5). They believed in an end-state of humanity that included equality of outcome and the equal distribution of material resources.

Marx and Engels did not create these ideas; former utopian theorists, such as Charles Fourier and Roberts Owens, influenced their thinking (Chattopadhyay 2014, 37). Marx developed these ideas into a comprehensive ideology and internationalized communism, pushing the envelope on socialism as a global phenomenon. His work within the International Working Men's Association was communism's "First International" (Mazower 2012, 56). There was never a direct conflict between Mazzini and Marx; their arguments were mainly subliminal through published articles and speeches throughout Europe. However, the conflicting nature of the ideas that they proposed is evident. Mazzini supported individual rights and emphasized nationalism, capitalism, and supported an international system of democratic societies. Marx, on the other hand, proposed a system of group rights, rejecting capitalism and nationalism, criticizing democracies, and expecting the communist revolution to overthrow the current international system. These ideas are the foundation of the 20th century ideologies held by the US and Soviet Union. They directly oppose one another and advocate contradictory systems of international governance. A reality that was not fully clear until they were adopted by global powers centuries later in a structural vacuum.

Sunnism and Shi'aism

The ideologies that emerged from Sunnism and Shi'aism were less polarized than communism and liberalism. Islam emerged in the 6th century after the fragmentation of the Roman Empire. The Prophet Muhammad (PBBUH) received the revelation from God and was required to spread the message. It was simple yet incredibly controversial, proposing a monotheistic religion rather than the Meccans preferred polytheistic system. The popularity of Islam grew quickly and so did the subsequent empires. They developed polities, strong armies, literary institutions and expanded their influence throughout the entire Middle East and its surrounding regions (Schwedler 2020, 362). The Prophet Muhammad (PBBUH) was integral to the development of Arabian politics and when he passed away, the question of succession became a contentious issue.

Four Caliphs (or successors) followed in his place: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali. Issues emerged surrounding the order of the Caliphs as a small percentage of the "Islamic Ummah" (or Muslim community) believed that 'Ali was the only rightly guided Caliph. To the Prophet (PBBUH), 'Ali was his cousin, husband of his daughter, and among the strongest in the Ummah (Cleveland and Bunton 2017, 15). His opportunity for rule came after the death of 'Uthman, when Qurayshi rebels took control of large swaths of Islamic territory and there was significant pressure to establish another Caliphate. Many pledged their allegiance to 'Ali but not all political units supported his rule. The Ummah' split into three different groups; those who supported the ruling principles laid out by Abu Bakar and 'Umar, the supporters of the caliphate of 'Uthman, and the people of 'Ali (Madelung 1996, 147). 'Ali continued to struggle for power and popular support until his assassination in 661 A.D. in Kufa, Iraq (Cleveland and Bunton 2017, 15). Mu'awiyah I, a member of the Qurayshi political elite, became the next Caliph establishing the Umayyad dynasty (661-750). He was a highhanded ruler who used misrule and repression for power and control.

These harsh conditions pushed many to become supporters of ‘Ali, forgiving his lesser qualities and remembering his generosity, fair treatment, and devotion to Islam (Madelung 1996, 309).

After the death of Mu’awiyah I in 680 A.D., it was set for his son Yazid I to be his successor. He was challenged by ‘Ali’s son Husayn, who was murdered alongside his 72 companions by Umayyad forces on his journey to Kufa (Betts 2013, 15). The death of Husayn remains one of the most significant moments in Shi’a history and is recognized every year during Ashura. They view it as the start of the illegitimate rule of the Ummah and engrained a sense of martyrdom and marginalization in their faith, which is critical to understanding the contemporary mobilizing tactics of Iran. The Shi’a refused to recognize the rule of the Umayyad and the subsequent Abbasid Empire. They remained a minority under the status quo, primarily relying on underground networks for teaching and worship. As time went on, they expanded and temporarily secured political power in Egypt under the Fatmid Caliphate (Betts 2013, 33). It did not last long as they eventually lost control to the Sunnis. All hope was not lost, however, in the 16th century came the rise of the Safavid Dynasty. The Sunni rule in Iran came to an end, and Safavid leader Ismail I declared himself the Shah of Shi’a Islam and the ruler of Iran (Betts 2013, 33). During this period, the divide between and within Sunnism and Shi’aism began to increase.

Through assessing the origins of the ideologies, we observe the differences in their divisions. Mazzini and Marx advocated different worldviews and proposed contradictory systems of governance. It is likely that two major powers holding these opposing positions would eventually conflict. The Sunnis and the Shi’a, on the other hand, conflicted on issues of rightful leadership, scholarly legitimacy, and methods of practice. Even Ibn al-Wahhab – the scholarly backbone of Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabist model – did not denounce the practices of Shi’aism. Middle East historians suggest he willingly interacted with them during his time and often discussed their

similarities (DeLong-Bas 2004, 22). Therefore, two powers holding these positions would not necessarily produce an international conflict as the teachings of Mazzini and Marx did.

An Ideological Movement or Ideological Legitimacy?

The scale and intensity that the Cold War reached went beyond the root conflict between Marx and Mazzini. The leaders in both Moscow and Washington genuinely believed that their model of governance was superior and the only reasonable means of future prosperity (Leffler 2007, 8). They actively sought to export their models and structure the post-imperial world. The adoption of Wahhabism and Khomeinism, on the other hand, was more strategic to gain religious legitimacy for their rule. Muhammad Ibn Saud utilized the authority of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to gain popular support throughout large swaths of Arabia. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini gained popular support by Islamizing the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The strategic nature of this adoption translates into less emphasis on ideology and more on pragmatic geopolitical factors.

Woodrow Wilson and Mazzini's Liberalism

Liberal internationalists believe rules and institutions create a safe environment within a state. They extend this assumption by suggesting that an international system based on rules and institutions would create a safe global environment – at least safer for liberal democratic states. Thus, they are constantly engaged in order–building and trying to create a system of liberal democracies (Ikenberry 2020, 17). This includes international trade, information sharing, diplomacy, and cooperative security. These are all observable characteristics of the current Western Liberal order, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations (UN), G8, G20, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the UN Security Council (UNSC).

Woodrow Wilson is a foundational character in the development of this liberal world order, genuinely advocating for it after WWI. Wilson was an admirer of Mazzini and drew inspiration

from his teachings on democracy, nationhood, and political freedom. Nothing embodies his work better than "Wilson's Fourteen Points," which was a guideline to structure a post-war settlement. Some points were as general as removing economic barriers, and others were as specific as the evacuation of Romania and Serbia (Wilson 1918). In Wilson's view, the war was the product of international fascism and authoritarianism, and he planned to use WWI to bring about progressive global change and limit subsequent wars (Ikenberry 2020, 106). The liberal notion that institutions and laws could be implemented at the international level led Wilson to back the establishment of a "League of Nations," which was proposed and negotiated during the Paris Peace Conferences. Although Congress rejected the proposal, his support was crucial in the development of the League as it built up the confidence of British internationalists who brought the blueprint into fruition (Mazower 2012, 118). The significance of Wilson's ideas and the League is that they served as the foundation of the United Nations, a symbolic representation of the liberal international order. In the following decades, US foreign policy increasingly reflected the ideas in Wilson's Fourteen Points, many of which starkly contrasted the developing socialist ideology of the Soviet Union.

Vladimir Lenin and Marx's International Communism

The Bolsheviks Revolution is the necessary starting point for any discussion of Cold War Soviet ideology. Social democratic movements began moving through Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, of which Bolshevism was an extreme branch. It originates in Germany with the work of Ferdinand Lassalle, who founded the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). Marx and Engels' teachings influence their ideology, but what set them apart was their adoption of the "permanent campaign." They promoted their ideology and spread propaganda during the day-to-day lives of their societies (Lih 2014, 55). This increased the popularity of their movement and inspired young Russian social democrats towards revolution decades later. Most notably,

Lenin, the extremist and absolutist brainchild of Karl Kautsky, who was a member of the SPD. He revered him, believing that his ideology was a true "expression that reproduces the basic ideas of the Communist Manifesto" (Lih 2014, 55). Lenin leveraged the momentum of the socialist movement and led a communist uprising that created a sense of anxiety among the liberal states.

The revolution changed the course of history and was an inflection point in international relations. It began as a result of various economic grievances; by the late 19th century, an estimated 90% of Russians were among the working poor (Le Blanc 2008, 7). Alexander II implemented various modernization policies to mitigate these conditions, his most notable being the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. It gave the peasantry back roughly 50 percent of their land, however, they were unsatisfied with this as they felt they should own 100 percent (Wade 2016, 3). The economy changed under these new capitalist conditions, and while productivity increased, so did the cost of living, which increased the strain on the working poor. Lenin, among other socialists, began blaming the industrialization of Russia and the formation of its capitalist system. Mass protests broke out in 1905, but the Tsarists were able to keep it under control. However, they were not so successful the second time, when it occurred even stronger in 1917.

The discontent of the working class began to increase, and communication lines became more ubiquitous across the working class after the first revolution. Industrial workers were now concentrated in a few central areas, making it easier to spread information and propaganda. The main catalyst and arguably the reason for the success of the 1917 Revolution was WWI (Wade 2016, 16). It placed an incredible amount of strain on the Russians and revealed many weaknesses. For example, they were severely behind in arms production, such that unarmed soldiers were entering battle expecting to pick up weapons from dead soldiers. By the end of 1915, the death toll was roughly 2.5 million men, in addition to 1.5 million wounded or imprisoned (Wade 2016, 17).

They lost large swaths of their land, including Poland and Ukraine. Coupled with their economic struggles, the devastating impact of WWI brought the population to a subsequent uprising. This time they were successful, toppling the Alexander II regime and gaining control of the military.

Lenin had been in exile during this period, but after the overthrow of the Tsarist regime, he quickly made his way back to Russia. The revolutionaries established provisional governments for temporary rule, but Lenin criticized their legitimacy, believing the workers deserved all the power (Le Blanc 2008, 14). He quickly mobilized the Bolsheviks, and through a relatively non-violent movement in November of 1917, took control of Russia (Le Blanc 2008, 16). Like liberalism in the US, communism was not an adopted ideology for strategic purposes. The life of Lenin and the efforts of the Bolsheviks indicates a wholehearted movement towards implementing this ideology. A characteristic that is not consistent in the case of Wahhabism and Khomeinism.

Muhammad Ibn Saud and the Teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab

Saudi ideology is referred to as "Wahhabism," a politically conservative strand of Sunnism. The history of Wahhabism is one of merging a religious ideology with a political movement to mobilize local support. It originates from the 18th century teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who was a local Islamic scholar/preacher from al-Uyaynah, in the province of Najd – some 30 kilometers from Saudi Arabia's capital Riyad. He believed and preached the significance of "Tawhid," translated as the absolute monotheism or supremacy of God. Strong political opposition forced Ibn al-Wahhab to move to Medina, where he continued his activities as a preacher and religious scholar until an assassination attempt forced him back to his home village of al-Uyaynah (DeLong-Bas 2004, 20). However, it was now under the new leadership of Uthman ibn Hamid ibn Muammar, with who ibn Abd al-Wahhab established a strong relationship. Ibn Muammar benefitted as he gained religious support for his political motives, and ibn Abd al-

Wahhab benefited from his political support. The teachings of ibn Abd al-Wahhab began gaining political momentum and led to him establishing ties with the powerful Al Saud family.

During his stay in al-Dir'iyah, ibn Abd al-Wahhab conducted his teaching and preaching through clandestine networks. Over time, he got the attention of Muhammad Ibn Saud, who was the local ruling elite at the time. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was not interested in politics, but he was a very pragmatic man and realized the necessity of political support. Upon introduction to Ibn Saud, he promised that if he devoted himself to his teaching that God would grant him rule over the land of Najd (DeLong-Bas 2004, 34). This led to the famous agreement in 1744, which establishment the first Saudi regime. The motive behind Muhammad Ibn Saud was strategic; he endorsed him because his wife and brother told him about the popularity of his teachings. They agreed not to interfere in each other's affairs. Essentially, ibn Abd al-Wahhab stayed out of politics and military, and Ibn Saud did not interfere in the religious teachings. Their relationship was far from perfect, and there was a high degree of tension as this division of labour did not sit well with ibn Abd al-Wahhab. A major point of contention was that the military leader, in this case Ibn Saud, was able to call for holy war. This directly contradicted the teachings of ibn Abd al-Wahhab who believed that only an Imam (religious leader) could call a holy war (DeLong-Bas 2004, 36). It was clear at the outset that Ibn Saud had little intention of implementing these religious practices.

Tensions continued to increase as ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not support the power and material hunger of the Ibn Saud family. They continued to expand their territory and wealth, all while disregarding his religious teachings. This materialism and power hunger only got worse after the death of Muhammad, under his successor Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud. The ongoing conflict forced ibn Abd al-Wahhab to resign from his position as Imam and all other positions that he had assumed. Over time, he fully withdrew himself from political life and reduced his legitimation of Ibn Saud's

military endeavours (DeLong-Bas 2004, 40). The strategic utilization of ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings is clear from the actions of the Ibn Saud family. Particularly, the disregard for the rules set out by ibn Abd al-Wahhab. If this was a genuine ideological adoption, they would have followed the teachings of ibn Abd al-Wahhab, eliminating the tensions between the two. However, this was not the case as they often made ideological concessions for political gain, against the advice of ibn Abd al-Wahhab. For example, his teachings conceptualized Jihad in a strictly defensive manner and rejected its use for expansionism (DeLong-Bas 2004, 242). Yet, the Ibn Saud family continued to use it to legitimatize the expansion of the Saudi regime for generations.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Twelverism

The Iranian political ideology, referred to as "Khomeinism," was formally established after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Before analyzing the Islamization and "hijacking of the revolution" by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, it is crucial to understand the domestic context that made the Iranian population receptive to his teachings. Mohammad Reza Shah assumed power after a coup ousted the widely popular and democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh. As he modernized the Iranian state and attempt to consolidate his rule, public grievances increased. The working class was pressured by poor economic conditions, such as wage freezes and the halting of infrastructure development projects. Reza Shah attempted various economic reforms attempting to mitigate this, some of which had a positive impact. Particularly, there was better labour conditions and increased industrial production under his Third and Fourth Development Plans (Arjomand 1989, 78).

The social and political conditions produced a backlash from all sectors of Iranian society. Liberal groups were against the increasing militarization and authoritarianism of the regime; calling for a return to the 1906 constitution and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy (Cleveland and Bunton 2017, 357). A religious opposition formed as a reaction to the Shah's

secularization and westernization policies. The Shi'a clergy began to lose their clerical power and felt humiliated by the Shah (Milani 2008, 1:352). As mentioned previously, the Shah was a great admirer of Cyrus the Great and portrayed himself as the continuation of this non-Islamic tradition (Fürtig 2006, 15). He implemented social policies that moved away from what he believed to be "backward" religious rules. Essentially, the conditions of Iranian life and the various poor policies pursued by the Shah caused mass grievances across all sectors of society. In an interview with AlJazeera, Mohsen Mirdamadi, Iranian academic and politician, stated he was a student at the time of the Revolution and claimed that "there was a feeling that we were being humiliated by the Shah and his regime…there was no freedom" (AlJazeera 2019). These grievances would compel thousands to protest the regime in 1978-79. They would find a symbolic representation in Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who hijacked the revolution through tactics of stealth and force.

Ayatollah Khomeini was a Shi'a cleric and instructor in Qum. Even as a young cleric and junior Ayatollah, Khomeini was openly critical of the Pahlavi dynasty and its secular reforms. His objections primarily targeted the reduction in clerical authority and the secularization of Iranian society. Over time, however, his thoughts and teachings became more political. The grievances stated above brought about a revolutionary ideology, also within the religious clergy. Khomeini became the leader of the religious opposition to Reza Shah. In June of 1963, he gave a speech comparing the religious persecution of the Shi'a clergy in Iran to the Umayyad Dynasties' attempts to destroy the lineage of 'Ali (Ostovar 2016, 37). As previously mentioned, this is a significant source of grievance and feeling of marginalization within Shi'a history - a mobilization tool that Khomeini and his successor will leverage for decades to follow. His popularity and constant clashes with state forces resulted in his imprisonment in 1963 and subsequently, his exile to Iraq in 1964 where he would plan his return and overthrow of the Pahlavi regime.

Khomeini was likely troubled by the relatively minor reaction his imprisonment and exile received by the public and the clergy. Protests occurred, but it seemed there was an unwillingness to act against the Shah. Nonetheless, Khomeini began setting the foundation for an Islamic revolution. Additionally, this is where we observe the strategic tactics employed to Islamize and take over the revolution. During his time in Qum, Khomeini was incredibly influential, reportedly having trained over 500 Mujtahids (Shi'a jurists) and taught approximately 12,000 students before his exile (Arjomand 2009, 21). There was no surprise that he encountered many of his old students in Najaf and began preaching/teaching out of a local mosque. However, the content of his sermons and lectures had changed. Typically, he remained within topics of Islamic law, such as donation or taxation, but he intentionally shifted towards issues of governance to advance his political theory (Rahnema 2014, 89). In particular, the concept of "Guardian Jurist," to (politically) guide the people in the place of the Hidden Twelfth Imam. He expanded the role of religious rule, making it mandatory that if a religious authority successfully established a religious government, the clerics needed to follow it. Khomeini's conceptualization of this role directly contradicts the long-standing Twelver rule that jurists do not have authority over one another; only the Hidden Twelfth Imam can do this (Arjomand 2009, 22). He expanded his religious authority in an attempt to control the Shi'a clerics, many of whom disagreed with his ideology and posed a challenge to his rule.

The various grievances noted above pushed individual groups to rally behind Khomeini. The reason for this widespread support was that he leveraged Iranian society's culture of religious protest, resistance, and martyrdom (Cleveland and Bunton 2017, 359). As discussed above, these feelings are deeply rooted in Shi'a history. Iranian society became more receptive to Khomeini, and their revolution became increasingly Islamized. A 1976 survey result show an approximately 118 percent increase in religious book publishers in the decade between 1965 and 1975 (Arjomand

1989, 92). Moreover, there was also a substantial increase in the development of religious institutions across Iran. These institutions distributed the taped sermons and lectures of Khomeini (Arjomand 1989, 93). Coupled with the various efforts of his students and supporting clerics, Khomeini became the face of an Islamic revolution that was only in part due to religious grievances. We observe the Islamization of the revolution in the tactics of contention of the protesters. For example, on December 2, 1979, during Muharram (the religious period of mourning of Husayn), thousands of protesters publicly engaged in traditional mourning rituals to protest against the Shah (Cleveland and Bunton 2017, 362). The regime responded with aggression and despite hundreds of deaths, protesters continued to publicly recognize Muharram. The resolve of these protesters and their choice of contention tactics are evidence of the Islamization of the revolution and Khomeini's success in leveraging the Shi'a sense of martyrdom and sacrifice.

The pro-Khomeini camp leveraged stealth tactics well to mobilize the population, but they also utilized physical force. After his exile to Najaf, Khomeini established various support groups, one of which was called the "Coalition of Islamic Mourning Groups". Mohammad Bokhara'i, a member of an armed branch of this group, shot and killed Prime Minister Hasan Ali Mansur in 1965 (Rahnema 2014, 88). The most notable use of force was upon Khomeini's return from exile. He pushed his supporters to continue the revolution and remove Prime Minister Bakhtiar (Ostovar 2016, 41). There were numerous clashes between armed supporters and the state military. The most significant display was when hundreds of Air cadets and technicians, who were avid supporters of Khomeini, moved towards the University of Tehran with multiple trucks filled with weapons to incite an armed rebellion against Bakhtiar (Ibrahim 1979). Khomeini responds with support for the rebellions, warning that "Although I have not yet ordered a holy war... if this killing of brethren does not stop …I will then make a final decision, God willing" (Ibrahim 1979).

In the years to follow Khomeini successfully consolidated his rule and established an Islamic regime, based on his ideology of Guardian Jurist. However, even after securing governing control over Iran, there was the issue of ideological acceptance at the societal level. Many did not support the establishment of an Islamic Republic, as much as they did the ousting of the Shah. This continues to pose a conundrum to the republic, the population is no longer satisfied with the structure of the post-revolutionary state (Maloney 2020, 28). The changes required to settle this are in direct contradiction to the ideology of Iran. This is one of the many perils of the strategic utilization of Shi'a traditions to overtake the Iranian Revolution. The issue is similar to the ideological contradictions of the Saudi regime, both result from a disingenuous utilization of ideology to mobilize popular support. This is an indicator of the pragmatism of their current rivalry, as their ideological positions are inherently strategic. Thus, when their utility decreases, we observe an increase in ideological concessions, which I discuss in detail under section three.

Inflection Point

Many conflicts have inflection points or moments that cause drastic changes in the relations between those involved. In the case of the Cold War, it was the Russian Revolution in 1917, which began the ideological conflict between the US and the Soviet Union (Engerman 2010, 20). Most recounts and discussions of the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran suggest the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran to be its inflection point. As outlined above, many believe that the shift of Iran's ideology towards Twelver Shi'aism directly threaten the Wahhabist position of Saudi Arabia. Focusing on these inflection points is useful as it allows us to consider different hypotheses to explain a particular outcome. Historical evidence does not support the hypothesis that the Iranian ideological shift is a driver in the rivalry like the 1917 Russian Revolution was in the Cold War. Instead of direct conflict, there was mixture of cooperation and tension after the 1979 Revolution.

The Interwar Period and the Eve of the Cold War

The success of the Bolsheviks in dismantling the Tsarist regime was a signal to the international community of the potential strength of the European socialist movement. If the letters written by Lenin to the American working-class triggered a CIA investigation, the establishment and consolidation of the Soviet Union must have posed a geopolitical threat. Particularly with the rule of Joseph Stalin, who by most bibliographical recounts was a "cold-blooded" revolutionary. He furthered the already brutal regime of Lenin by ratcheting up the use of force and coercion (Gorlizki and Khlevniuk 2006, 243). As his leadership calcified, he assumed the role of internationalist leader of the global proletariat struggle. Under Stalin, the communist revolution was no longer a theoretical discourse propped up by local Marxist preachers through clandestine networks; it became an international phenomenon and a substantial threat to capitalist powers.

Stalin's rise to power was quickly followed by "socialist modernization" policies in Russia and its surrounding territory, which he outlined in his First and Second Five Year Plan. Essentially, it was an attempt to reform Russian social and economic structures to reflect the Marxist ideology. Examples of this include collectivization, elimination of the private farming, market restrictions, and high taxes. These policies were inward-focused and not directly threatening to the international community. During the 1920s, Stalin was primarily focused on developing a modern socialist state because he believed that the Soviet Union needed to develop before exporting the revolution (Shearer 2006, 200). Despite not being a direct threat, he still received considerable backlash from the international community, particularly, the British severed their ties and threatened war against them (Shearer 2006, 200). This was due to Stalin's policies being ideologically threatening, not materially or militarily. As he demonized world capitalist leaders, arguably to increase domestic political support for his communist rule, it developed a sense of enmity toward the Soviet Union.

The American position on the Soviet Union was one of open skepticism. Diplomacy and cooperation were options for Franklin Roosevelt, but he was very skeptical of Stalin's legitimacy and concerned about his communist ideology. Two memorandums sent to Roosevelt from the Secretary of State office illustrate these conflicting positions. The first was from Walton Moore, the Assistant Secretary of State, who felt that it was necessary and pressing to formally recognize the Soviet Union to mitigate potential future issues (Hanhimäki and Westad 2004, 16). The second was from William Buillitt, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, who did not feel that the US should formally recognize the Soviet Union until they proved the legitimacy of their government (Hanhimäki and Westad 2004, 16). More importantly, the US needed a commitment from the Soviet government to not interfere in American society. Roosevelt made no formal decision on the issue until Germany emerged and pushed these powers towards cooperation.

The delayed decision of the three powers – the US, UK, and the Soviet Union – to cooperate in balancing against Germany illustrates the ideological impact on decision-making. Haas (2014) explains that the Conservatives held a majority in the British Parliament and had great hostility towards the communists. They had such disdain that some of their members preferred the fascisms of Nazi Germany and considered it to be a "bulwark against communism" (Haas 2014, 744). At first, Stalin pursued a cooperative method to addressing the German threat under the Non-Aggression Pact (Leffler 2007, 19). Although skeptical that it would last, the pact conveniently bought the Soviets time to strengthen the Red Army and pursue various expansionist policies in its surrounding regions. The reluctance to cooperate began to dissipate as Germany grew stronger; their decision to break the Non-Aggression Pact and invade Soviet territory shifted the geopolitical positions of the three powers. The British and the Americans concluded that cooperation was required to defeat Germany and sought to take advantage of the Soviet's new anti-Hitler position.

Stalin was eager to join the anti-Hitler coalition after the Germans destroyed thousands of villages and killed over 7 million Russians (Leffler 2007, 20). The severity of the German threat pushed all three powers to put aside their ideological differences. The pragmatic nature of these decisions was clear as Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's special envoy, wrote on his meeting with Stalin that "my mission was not a diplomatic one…the most important thing to be done in the world today was to defeat Hitler" (Hanhimäki and Westad 2004, 23). The decision was dire for the Soviets as well; Stalin rarely ever made ideological concessions (Gorlizki and Khlevniuk 2006, 244).

The reluctance to cooperate and forced pragmatic decision-making caused an underlying ideological tension during the Second World War. None of the three major powers truly believed that wartime cooperation would endure. The end of the war brought about unprecedented global conditions, the destruction of the two world wars and the Great Depression caused the old international order (e.g.: Pax Britannica) to collapse. Moreover, they disrupted the balance of power and shifted the distribution of power towards the US. The result was a structural vacuum, where the heads of major global powers needed to step forward and propose a new international system (Ikenberry 2020, 101). The Americans and the Russians both genuinely believed in the supremacy of their ideologies and sought to frame the post-imperial world around it. No longer having an enemy uniting them, it led to the ideological conflict we know today as the Cold War.

Regional Impact of the 1979 Iranian Revolution

When Reza Shah and Al Saud assumed power in modern-day Iran and Saudi Arabia, ideology was a minor issue. Their concerns matched the context they emerged in; securing control and influence over a territory that European powers had recently occupied (Keynoush 2016, 4). Although instances of contention occurred throughout the 20th century, such as the 1987 Mecca Incident, the decades that followed the revolution were characterized by relatively few issues in

Irani-Saudi relations. In fact, there was quite a high level of cooperation between the two states throughout the 20th century. They signed a Friendship Treaty in 1929, had regular diplomacy in the form of visits by the heads of state, were founding members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and Saudi Arabia formally recognized the Islamic Republic of Iran after the 1979 Revolution (Altoraifi 2012, 12). The immediate outcome of the Islamic Revolution was not ideological tension, as is the common assumption, but seemed to have increased the prospects for greater regional security cooperation. King Khalid congratulated Khomeini, expressing his satisfaction with the "Iranian republic resting on a firm Islamic foundation" (Fürtig 2006, 27). Prince Abdallah furthered this by stating "from now on Islam will be the basis of our common interests and relations" (Fürtig 2006, 27). The shift to Khomeinism was a positive change for the Saudis; although promoting a different sect, the Islamic nature of the regime brought greater ideological alignment, especially when compared to the secularism of the Shah's regime.

It was not the Islamic Revolution and the ideological shift that caused the conflict, rather it was the actions of both Saudi Arabia and Iran in the decades after. Iran's foreign policy began to shift to one that was more defensive and strategically anti-Western. In addition to the fact that the pro-Khomeini camp was anti-Western, the geopolitical experience of Iran in the decades to follow proved the lack of regional support the state had. After the invasion by Saddam Hussein in 1980, Iran received very little support compared to Baghdad, which benefited from the US and the Gulf states. They did receive some assistance from Syria, Russia, and China, partly explaining the continued relations between these states, however, it did not compare to that of Iraq. Moreover, Saddam had the advantage of chemical weapons, which he deployed regularly throughout the war. This was a primary factor in Khomeini's decision to sign the United Nations Cease-Fire Resolution 59 (McNaughter 1990, 8). Despite Western powers having stood against the use of chemical

weapons, they did little about Saddam's use of them against the Iranians, thus, bolstering the pre-existing anti-Western view. The war came to a draw, but it exposed the weakness of Iranian forces; with an estimated loss of approximately 213,000 (Mason 2015, 21). Such devastation struck the sense of martyrdom engrained within Iranian society. The regime adopted a militaristic mindset and quickly expanded its arsenal, including its incredibly notorious nuclear program. Ultimately, its goal was to protect itself and block foreign intervention in the region. The emergence of Iran's "Resistance Axis" – the strategic partnership with Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine – is evidence of this, and will be discussed in further detail below.

Saudi Arabia remained relatively quiet during this period, mainly threatening Iran through its actions in OPEC. For example, during the First Oil Shock, Saudi Arabia overtook the movement committed to by all OPEC members by doubling the agreed-upon production increase, from five to ten percent, and unilaterally halting all oil shipments to the US (Parra 2004, 181). They acted similarly in the mid-1980s, when OPEC members, namely Iran and Iraq, were not following their quotas. Saudi oil production was taking major losses, thus, they boosted their production again by making netback deals outside of OPEC with Exxon, Mobile, Texaco, and Chevron (Parra 2004, 287). They outproduced all other states and restabilized the global oil prices. Dominating the international oil market was the clear priority and vision for Saudi policymakers.

Saudi-Irani relations truly began to worsen after the Gulf War in 1991. The conflict brought a new geopolitical landscape, and regional powers began developing new security frameworks. The issue was that Saudi officials could not support a framework with Iran because their actions contradicted Saudi Arabia's western aligned priorities; particularly, Iran's continued support of terrorist groups, anti-Western forces, and its developing nuclear program (Mason 2015, 25). This increased the rift between the two states, which only worsened as the US increased its involvement

after 9/11. There were still regular attempts to maintain bilateral relations, for example, Abd al-Aziz Khuwaithir, former Saudi Minister of Higher Education, visited Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1994 stating: “the two countries officials have opened a new phase of bilateral ties with the intention of reinforcing unity among Islamic countries” (Fürtig 2006, 262). This back and forth between the necessity of cooperation for regional security and an underlying tension for control and influence characterized the relationship between the two states in the post-Revolution period. Their growing tension and increasing divide had little to do with ideology, it was rather their foreign policies and positions on Western intervention that conflicted. These factors set both states on opposing trajectories that hindered their cooperation. Therefore, there is no clear causal connection between Iran’s ideological shift and its rivalry with Saudi Arabia.

An analysis of the ideological development of Saudi Arabia and Iran reveals that their rivalry is more pragmatic. Firstly, the two states do not hold conflicting ideologies that outline contradictory worldviews. While Khomeini came to power expressing an intention to export the revolution, there is little evidence to suggest that they made serious attempts at this – at least not nearly to the extent of the Russians with communism or Americans with liberalism. Secondly, their adoption of those ideologies holds strategic elements that indicate they served as a tool of nation-building rather than a lens through which threats were interpreted. Finally, there is a clear ideological inflection point that should have hypothetically caused a conflict, however, the relatively neutral post-revolution relations between the two states does not indicate a causal relationship between Iran's ideological shift and their regional rivalry with Saudi Arabia.

Inconsistent Foreign Policies and the Question of Proxies

The US-led Multinational Force (MNF) touched down in Beirut in the summer of 1982. Their mission was to evacuate all foreign parties from Lebanon, including Syria, the Palestinian

Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Intervention in Lebanon has always been peculiar because its profile does not match the typical case of US intervention in the Middle East. It is a small and poor state with little impact on regional power balances; most importantly, it is not an oil-exporting state – despite known reserves in the Levant Basin. Yet, Ronald Reagan felt it critical to commit thousands of American troops to resolve the civil war. Lebanon was not a prototypical proxy war between the US and the Soviet Union per se, but it illustrates Cold War decision-making. The Middle East was a breeding ground for communism, and former Russian Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov fully intended on leveraging grievances associated with the independence movement (Behbehani 1986, 92). It was a perfect opportunity to undermine Western liberalism as Arab states associated it with the poor conditions of colonization.

The Americans were aware of Russian intentions in the region, and it became a foreign policy priority. Reagan stated in his address to the nation that "if that key should fall into the hands of a power or powers hostile to the free world, there would be a direct threat to the United States and to our allies" (Reagan 1983). He was not as concerned with protecting Lebanese sovereignty as he was with the state falling to communism. American intervention in Lebanon exemplifies Cold War decision-making, as their earnest ideological adoption "affected their construction of "reality" – their perceptions of threats and opportunities in a turbulent world" (Leffler 2007, 8). Lebanon had little to offer in terms of economic benefits. The driving factor was the possibility of Lebanon falling to communism and the threat it would pose to pro-American liberalism allies, such as Israel. International engagement along ideological lines is a foundational characteristic of the Cold War, which is not the case in the Saudi-Irani rivalry. As we analyze the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan, we observe pragmatic geopolitical factors influencing their foreign policies and a relatively high willingness to make ideological concessions to address certain policies issues.

The Taliban Conundrum

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to support the (pro-Soviet) government against the Mujahideen, an anti-communist guerilla group supported by the US and Saudi Arabia. The Mujahideen overthrew the government but ended up splitting into different groups, one of which was the Taliban (Akbarzadeh and Ibrahimi 2020, 765). It is here we begin observing the contradictions in Iranian and Saudi foreign policy. Initially, both states engaged along ideological lines; Iran supported the Shi'a factions of the Mujahideen against the Sunni extremist group. In 1998, Iran gathered 70,000 troops and placed them along the Afghan-Iran border after the Taliban killed 10 Iranian journalists (Akbarzadeh and Ibrahimi 2020, 767). They remained at the forefront of the anti-Taliban effort, playing a vital role in toppling the group in 2001. Saudi Arabia, alongside the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, formally recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan and provided financial and arms support (Steinberg and Woermer 2013, 3). Throughout the 2000s, each state shifted their position and engagement with the Taliban. Iran publicly developed relations with the group, providing them financial support, training programs, and arms (Ahmed 2015). Saudi Arabia severed their ties with the Taliban and began supporting the new government of Hamid Karzai after the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Mason 2016, 319).

The shifts in position and ideological concessions are due to practical geopolitical factors. There was pressure on Saudi Arabia to cut ties from the Bush Doctrine and "War on Terror." Additionally, tensions rose between Saudi officials and Mullah Omar before 9/11, after he broke his promise to have Osama bin Laden detained in his home country (Steinberg and Woermer 2013, 3). Since then, Saudi Arabia has continued to maintain an anti-Taliban position and contribute to US efforts to eradicate terrorism. For Iran, the shift was a strategic move against the US. Thomas Juneau (2016) explains that Iran offers its support to non-state actors who go against the status quo

in the region (Juneau 2016, 649). When President George W. Bush included Iran in his conception of the "Axis of Evil" – the presence of US troops began to increase in the region, and so did the concern for Iranian foreign policymakers (Akbarzadeh and Ibrahimi 2020, 767). The result was Iran increasing its support of regional anti-US actors. In a way, Iran's actions are more anti-US/Western than they are anti-Saudi/Wahhabism. There are reports of the Revolutionary Guard providing support, shelter, and assistance to Osama bin Laden's son, Hamza bin Laden (Levy and Scott-Clark 2017). The CIA has also released multiple documents, including funding agreements between Al Qaeda and the Revolutionary Guard. Further illustrating the pragmatism of their foreign policy is the most recent shift in their position after the overthrow of the Afghan government. They are now more hesitant about the Taliban and preparing to support anti-Taliban groups (The Economist 2021). This is likely due to concerns about refugees; historically, the Taliban have persecuted Shi'a minority groups in Afghanistan, such as the Hazaras (The Economist 2021). These groups are likely to flee towards what they expect to be a Shi'a-friendly state, which is not ideal for Iran given its poor economic conditions. These are all pragmatic considerations impacting their foreign policy and causing them to make ideological concessions.

Proxy Warfare

Direct non-confrontation between the superpowers and engagement in proxy warfare became fundamental characteristics of the Cold War. The presence of these factors in the Saudi-Irani rivalry leads many to conclude that it is a cold war. However, the Americans and Russians engaged with proxies along ideological lines, which I will illustrate through the case of the Korean and Vietnamese Wars. As with their foreign policy generally, Saudi Arabia and Iran engage in proxy warfare for pragmatic reasons, such as territorial disputes, regional security, and economics. I prove this through two case studies; the first is the Yemen Civil War, where Saudi Arabia has a

history of engaging in territorial disputes and economics. The second is Levantine geopolitics, where Iran is establishing an "Axis of Resistance" to enhance its regional security. In both, we see one state gaining influence and control, and the other attempting to balance against it.

The Korean and Vietnamese Wars

In June 1950, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel and sparked a civil war with the South. The decision was an attempt by Kim Il Sung to unify Korea under a pro-communist system, which posed a major threat to the US (Savada and Shaw 1992, 32). The Americans quickly responded by developing a task force with the UN to counter North Korean forces (Gaddis 2005, 43). The Korean War was a quintessential proxy conflict, where we observe the Americans and the Russians developing and deploying local groups to enhance their ideological position. Korea held a special place in the memory of Russian foreign policymaking. They have been involved in Korea since the 19th century but lost their imperial control during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 (Kim 2016, 90). They regained control of North Korea in 1946 after Operation August Storm. They governed indirectly through local leaders and never passed the 38th parallel (Kim 2016, 93). The plan was to establish a pro-Soviet communist society in the North, ultimately, with Sung's goal to unify Korea. Despite some local pushback, over time, North Korea increasingly began to reflect the Soviet model. The most significant was the establishment of the Korean Peoples Army (KPA), which was aligned with Soviet ideology because it was created in the direct image of the Red Army and relied almost exclusively on Russian funding (Kim 2016, 115). The Russians were more than supporters in the North, they had a strong influence over decision-making. For example, Stalin stopped Sung from initiating the war much earlier because he did not feel it was within the Soviet grand strategy (Kim 2016, 132). In the 1950s, Stalin concluded that unification was feasible, with minimal risks to the Soviet Union, and gave the green light to Sung (Gaddis 2005, 42).

The US held strategic interest below the 38th parallel for quite a while before formulating any concrete strategy. After ousting the Japanese from the South in 1945, the US governed through the United States Army Military Government in Korea until 1948 (Savada and Shaw 1992, 27). Their goal was to establish a pro-Western liberal regime that could balance the communist pressure from the North. South Korea developed a democratic system and became an integral part of the US fight against communism in Eurasia, as President John F. Kennedy stated "Korea has become a testing ground in which the validity and practical value of the ideas and principles of democracy… are being matched against the practices of communism" (Oh 1969, 165). The Americans supported the creation of the Republic of Korea Armed Forces (ROK) and fought alongside them against the KPA, in a struggle for ideological dominance in the state (Chum 2017).

The Vietnam War was much larger and more complex than the Korean War, but the motivating factors of the major powers were similar. The Soviets supported the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the North, while the US was directly involved in fighting alongside the Saigon regime in the South. The US got involved after the Geneva Conference in 1954, which ended the Franco-Vietminh War. They committed to establishing a non-communist force in the South as pro-Soviet forces gained a stronghold in the North (Logevall 1999, 2). The Americans found themselves in a very vulnerable position. The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLFSV), a pro-communist group from the North, took over most of the South with a cumulative control of roughly three-quarters of Vietnam (Gaiduk 1996, 22). US President Lyndon B. Johnson was concerned about these developments and was adamant about not losing Vietnam to communist forces, to "leave the vast Pacific…a Red Sea" (Logevall 1999, 76). Vietnam was incredibly unpopular; it created deep social divisions and high levels of cynicism toward government policies (Logevall 1999, 412). Johnson's resolve in Vietnam illustrates Cold War decision-making. Despite

its unpopularity and mounting pressure to evacuate forces, he remained and endured massive casualties out of fear of communist domination. Such a level of sacrifice and ideological resolve is not present in the Saudi-Irani rivalry, as we observe through their engagement in proxy warfare.

The Civil War in Yemen

Yemen is currently amid the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The state has been torn apart by rival local and foreign actors – with millions of suffering civilians caught in the middle. Since the intervention of the Saudi-led coalition in 2015, Yemen has become one of the most widely cited cases in discussions of Saudi-Irani proxy warfare. The traditional view, often charged by domestic politicians against their adversaries, holds that Iran backs a prominent Shi'a rebel group called the Houthis that have increasingly gained control in Northern Yemen. Saudi concerns of an Iranian-backed Shi'a state at its border compelled them to establish a counter coalition to the Houthis. While Saudi Arabia and Iran are involved in the conflict and support different groups, ideology is not the driving factor for their intervention. Saudi Arabia has had a geopolitical agenda in Yemen since the unification of the modern Saudi state in 1932; some suggest as early as the first Saudi state in the 18th century. King Abd al-Aziz supposedly stated to his sons on his death bed that "the good or evil for us will come from the Yemen" (Gause III 1990, 1). They view Yemen as an integral part of their local security, and three non-ideological factors contribute to Saudi's continuous involvement in Yemen: territorial claims, border disputes, and foreign influence. Efforts to address these issues often involve Saudi officials making ideological concessions.

After the establishment of the modern Saudi state, the Royal Family sought to expand their control in the neighbouring region. A war broke out in 1934, and three northern provinces were annexed from Yemen: Asir, Najran, and Jizan (Rossiter 2018, 30). King Abd al-Aziz and Imam Yahya – a ruling Shi'a Imam in North Yemen – ended the war by signing the Taif Agreement of

1934, which officially recognized the three provinces as Saudi territory. In the decades that followed, there was a continuous effort to maintain a fragmented Yemen, as unification posed a threat to Saudi's territorial claims in the North (Gause III 1990, 4). These concerns came to light after the abolishment of the Imamate of Yemen when the leadership of the new "Yemen Arab Republic" began questioning the validity of the 1934 Taif Agreement. A civil war emerged between the Egyptian-supported Southern Republicans and the Northern royalists, who the Saudis supported. Ultimately, the republicans were successful; Yemen regained control of Asir, Najran, and Jizan, and Saudi Arabia formally recognized the new Yemen Arab Republic. However, the reunification of Yemen in 1990 brought new developments to Saudi-Yemeni relations. Ali Abdullah Saleh upheld the provisions of the Taif Agreement, and both sides signed an 11 point agreement in Mecca in February of 1995 (Rossiter 2018, 31). Saleh and Imam Yahya were Zaydi Shi'a Muslims, and although their ideology differs from Wahhabism, Saudi officials engaged with both to form a solution to their territorial disputes. These instances of cooperation were almost 70 years apart, indicating a fairly consistent level of pragmatism in their engagement with Yemen.

On June 12, 2000, Saudi Arabia and Yemen signed the Jeddah Treaty or the "International Boundary Treaty." It was comprehensive and covered all maritime and land boundaries between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, including all previous agreements and treaties. Most notably, the condition that Yemeni officials would reaffirm Saudi Arabia's control over Asir, Najran, and Jizan if they agreed to dismiss all territorial claims past the Taif Agreement (Al-Enazy 2002, 167). Both sides seemed fairly content with their agreement, however, it created a new set of economic issues. Saudi Arabia had aspirations for securing a route through Hadhramaut to the ocean to export oil, food, and other necessities (Clark 2010, 215). After Jeddah was signed, they required Yemeni cooperation to ensure safe and secure exports and imports, as their only other options were the

Strait of Hormuz (controlled by Iran) or the Bab al-Mandab (riddled with Pirates). Overtime, a perception began to develop that Yemen failed to adequality secure their side of the newly demarcated border. Saudi Arabia experienced an influx of unmarked weapons, illegal drugs, and terrorist networks, much of which they claimed to have originated in Yemen. By 2009, Saudi Arabia deemed Yemen its greatest security threat and began to increase its physical security and surveillance along the border (Clark 2010, 216). These activities increased the Northern Yemeni resentment towards the Saudis, blaming their increased presence for their poor political/economic conditions. Saudi Arabia's approach became increasingly militarized after the Sixth Sa'ada War in 2009 when the Houthi rebels fought the security forces of Saleh (Ardemagni 2020). Since then, we observe the increased use of force to eradicate the Houthis and stabilize the state.

The final factor of concern for Saudi policymakers is Yemen falling under the influence of a foreign adversary. Iran is their primary contemporary concern, but they were not always. Soviet influence was concerning when they attempted a communist conversion of the state after the British left Yemen in 1968 (Clark 2010, 113). This would have been a geopolitical win, as it would have offered them an influential foothold in the region and a convenient port to import and exports goods and services. Truly, South Yemen was hardly communist, but the foreign perception of Soviet influence, such as school children dressed in traditional Russian outfits, was strong enough to concern the Saudis and Americans. Regardless of their ideological position, Saudi officials are actively fighting against the development of a regional adversary at their southern border.

Iran's involvement in Yemen is more complex and nuanced than the common claim that the Houthis are Iranian proxies, often expressed by Saudi officials and the al-Hadi administration. Such a charge is inaccurate, Iran's role and influence in the Yemen conflict are limited, and the Houthis are driven predominately by domestic grievances and a desire for political control (Juneau

2016, 647). While they are both rooted in the same Shi'a tradition, their ideologies are distinct. The Houthis are Zaydi and Khomeinism is Twelver. As previously discussed, the Shi'a revere 'Ali and believe in the supremacy of his bloodline for the leaders of the Islamic world, who they refer to as "Imams." Zaydis trace their ideology back to the Fifth Imam, Zayd ibn 'Ali, one of the great-grandsons of 'Ali (Brandt 2017, 21). Twelvers follow the Twelfth and final Imam, who is currently under the major occultation and will return at the end of time. Zaydis are relatively moderate compared to Twelvers, and some would argue that they have more in common with Sunnis than they do with Shi'as (Juneau 2016, 651). Thus, the argument that the Houthis are Iranian proxies, and more generally Iran's development of a "Shia crescent," simply because they are Shi'a is not valid (May 2019, 117). Each religious sect is unique and holds its own distinct beliefs, which is critical to remember when analyzing any phenomenon in the Islamic world.

The history of the Houthis is one of a religious scholarship turned militant ideology. It began in the remote region of Sa'ada to counter the Wahhabi movement from Saudi Arabia (Vall 2014). In the mid-20th century, a "Sunnization" of the Zaydi community occurred in Sa'ada, which is a religiously significant region because it is where the first Zaydi Imam migrated from Saudi Arabia. The Sunnization occurred because of the constant movement in the bordering region. During the 1970s and 80s, an estimated 20 to 40 percent of Yemeni males worked in Saudi Arabia, many of whom converted to Wahhabism and began promoting their new ideology through local networks and mosques when they returned (Clausen 2018, 563). The mass Sunnization triggered public grievances and feelings of marginalization. As a result, a counter-movement emerged that targeted the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, and in 2001, they became known as the "Houthis." (Brandt 2017, 113). The history of the Houthi movement indicates that they had an anti-Saudi stance before the involvement of Iran, who began to increase their support after the 2011 Arab Spring.

As illustrated by its varying position toward the Taliban in Afghanistan, Iran often uses certain groups/movements as opportunities to balance against the regional status quo. After the 2011 Arab Spring, the Houthi movement provided them an opportunity to fight against the Saudi-backed and pro-Western regime of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Saleh temporary shifted his position and joined the Houthis to regain control over the state. Hadi was ousted from power and exiled to Saudi Arabia, which triggered the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen (Cleveland and Bunton 2017, 551). Since then, Iran has continued to increase their support of the Houthis, although denying supplying them arms. The Yemen Civil War exemplifies the pragmatism of Saudi and Irani foreign policy. Issues surrounding territory, border, and foreign influence have kept Saudi officials engaged in Yemen. On numerous occasions, they have shown a willingness to make ideological concessions to solve these geopolitical issues. Iran's support for the Houthis is not ideologically motivated; they are leveraging the strength of the group to balance Saudi influence in the Gulf.

Geopolitics in the Levant

Levantine geopolitics has been somewhat of a success story for Iran as it is the region where their efforts have been the most successful. This topic is broad; thus, I focus specifically on Iran's development of an “axis of resistance,” and Saudi Arabia’s attempts to counter it. After the Iran-Iraq War, it became clear to Iranian foreign policymakers that they exist in a constant state of insecurity. The axis of resistance was a geopolitical project to enhance their regional security and support. Saudi Arabia continues to pursue efforts at curbing this emerging power structure but generally has been unsuccessful. The Levant is a primary region of proxy warfare and serves as an excellent case study to observe their pragmatism and willingness to make ideological concessions.

Iran's Levantine project begins with their most prominent regional partner, Hezbollah. Unlike the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah is inarguably an Iranian proxy and plays a significant

role in their power projection in the Levant. They are a Shi'a political organization in Lebanon with origins in the Lebanese Civil War (1975 to 1990). During this conflict, Israeli forces controlled the Shi'a quarters of Beirut and were perceived as causing mass destruction. As has been a common theme in Iranian political rhetoric, Khomeini leveraged local grievances caused by the IDF presence. He connected them to the Shi'a historic feelings of martyrdom and marginalization and promoted his revolutionary ideology to the Shi'a of Beirut (Razavi 2013, 125). These sentiments took hold and Hezbollah was established, recognizing Khomeini as their leader and the Iranian structure as their model. Iran provides immense support for the organization through training, technology, and arms. While the religious connection and foundation point towards the importance of ideology, the partnership is more strategic. In addition to being a major foothold in the Levant, Lebanon neighbours Israel. Iranian hardliners view Israel as a threat, thus, there is great utility in having an ally directly on Israel's borders. Iran proved this true during the Hezbollah-Israel War in 2006, where they were able to test their indirect military might against Israel (Razavi 2013, 128). Hezbollah has become a substantial player in their Axis of Resistance.

Hezbollah has only increased in popularity since it conflicted with Israel in 2006. The dominance of this Iranian-backed group has been a serious concern for Saudi Arabia, which regularly tries to balance against it. Saudi intervention in Lebanon increased after the assassination of Lebanese and pro-Saudi Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Syria maintained a stronghold in Lebanon since the end of the Civil War, however, their role was internationally contested. This led to UN Resolution 1559, which called for "all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon" (UNSCR 2004). The US also had a keen interest in removing Syria from Lebanon after they had served ties with al-Assad. Hariri was later assassinated in 2005, and Saudi officials blamed Syria and Iran (Keynoush 2016, 204). They continue to monitor developments in Lebanon, trying to

limit Hezbollah's influence. For example, in 2017, Saudi officials were accused of forcing Saad Hariri's obscure televised political resignation. The Saudis were supposedly dissatisfied with his efforts to curb Iranian influence in the state (The Economist 2017). Despite continuous attempts, Saudi Arabia has been largely unsuccessful in balancing against Iranian influence in Lebanon.

The second part of the axis of resistance is Syria. Iran has developed strong relations with the al-Assad regime, and they are a significant part of their geopolitical project. Syria has maintained a peculiar role in the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. For decades, they were geopolitically aligned with the major Arab powers in the region, and Saudi Arabia considered them a strategic ally despite their Shi'a Alawi ideology (Partrick 2016, 208). Their relations ended after Saudi officials accused al-Assad of killing Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri. Syria was Iran's only regional supporter during the Iran-Iraq War. Since then, they have cultivated a strong relationship primarily due to their strategic alignment. The development of their relationship has less to do with ideology and more with their continuous support of one another (Ostovar 2018, 1252). Firstly, the al-Assad regime is of the Alawi sect; similar to the Houthis, the Alawi are a distinct religious group with unique cultural history and religious practices. Secondly, Iran has not wavered in their support of Syria and have backed al-Assad financially and militarily. They were the primary supporters of al-Assad during the rebellion and have continuously propped up the Syrian military. The support goes both ways, Damascus has also proven instrumental to Tehran. In the 1990s, Hafez al-Assad permitted the transport of resources to Hezbollah through Syria (Osiewicz 2020, 95). Additionally, Iran was allowed to establish a military base in Zabadani, a bordering city of Lebanon and Israel. These are both non-ideological factors that increased the strength of their relationship.

Saudi Arabia has struggled with these close ties between Iran and the al-Assad regime. It continues to try and mitigate the impact of this power structure, particularly through Lebanon.

However, their efforts have been unsuccessful because Hezbollah has only grown in popularity and strengthened its grip on Lebanese politics. A glimmer of hope appeared during the 2011 Arab Spring. It seemed that the al-Assad regime was collapsing to the will of a popular uprising. In this case, we observe ideology used as a strategic tool to mobilize support. Saudi officials leveraged this promising opportunity by providing financial and military support to Sunni rebel groups to aid in the toppling of the al-Assad regime (Nerguizian 2014, 120). The hope was to establish and control a Sunni regime in Syria to balance Iran's stronghold over Lebanon. Iran was resolute in maintaining its partnership with al-Assad; by leveraging Hezbollah, the Revolutionary Guard, and local Shi'a groups, they successfully defended against the Saudi intervention (Salloukh 2014). The domestic conflict in Syrian continues to be a theatre of proxy warfare between the two powers.

The final aspect of Iran's axis of resistance is Hamas in Palestine, which presents itself as another example of Tehran's pragmatic engagement with regional proxies. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been a central concern for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both states have gone against their ideological positions to support actors who will aid in their security initiatives. As previously mentioned, Iran views Israel as a regional adversary and threat to its security. While Hezbollah has given Iran a tremendous geopolitical foothold in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hamas has also proven to be a beneficial client. On January 25th, 2006, the Palestinian Territories held an election that the Bush administration insisted on and helped administer. To the surprise of American officials, the Palestinians, fed up with corruption and inefficiency, rejected the secular Fatah organization and supported the Islamist group Hamas (Ostovar 2016, 170). The Bush administration immediately boycotted and cut funding to Hamas, but this created a support vacuum and provided Tehran with an opportunity to step in to support the new Palestinian administration. The decision to support Hamas was not ideological as it is a Sunni dominant organization. Instead,

this was a strategic opportunity to further their geopolitical grip in the Levant. Since then, Iran has continued to offer unconditional support to Hamas in their fight against Israel (Jalal 2020).

Saudi Arabia has maintained a mediating position between Israel and Palestine, in the hopes of bringing the conflict to an end. They supported the outcomes of the Oslo Accords and endorsed the 1996 Palestinian election (Keynoush 2016, 221). At the time, Fatah was the dominant party and Hamas posed little threat to the plans of the Saudis and Egyptians. After the election of Hamas in 2006, Saudi officials attempted to unite Fatah and Hamas, but ultimately, their tentative agreement failed (Keynoush 2016, 221). The primary issue is that the Saudis are caught between their regional concerns and the position of the US. They have been hedging their bets; while Israel is a clear liability to Saudi Arabia and they avoid formal relations, the Kingdom is willing to engage in dialogue with them to balance its foreign priorities. For example, their proposed 2002 peace initiative included an unofficial rapprochement with Israel (Wehrey et al. 2009, 86). Since then, it has engaged with Israel over shared security concerns, namely, Iran and their nuclear program. Israel's continuous expansion and infringement on Palestinian rights have made it exceptionally difficult for the Saudis, as it weakens their stance as a supporter of Arab Sunnism in the region.

The geopolitics of the Levant illustrates the strategic and non-ideological nature of both Saudi and Iranian foreign policy. In response to concerning security threats, Iran began to develop its axis of resistance. It was not an effort to create a Shi'a crescent in the region, it was more pragmatic. Hezbollah provides a geopolitical foothold in the Levant and direct access to Israel. Syria was the only regional supporter of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and made it easier to deliver resources to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Finally, Hamas is the strongest anti-Israeli force in Palestine and enhances their anti-Israel efforts. This is not to suggest that Iran does not benefit from establishing relations with Shi'a actors. Rather, it is to explain that ideology is not the main driver

for engagement with certain regional actors. Similarly, Saudi Arabia's efforts to balance against these developments are due to the threat they pose to their own regional influence and dominance.

Conclusion

Part of what makes the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran complex is the fact that it is ongoing. As Westad (2013) stated, "it is much easier to explain war and conflict when they are over than right in the middle of the process" (Westad 2013, 67). Nonetheless, understanding the nature of the conflict and its main drivers is crucial. One of the most cited causal factors in this conflict is the ideological difference between the two states. Many believe the Iran-Saudi dispute to be a struggle for religious supremacy – the forces of Sunnism against Shi'aism. Thus, I posed the question, is there an ideological "Cold War" between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East? Through rigorous analysis, guided by comparison with the 20th century conflict between the US and Soviet Union, I concluded that there is not an ideological Cold War in the Middle East.

I began my analysis with the origins of the rivalry. One of the most unique features of the Cold War is the absence of conflict between the Americans and Russians before the Second World War. In fact, they cooperated to a certain degree with Russia mediating a settlement between the Americans and the British in the War of 1812. Most notably, their cooperation in WWII led to the defeat of Nazi Germany. What remained was their ideological difference, and when the post-imperialist world was open to the proposition of a new system, these differences drove them to an intense global conflict. Such a non-conflicting history does not exist in the Middle East. Imperial rivalries consumed the region since antiquity and there have been many instances of Arabs and Persians fighting before the emergence of Islam – the religious source of both their ideologies.

My second point of analysis was their ideologies, how they developed, were implemented, and what causal effects can be attributed to their implementation? American liberalism and Soviet

communism were inherently conflicting ideologies. Each power adopted and implemented them, which caused a conflict to emerge. This is unlike Wahhabism and Khomeinism, which originate from the same religious source and do not propose differing systems of governance. Rather, they conflicted over political succession and sources of religious authority. Actors in both Saudi Arabia and Iran strategically implemented ideologies to gain religious legitimacy during critical points of nation-building. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, there should have hypothetically been a conflict between the two states. Instead, we observed a mixture of tensions and cooperation attempts for decades to follow. My third point was that the US and Soviet Union had ideologically consistent foreign policies and engagement with proxies, the two most prominent examples being the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Saudi Arabia and Iran have inconsistent foreign policies and do not engage regional proxies along ideological lines. They do so for geopolitical gain, which I illustrate through the case of Afghanistan, the civil war in Yemen, and geopolitics in the Levant.

These three characteristics show that we are not observing a primarily ideological conflict, as was the case in the Cold War. Rather, we are observing a classic geopolitical rivalry. There are many implications to this conclusion, one of which is that there is the possibility for cooperation between the two states. During the Cold War, the ideological differences trapped each power in a commitment to opposing one another. That does not have to be the case in the Middle East, as shifting geopolitical conditions, such as the US reducing its presence in the region, could allow for cooperation towards a common security strategy. The diminishing significance of oil on the global market, and the move to renewable energy, may reduce tensions created by economic competition. For the foreseeable future, however, it seems most likely that the two states will continue to conflict on various issues and engage in indirect battles for regional control and influence.

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