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Prince Metternich Reborn?

- A study of Saudi Arabia's Regional Policy During
  the Time of The Arab Upheaval

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The paradigm shift in Saudi Arabia's regional foreign policy in the wake of the Arab upheavals serves as the rationale for the thesis. Prior to the Arab Spring, the Kingdom has been known for conducting a cautious foreign policy in order to retain regional stability and ensure regime security. However, the Saudi regime has conducted an aggressive and confrontational foreign policy in light of the revolutionary wave that rolled across the region from 2011. The objective of the study was to investigate the driving force(s) behind the paradigm shift and to discuss whether Saudi Arabia has, in fact, led a counterrevolutionary foreign policy in the time period of 2011-2014. The thesis relies on case study, complemented with theory triangulation as the method. The cases include four cases of Saudi foreign policy behaviour in Bahrain, Egypt, Syria/Iraq, and Yemen. The theories that are used in the thesis relies on offensive realism and constructivism, in addition to an analytical framework provided by foreign policy analysis (FPA).

The Arab upheavals served as a catalyst for Saudi Arabia to undertake a change in their regional foreign policy behaviour, as new challenges and opportunities arose for the Kingdom. Political aspirations and ideologies from states, transnational actors and the demonstrating masses were perceived to question the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. In addition, transnational actors posed a realistic military threat towards Saudi sovereignty and its political interests abroad. Moreover, the Arab Spring served as an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to challenge the Iranian political influence in the Middle East, which has increased following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The Saudi regime has conducted counterrevolutionary politics on the domestic level in order to ensure its position. However, the Saudis have not led counterrevolutionary politics in all cases on the external level. King Abdullah undertook counterrevolutionary actions in Bahrain in order to prevent a democratic revolution on the Arabian Peninsula. The Kingdom supported the counterrevolution in Egypt, implying, in this case, to support the notion of Saudi Arabia to act counterrevolutionary while the cases of Syria/Iraq and Yemen show the opposite. The Saudis have supported different opposition groups in the attempt to remove the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while the Saudis through Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) created a transition plan for the former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

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Notes on translation and transliteration

Arabic terms have been translated directly in accordance with John L. Esposito (2003: 39-345) *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, except for the word *Dāʿesh,* which is new phenomena. Whenever I used Arabic words in the thesis, they are written in *Italic*. I have followed the IJMES transliteration system, where the Arabic consonant *-Ayn* is transliterated as /ʿ/, the glottal stop *hamza* transliterated as /ʾ/, the long Arabic vowels /ا/, /و/, /ي/ are transliterated as /ā/, /ū/, /ī/, while the doubled diftong /يّ/ is transliterated as *-iyy*, as for instance *Islāmiyya*.

Bayʿa: Oath of allegiance to a leader. Unwritten pact given on behalf of the subjects by leading members of the tribe with the understanding that, as long as the leader abides by certain responsibilities towards his subjects, they are to maintain their allegiance to him.

Dāʿesh: Arabic acronym for al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya bil-Iraq wa al-Sham, meaning The Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant. Often referred to as ISIL, ISIS or IS.

Fatwā: Authoritative legal opinion given by a mufti (legal scholar) in response to a question posed by an individual or a court of law. […] Present-day Muslims states have tried to control fatwas through official consultative advisory organizations within religious ministries.

Hajj: The annual pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. Approximately two million Muslims worldwide participate annually. The performance of the Hajj is one the five pillars of Islam, and all adult Muslims are required to perform it at least once in their lives if they are physically and financially able. […] The government of Saudi Arabia currently oversees the hajj.

Imām: One who stands in front; a role model for the Muslim community in all its spiritual and secular undertakings. The title is used interchangeably with the word *khalīfa* for the political head of the Sunni Muslim state.

Jihād: From the Arabic root meaning "to strive," "to exert," "to fight"; exact meaning depends on context and interpretation. May express a struggle against one's evil inclinations, an exertion to convert unbelievers or a struggle for the moral betterment of the Islamic community. […] Jihad is the only legal warfare in Islam, and it is carefully controlled in Islamic law.

Khārijis / Khārijites: Seceders. Early sectarian group in Islam, neither Sunni nor Shii, although they originally supported Ali's leadership on the basis of his wisdom and piety. […] The group survives today, known as the Ibadis, with fewer than one million adherents.

Muftī: Jurist capable of giving, upon request, an authoritative nonbinding opinion (fatwa) on a point of Islamic law.

Salaf: Predecessors or ancestors. Usually used in the sense of "pious ancestors," especially the first three generations of the Muslim community, who are considered to have lived the normative experience of Islam. Often referred to in works by Hanbali jurists, particularly Ibn

Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Wahhabis called for the implementation of the social organization of salaf as a means of restoring Islamic ethics and piety to original purity.

Saudi Arabia, Islam: Islam is the religion of the state in Saudi Arabia and is interpreted according to the conservative Wahhabi ideology. The legitimacy of the monarchy rests on an alliance between the Saudi royal family and the *Ulamaʾ*, who serves as consultants.

Sharīʿa: God's eternal and immutable will for humanity, as expressed in the Quran and Muhammad`s example (Sunnah), considered binding for all believers; ideal Islamic law.

Shiite Islam: Shiite Muslims, the followers or party of Ali, believe that Muhammad's religious leadership, spiritual authority, and divine guidance were passed on to his descendants, beginning with his son-in-law and cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, his daughter, Fatimah, and their sons, Hasan and Hussein. The defining event of Shiism was the martyrdom of Husayn, at Karbala (Iraq) in 681[…]. Shii political thought entered its modern phase during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11, when Shiites was divided between the forces of constitutionalism, modernism, reason, and secularism, on one hand, and more traditional interpretations of faith, religious law, and the role of clerics, on the other. […] The most important event of the 1960s was the 1963 uprising led by Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989), who called for the ouster of the Shah. […] Khomeini was the most rhetorically successful revolutionary Shii. Opposed to the increasing secularization of Pahlavi society and American domination of Iranian political, social, economic, and cultural life, Khomeini introduced the principle of *vilayet-i faqih* as the foundation for Islamic government. According to this principle, in the absence of an *imām*, the leadership of Muslim nations is to be entrusted to Shii jurists, who are to rule by virtue of their knowledge of sacred law and their ability to regulate the daily affairs of Muslims. This form of governance is what differ from a Sunni Muslim governance. The resultant Islamic revolution of 1979 and Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran represent the ideological institutionalization of modern Shii political ideas.

Sunni Islam: The Sunnis are the largest branch of the Muslim community, at least 85 percent of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims. The name, derived from the Sunnah, the exemplary behavior of the Prophet.

Ulamaʾ (Sunni): Men of knowledge. Refers to those who have been trained in religious sciences. Will be referred to as the "religious establishment" in the thesis.

Wahhabis: Eighteenth-century reformist/revitalist movement for the socio-moral reconstruction of society. Founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a Hanbali scholar, in Arabia (present-day Saudi Arabia). Proclaimed tawhid (uniqueness and unity of God) as its primary doctrine. Proposed a return to an idealized Islamic past through reassertion of monotheism and reliance on the Quran and hadith, rejecting medieval interpretations of Islam and jurisprudence. Emphasized education and knowledge as a weapon in dealing with nonbelievers. Formed an alliance with Muhammad ibn Saud in 1747, which served as the basis for the consolidation of the present-day Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia.

Zakāt: Required almsgiving that is one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims with financial means is required to give 2.5 percent of their net worth annually as zakat.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the wake of the Arab upheavals, Saudi Arabia has carried out an aggressive foreign policy and has actively tried to manipulate the regional political situation to the kingdom's favour. There are several perspectives on how to describe the new trend in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, with the majority of the analysis describing Saudi Arabia's foreign policy as 'counterrevolutionary'. There exist different perceptions related to Saudi interests, the instruments used, and the desired impact for the Saudis to engage in counterrevolutionary politics. Madawi al-Rasheed (2011: 513) states, "In response to the Arab Spring, sectarianism became a Saudi pre-emptive counter-revolutionary strategy that exaggerated religious difference and hatred [...]". The use of the sectarian instrument as a counterrevolutionary strategy is also highlighted by Frederick M. Wehrey (2014: 136), who argues that the sectarian instruments were applied at the domestic level as a strategy to counter a potential united Sunni and Shiite anti-regime block in the wake of the Arab Spring in order.

Lawrence Rubin (2014: 119) notes that, "Other states, such as Saudi Arabia, led the counterrevolutionary charge by offering payoffs to their own citizens as well as their allies in an effort to ensure regime stability." While Toby C. Jones (2011b: 43) states, "Saudi Arabia is determined to crush the Arab Spring. Both at home and throughout the region the kingdom's leaders have doggedly been pursuing the path of counterrevolution." This notion is also supported by Mehran Kamrava (2012: 96) who writes that, "In fact, the kingdom has positioned itself as the chief architect of a counterrevolution to contain, and perhaps to even reverse, the Arab Spring as much as possible".

Mohamad Bazzi (2015), suggests that King Abdullah, who ascended the Saudi throne on August 1, 2005 and who died on January 23, 2015, has shaped a muscular foreign policy, and that the Saudis have tried to block the revolutionary momentum in the region since 2011. While Neil MacFarquhar (2011, May 27) in *New York Times,* wrote that the Saudis gave $4 billion in support to the established military council in Egypt after President Hosni Mubarak had to relinquish his position. He further highlights the kingdom's proposal to expand the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to include Jordan and Morocco, in order to build the GCC into a political alternative to the Arab League, and the kingdom's push for stability of the Gulf monarchies, including Jordan and Morocco.

According to Saudi Prince Waleed bin Talal, a nephew of King Abdullah, in reference to the unrest in Bahrain, the Saudi engagement there following the GCC-led intervention, was motivated by a need to send "a message that monarchies are not where this is happening. We are not trying to get our way by force, but to safeguard our interests," according to Neil MacFarquhar (2011, May 27) in *New York Times*. Renè Rieger (2014: 6) highlights Saudi reactions towards the uprisings in Bahrain as a prime example of Saudi counterrevolutionary politics. Rieger suggests that the Saudi regime was afraid of a spillover effect and that a potential overthrow of the Al Khalifa monarchy could challenge the domestic legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy itself. Another motivation was, according to Rieger, the potential Iranian political influence in Bahrain, which might have increased after the fall of Al Khalifa.

Both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have tried to prevent further democratic aspirations in the region. This strategy was most noticeably pursued in the neighbouring Gulf states in light of the Arab Spring, according to Ana Echagüe (2014: 1–20). She refers to how the two states gave an economic package of $20 billion to Bahrain and Oman. Ana Echagüe further argues that the strategy for both countries has been to take a more active role in the region through influencing transitions of government in countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Syria, while highlighting that Saudi Arabia has focused on gaining influence over Iran. Guido Steinberg (2014: 15-21) argues that the Saudis have engaged in counterrevolutionary politics at a regional level. The Kingdom has sought to stabilise Jordan and Morocco and gave support for the Egyptian military establishment in order to preserve the status quo of its authoritarian regime. March Lynch (2011 a: 3) stresses the Saudi viewpoint towards the uprisings in Syria, where King Abdullah gave an unusual statement to the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on August 7, 2011, urging him to stop the killings and to begin initiating reforms for maintaining regional stability.

A political activist in Riyadh, Mohammed F. al-Qahtani, stated, "We are back to the 1950s and early 1960s, when the Saudis led the opposition to the revolutions at that time, the revolutions of Arabism," according to Neil MacFarquhar (2011, May 27)) in *New York Times*. The Saudi regime has historically been countering regional revolutionary ideologies such as Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, and the doctrine of Shiite Islam, as all were considered to threaten Al Saʿud's political legitimacy. Certainly, there is a broad consensus among leading researchers and analysts of the Middle East that Saudi Arabia has been a counterrevolutionary force within the region.

In light of this debate, Saudi King Abdullah appears as the reborn Prince Klemens Von Metternich (1773–1859). Von Metternich played a significant role in European politics, strongly opposed to liberalism, nationalism, democracy, and revolution – all of which swept through Europe during the mid-18th century and threatened the very existence of Europe's monarchies. The Austrian Prince Metternich fought to keep the traditional aristocratic order in Europe and urged the monarchies to unite, in order to ensure the survival of monarchy as the system of governance. However, the common 'agreement' of Saudi Arabia being a counterrevolutionary force within the Middle East is what is being critically discussed throughout the thesis.

Saudi Arabia's instruments for promoting its foreign policy interests have traditionally been cautious and soft. The Saudi soft power capabilities include economic support, public diplomacy, and religious and ideological influence. Ana Echagüe (2014: 13) states that, "In an effort to uphold the internal security of the Kingdom and maintain regional stability, Saudi Arabia had traditionally conducted a consensual, cautious foreign policy that avoided open confrontation and favoured accommodation." Abdulrhman A. Hussein (2012: 67), Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 194), and Mehran Kamrava (2013: 5) follow these lines and suggest that Saudi foreign policy has been defensive and cautious in its character. They validate their argument by referring to that Saudi Arabia has sought to reconcile externally and competing pressure to ensure regime stability, due to the political dynamics of the Middle East.

I would argue that the Arab upheavals were likely to serve as a catalyst for Saudi Arabia to conduct a far more aggressive and confrontational foreign policy. Indeed, there are several examples of a paradigm shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards aggressively defending its regional interests. The use of military force in the neighbouring country Bahrain in 2011, for instance, or the arming of insurgent groups in the civil war in Syria from 2012. Moreover, the Saudi support for the coalition led by United States in the military campaign against *Dāʿesh* (IS/ISIL) from September 2014, in addition to the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen March 2015, follow the pattern of Saudi behaviour that breaks with the former cautious foreign policy undertaken by Saudi Arabia.

1.1 Research questions

In accordance with these claims, the thesis will critically discuss the following questions:

What has been the driving force(s) for Saudi Arabia's more aggressive foreign policy in the time period of 2011–2014? Did Saudi Arabia lead a counterrevolutionary foreign policy in the Middle East during this period?

Highlighting these two questions is important for several reasons in order to understand the nature of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, a country that plays an important regional and global role. Saudi Arabia possesses one of the world's largest oil reserves, is one of the world's most strategically located countries and holds Islam's two most holy places. Other reasons for giving attention to Saudi Arabia and its foreign policy center around the dynamics of the tense diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The bilateral tension affects Middle Eastern security and stability, as both countries are trying to position themselves as the region's most influential actor. Moreover, the longstanding alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States provides Saudi Arabia security and affects the regional balance of power.

First, Saudi Arabia has historically played the role as a swing producer in the international oil market. The Kingdom has the world's second-largest known oil reserves, is the world's greatest oil exporter and is capable to adjust the global oil supply within a short time-frame. Saudi Arabia possesses a leading voice in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC): an influential organisation in the international oil market. Due to the acquisition of oil and its historical role as a swing producer, Saudi Arabia has become an important country both in a regional and global context. The kingdom is the only country in OPEC and the Arab world that is a member of the G20, an organization of the world's largest economies. Saudi Arabia has played a critical role in ensuring moderate and stable oil prices. Stable oil supply and oil prices are important for the world's oil importing countries in their quest for oil in a period of high uncertainty. Oil prices are also important for oil exporting countries, such as Norway, that base much of their economies on stable market prices. Saudi Arabia has the potential for using its enormous economic power as a foreign policy instrument to promote its national interests, as it did with the 1973 oil embargo. The wealth that accompanies oil also ensures domestic stability, as the royal family can, in contrast to the other medium or non-exporting countries in the Middle East, co-opt compliance from their population.

Second, Saudi Arabia is of great importance when it comes to Islam. There are around 1.5 billion Muslims globally, with the vast majority being Sunni Muslims. Saudi Arabia contains the holy place of Mecca, where Prophet Mohammed was born and where the foundation and spread of Islam took place. The *Hajj* finds millions of Muslims travelling to achieve one of the five pillars of Islam. The Saudi king has the title *Custodian of the two holy mosques*, a title previously been used by former Islamic rulers such as the Ottomans and the Mamluks of Egypt. The kingdom also plays an important role in various international Islamic organisations. These include the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), and the Muslim World League (MWL). The kingdom's position within these organisations provides Saudi Arabia with significant influence among the world's 1.5 billion Muslims.

Third, the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia also affects the regional balance of power. The United States has, for many years, been a close and valued ally with Saudi Arabia. Diplomatic relations were established in 1933, a year after the foundation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 1943, during the Second World War, the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that the defence of Saudi Arabia was of vital interest to the United States. The underlying reason for making Saudi Arabia as vital interest is the kingdom's enormous reserves of oil, its strategic geographical position, and, later, its ability to help limit the Soviet Union's influence in the region. Although the alliance has remained robust and stable for decades, there have also been incidents that have strained the relationship. The strong US support for Israel has met with skepticism in Riyadh, even though the relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia has become closer to their common understanding of Iran as a regional security threat. More recent incidents of the strained relationship between United States and Saudi Arabia have also occurred. Lisa Watanabe and Christian Nünlist (2014: 3) states, "From the viewpoint of Riyadh, US engagement in the MENA region is jeopardizing regional security, with implications for Saudi domestic stability." The Saudis fear that United States will implicitly allow the Iranians greater regional influence, which may lead Iran to becoming a hegemon in return for a solution on the Iranian nuclear problem. US involvement in the Iranian nuclear issue, and the talks in P5+1, where Saudi Arabia is excluded, are, according to Lisa Watanabe and Christian Nünlist (2014: 3), perceived as a confirmation of the Saudi fear. Saudi Arabia has also been negative towards the US role in the civil war in Syria.

Moreover, according to SIPRI (2014), Saudi Arabia's defence spending ranks fourth in the world in 2013, with an increase of 14 percent in comparison to the previous year. In fact, SIPRI (2015) notes that Saudi Arabia's defence spending increased by 17 per cent in 2014 in comparison to 2013. According to IHS (2015) the Middle Eastern region is considered the largest regional market for arms import and this trend will increase in the coming years. Mohamad Bazzi (2015) argues that King Abdullah has taken the lead in promoting proxy wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Bahrain against its regional rival, Iran. The increased defence spending, in addition to the engagement in proxy wars, is worth paying attention to from an offensive realism perspective while analysing the kingdom's foreign policy. As it is, Saudi Arabia's identity and religious interpretation rest on the Islamic beliefs of *Wahhabism*, the heartland of Islam, and the importance of monarchy as governance. A threat towards this basis may provoke the Saudi regime to act against the perceived threat. This perspective is highly relevant from a constructivist perspective, with its focus on identity and ideology.

Given that Saudi Arabia, prior to the upheavals, conducted a cautious foreign policy, it is, therefore, interesting to analyse Saudi Arabia's foreign policy during a period that has been anything but stable. The Middle East has experienced enormous political changes from 2011 onwards. Therefore, the word *cautious* may no longer be an accurate description of the kingdom's foreign policy. In light of the revolutionary wave, with its demands for reforms and democracy, an analysis of whether Saudi Arabia does, in fact, serve as a counterrevolutionary force is useful for a greater understanding of the regional dynamic. The thesis applies an extensive theoretical framework and a variety of sources, including academic literature, along with primary and secondary sources.

1.2 Literature review

Extensive available sources related to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its foreign policy exist. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (2005) have edited an informative book from varied contributors analysing Saudi Arabia in terms of ideology, political economy, regime and opposition, and external relations. Gerd Nonneman discusses the determinants and patterns of Saudi foreign policy, in which he elaborates on the main stakeholders within the royal family and the interest groups within the Kingdom. The book serves as one of the most detailed and complete studies related to the country's foreign policy. Anthony H. Cordesman (1997) has

written a comprehensive book related to the Saudi defence capabilities, its economy, its growing internal security problems, the regime's stability, and its reliability as an energy exporter. The former Saudi diplomat and political analyst, Abdulrhman A. Hussein (2012), discusses Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and the determinants of Saudi Arabia's alliance behaviour. Madawi al-Rasheed (2010) provides an extensive research on the kingdom's history, which is essential material in any attempt to understand Saudi Arabia.

Mehran Kamrava (2012; 2013) is one of the several academics who argues that Saudi Arabia has pursued a counterrevolution in light of the Arab Spring. In this respect, his latest paper seeks to further explore the roles mediation and conflict resolution play in the formation of Saudi foreign policy. Frederick M. Wehrey (2014) investigates the roots of the sectarian tension between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in the Gulf, which increased after the US-invasion of Iraq in 2003 and has escalated throughout the Arab upheavals. There exists a variety of literature offering in-depth analysis of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in the wake of the Arab upheavals, much of which was used in the thesis. Renè Rieger (2014) and Gregory F. Gause III (2011b; 2014) are critical of the labelling of Saudi Arabia as promoting counterrevolutionary politics. They both argue that Saudi Arabia does not serve as a counterrevolutionary force, but rather plays the 'power of balance game' against Iran. While Agha Hussein and Robert Malley (2011), Madawi al-Rasheed (2011), Ana Echagüe (2014), Andrew Hammond (2013), Bernard Haykel (2013), Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani (2013), Guido Steinberg (2014), Marc Lynch et. al. (2011a: 2011b), Nawaf Obaid (2013), Toby C. Jones (2011a; 2011b), have all discussed the counterrevolutionary perspective.

Gregory F. Gause III (2002; 2011a) has made detailed contributions in analysing both Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and the regime's stability. My thesis supervisor, Stig Stenslie (2011; 2014a; 2014b), has extensively examined regime stability and the elite structure of the royal family. The structure of Saudi Arabia's elite is highly important for understanding the driving forces behind the kingdom's foreign policy decision-making.

The study primarily rests on the theoretical frameworks of realism and constructivism. The Greek historian, Thucydides (ca. 430-406 BC) gave birth to realism and the principles of national interests and survival during the time of Ancient Greece. Realism later developed in different directions including classical, structural, and offensive/defensive realism. However, the theory of constructivism appeared within International Relations (IR) at the beginning of

the 1990s, as a result of the fact that the two leading theories, realism and liberalism could not explain or predict the end of the Cold War. John T. Mearsheimer (1995; 2014) is one of the leading figures within offensive neo-realism, and emphasises competition for security among great powers in an anarchical international system. Mearsheimer argues that power-maximisation drives states, and the principal goal is survival with the aim of achieving regional hegemony. This theory is important while trying to elaborate what has been the driving force(s) for Saudi Arabia's more aggressive foreign policy in the time period 2011–2014. Offensive realism provides causal explanations as to why states behave aggressively and what assumptions need to be present for aggressive behaviour to take place. When discussing Saudi Arabia's instruments and capabilities, I seek to elaborate different power instruments from Christopher Hill (2003) who emphasises on the assumption that instruments are limited by a state's resources through the lenses of foreign policy analysis (FPA).

By contrast, Alexander Wendt (1992; 1999) is one of the main contributors to constructivism. In the first paper, he critiques both liberalism and realism and emphasises the notion of "anarchy is what states make of it", (Wendt 1992: 395) and that national interests are subject to change. In his second work, Alexander Wendt (1999: 246) elaborates the term "cultures of anarchy"; described as how states view each other, based on a socially constructed Kantian, Lockean or Hobbesian role structures. Theories of constructivism are highly useful in the thesis, as realism do not appreciate the importance of identity, ideology and internal factors in explaining state behaviour. In this context, Lawrence Rubin (2014) has edited a book with an analysis that challenges the realist perspective of threats in the wake of the Arab Spring. Lawrence Rubin (2014) analysis how and why ideas or political ideologies may threaten states and presents an in-depth argument as to how and why states respond to these perceived ideational threats.

In addition to these two approaches, the thesis applies FPA, which, to a large extent, focuses on how internal factors affect foreign policy behaviour. FPA developed as a common approach to IR after the Second World War. According to Valerie M. Hudson (2005: 3), "The single most important contribution of FPA to IR theory is to identify the point of theoretical intersection between the primary determinants of state behaviour: material and ideational factors". According to Hudson, the intersection is not the state, but rather the human decision-makers. Scholars agree that there are three paradigmatic books with different views or themes on how to conduct FPA. According to Steve Smith et al. (2012: 4), the first theme within FPA

had a focus on foreign policy and policy making that developed in the 1950s and was inspired by the work of Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, Burton Sapin, and later Graham T. Allison. Morton H. Halperin further developed this theme in the 1960-1970s with a focus on bureaucratic and organisational politics. The second theme had a focus on the psychological dimension of foreign policy making, with contributors such as Kenneth Boulding, Harald and Margaret Spout in the 1950s, Alexander George and Michael Brecher in the 1960s, and Irving Janis in the 1970s. The third and final theme was an attempt to develop a theory of Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP), with contributors from Jim Rosenau in the 1960s.

The research of Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2002), Christopher Hill (2003), and Fred Halliday (2005) have been instrumental in the development of research towards the field of FPA. While Halliday, and Hinnebusch and Ehteshami also include the regional context of the Middle East, which is a relevant analytical approach for the present thesis. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2002) have edited one of the most comprehensive studies of Middle Eastern foreign policies. They take FPA and the concerns from a realism perspective and document how the external context and internal factors shape foreign policy outcomes.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The study consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction and presents the research questions, literature review and the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 outlines the research method, sources, and ethical considerations used throughout the process. Chapter 3 presents relevant IR theories, offering two different approaches within IR-theory: realism, constructivism, and the analytical framework provided through FPA. The primary aim of this chapter is to highlight the kingdom's interests, identity, actors and foreign policy instruments, in addition to counterrevolutionary politics. Chapter 4 presents the Arab upheavals on a generalised basis, and, more specifically, how they affected the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Chapters 5 - 8 serve as the main portion of the thesis, being dedicated to the foreign policy behaviour within four case studies. The analysis in these chapters will, in accordance with the theory, discuss the Saudi bilateral relations towards the countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Syria/Iraq, and Yemen) used as case studies. Chapter 9 presents the conclusion, where I draw on the major findings in the thesis.

Chapter 2: Method and Sources

2.1 Method

I will use an explanatory case study, complemented with theory triangulation on Saudi Arabia's foreign policy within a limited and specific time period in order to answer the research questions. An extensive theory chapter and a variety of empirical data such as academic literature, primary and secondary sources are used for the analysis.

2.1.1 Case study

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005: 18) define a case study as; "[…] a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself." While, Schramm, W. (1971) according to Robert K. Yin (2014: 15) described the aim of the case study as; "The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions; why they are taken, how they were implemented, and with what results." As one of my research questions elaborates on what has been the driving force(s) for Saudi Arabia's more aggressive foreign policy in the time period of 2011–2014, it therefore seeks to describe a set of foreign policy decisions, and why they were implemented. As I shows in chapters 5-8, change in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is an ongoing event, it would, therefore, be difficult for me to reveal the results of the implemented paradigm shift in a long-term perspective. However, I will, as far as possible, discuss the results of the paradigm shift from a short-term perspective.

It is necessary to set a specific limit for the thesis data collection, as it should be possible to conduct the study within the limits of this report. The Saudi responses to the Arab upheavals are considered as being revealed within the time period of 2011-2014, and I have chosen this as an end date for the analysis. The thesis' historical epoch is, therefore, defined as the time period of 2011-2014, where I perceive the Arab Spring to be a catalyst for Saudi Arabia to undertake a change in foreign policy. I do not seek to analyse the Arab upheavals in depth, yet it is necessary to discuss the domestic impact of the Arab Spring and regime stability in Saudi Arabia, as there is a correlation between the kingdoms' internal-external link to its foreign policy when the revolutions rolled across the Middle East. The great momentum of the Arab Spring has now weakened, however, there are still enormous regional and international

unsolved challenges, such as the future of the Iranian nuclear programme, the position of the terrorist group *Dāʿesh*, the increased sectarian violence, shifting alliances, and the emergence of regional failed states, all of which may influence Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in one direction or another. However, Robert K. Yin (2014: 12) states, "The case study is preferred when examining contemporary events […]." I would argue that there are strong indications of the paradigm shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards an ongoing process. The ongoing aggressive foreign policy behaviour is shown through discussion of the case studies, and is, therefore, suitable for a case study method. For this reason, Saudi foreign policy behaviour that contributes to highlighting the paradigm shift as being an ongoing event will be mentioned in the cases, even though the study focuses on the specific time period. Highlighting the current Saudi foreign policy behaviour is important, as it should be possible to offer some predictions regarding the future stance of Saudi foreign policy.

2.1.2 Explanatory case study

Robert K. Yin (2014: 9) suggests that, while undertaking a case study, one needs to assess whether the case study is explanatory, descriptive or exploratory. The reason for this is to avoid using the wrong method for thesis' goals. An exploratory research method is widely used in the initial stage from a hypothetical and theoretical idea. The exploratory case study method is often an attempt to build a foundation for future research and studies related to a given subject. By expanding our understanding of a specific subject or field, the descriptive case method aims to describe and explain what is being observed and what is taking place. Moreover, it does so by contextualising previous events in order to create a broader and greater understanding of the factors bringing them into place. Several studies of Saudi Arabia and its foreign policy have been conducted, as my literature review shows. For this reason, it is not necessary to conduct an exploratory or descriptive case study, as the descriptive method, where scholars and researchers have described and explained the political development of the Middle East during, and after the Arab upheavals, has also been widely used.

The third mentioned case study method, the explanatory research, predominately focus on explaining cause and effect, with the aim to explain how things interact. As there might be, according to my opinion, a correlation between the Arab Spring and the paradigm shift in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, it is necessary to explain cause and effect. Based on this

argument, I have chosen an explanatory case study method, where the 'cause' – the Arab Spring, is presented in chapter 4, while the 'effect'– the foreign policy, is discussed through case studies of foreign policy behaviour in chapter 5-8. However, I do not seek to provide a law-given explanation of cause and effect as the epistemology of positivism tends to do. Rather, the thesis highlights and focuses on real observable incidents that could provide answers for the research questions, which, to a greater extent, follow the epistemology of critical realism. Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg (2009: 41) elaborates on critical realism, stating, "The real is central to critical realism. There is a strong conviction regarding the real and the possibility of identifying it. Something is real if it has a causal effect, that is, if it affects behaviour and makes a difference. Reality does not just consist of material objects. Ideas and discourses are real and can have causal effects."

2.1.3 Theory triangulation

According to Robert K. Yin (2014: 120), theory triangulation takes place when the researcher uses different perspectives on the same data. This means that the researcher uses more than one theoretical approach in the interpretations of a subject being studied. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005: 115) states, "When theories are fairly well developed, researchers can use case studies for theory testing. The goal here is rarely to refute a theory decisively, but rather to identify whether and how scope conditions of competing theories should be expanded or narrowed." The aim of using two theories is not, therefore, to refute a single theory, but rather to extend the theoretical framework and to test the theories in accordance with the scope conditions that are present. However, one can suffer a major pitfall while conducting theory triangulation. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005: 116) elaborates on this assertion, "While theories need to be developed into a testable form, a theory should not be forced into predictions beyond its scope; this leads to the creation of an easily discounted "straw man" version of the theory." In order to avoid this problem, I have presented causal assumptions for states to engage aggressively from a realism perspective. Moreover, I have outlined the 'role' structures of relations between states through constructivism and identified the scope conditions for Saudi Arabia to engage in counterrevolutionary politics based on the discussion elaborated throughout chapter 1-3.

In addition, there are challenges when conducting theory triangulation. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005: 115-116) states, "[…] when a theory fails to fit the evidence in a

case, it is not obvious whether the theory fails to explain the particular case, fails to explain a whole class of cases, or does not explain any cases at all […]. An additional difficulty in theory testing is that tests are partly dependent on the causal assumptions of theories themselves." Moreover, this means that the scope conditions need to be clearly contextualised, or one might experience the applied theories failing to explain the cases used. This is hopefully solved as I have chosen two leading theories within IR literature, complemented with FPA that have been prevalent in studies of the Middle East. However, there might be possibility that the theories will not explain the whole class of cases. Instead, the different cases might have different explanations in order to reveal the research questions, which implies that one of the theories might be a better explanation for the different cases.

Some IR-theories have been more widely used than others in explaining the dynamics of the Middle East. Fred Halliday (2005: 13) notes, "One of the particular approaches of International Relations is the analysis of how foreign policy is formed, and the combination of domestic, historical and external factors that shape foreign policy." However, Fred Halliday (2005: 23-39) suggests that, from a historical perspective, there exist five broad categories of the IR literature for the Middle East that includes: 1. Historical analysis (history of a specific country's foreign policy with a focus on diplomatic and state activity, within a stipulated period); 2. Realism (system and states with a focus on power); 3. Foreign policy analysis (focus on decision-makers); 4. Constructivism (focus on ideologies, perceptions and norms); and 5. Historical and international sociology.

William C. Wohlforth (2012: 50) argues when he discusses realism and foreign policy, "[…] whether a theory applies to a given situation depends on the degree to which its scope conditions are actually present." I would strongly argue that theory triangulation will be useful in order to explain the complex dynamics of the Middle East for two reasons. First, as Simon Mabon (2013: 10) insists: "Many of the applications of IR theory to the Middle East apply realist approaches to the region, yet adopting a singular position belies the complexity of the region and fails to appreciate the importance of identity." This argumentation strongly favours theories from constructivism, which emphasises the importance of identity and ideology. Secondly, Gregory F. Gause III (2014: 1) states that, "The best framework for understanding the regional politics of the Middle East is as a cold war in which Iran and Saudi Arabia play the leading roles." The two arguments, however, contradict themselves regarding which scope conditions and theories that need to be focused upon.

The present conditions when analysing Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in the Middle East during the time period of 2011-2014 are three-fold, including a 'balance of power game', the inter-state competition that followed the anarchy, and the essential notion of regime survival. All these conditions include both a realist military, in addition to an ideological threat perspective. The 'cold war' between Saudi Arabia and Iran usually favours the scope conditions as being a balance of power game from a realism perspective, whereby the rivalry has been described by analysts and observers of the region as the two states exploiting opportunities in order to increase their political influence. Yet, the Saudis have a closest 'paranoia' of Iran, which could be explained by the Saudis constructing a social perception of Iran as trying to interfere in their political interests. This understanding needs to be explained from a constructivist viewpoint.

The notion of survival and regime security is the most essential objective for the Saudi government, especially in the wake of the Arab upheavals. Regime survival traditionally favors theories from a realism perspective. John T. Mearsheimer (1995: 10) argues that survival is the primary motive in driving states. This perspective might coincide with several of the arguments presented in the introduction, where King Abdullah has worked to reverse the Arab upheavals and has tried to undermine Iranian influence. However, Lawrence Rubin (2014: 4) states, "First, ideology, or ideational power, triggers threat perception and affects state policy because it can undermine domestic political stability and regime survival in another state." Ideational threats posed by actors (hereafter a state or non-state actor) in light of the upheavals, have been perceived as threats against the domestic legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy. Moreover, the ideational/ideological factor plays an important role in Saudi foreign policy, in which challenges the scope conditions of realism and the balance of power game.

In addition, the foreign policy analysis is an important approach to the study, as it emphasises the link between internal and external in respect to foreign policy. The three systematic accounts detailed by Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2002) are used to reveal the *why*, *who* and *how*, in addition to *what* of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2002: 23) used the same variables in their case studies of foreign policies in the Middle East, and the accounts are as following:

1. Foreign policy determinants – *why*, by looking at external threats, and its domestic politics by focusing on identity, regime legitimacy, state formation, and the economic needs and interdependencies.

2. Foreign policymaking – *who* and *how,* the foreign policy concerns the effect of the elite's goals, perceptions, ideologies, and historical role conceptions. State institutions and policy processes, and how the domestic power structure affects the capacity of bureaucratic actors, and how public opinion can affect policymaking, and looking at the leadership autonomy.

3. Foreign policy behaviour – *what,* the foreign policy includes strategies and patterns of behaviour, or change in the foreign policy.

Numbers 1 and 2 of these accounts are presented as empirical material in the theory chapter, and include both a realism and constructivism perspective, while account number 3 is presented in chapters 5-8.

2.2 Sources and ethical considerations

According to Robert K. Yin (2014: 12), "The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, interviews, and observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study." By undertaking a case study, it, therefore, allows the author to use a range of different sources in the research. Because Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian regime, and much information and free access to sources and interviews are not easily available, the thesis consequently relies on a variety of primary sources complementary to the secondary sources.

2.2.1 Internship in Riyadh

I had the opportunity to have an internship at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh, from June - December 2013 during my Master's program at NMBU. Living in Saudi Arabia was a possibility for me that would be unavailable to most people. Therefore, it was an excellent opportunity to acquire first-handed information in a country where data collection is usually complicated. My daily work provided relevant information and data, both at the Embassy and through other channels in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, I met

several individuals that had worked in the diplomatic community in Riyadh for a long time, which contributed to expanding my knowledge about the kingdom and its foreign policy. I will, however, not explicitly refer to these sources in the thesis, as the conversations were not through formal interviews. In addition, I do not possess the information I acquired at the Norwegian Embassy, as this is restricted to individuals working in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NOR MoFA) only. However, I will, wherever possible, use my knowledge about the topics being addressed as a primary source.

While living in Riyadh, the Saudi regime undertook several foreign policy actions that are significant to the thesis. The Saudi rejection of a temporary seat in the UN Security Council, the Saudis' harsh rhetoric for a military intervention against the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and the extended Saudi support for Syrian opposition groups are among these incidents. One of my task at the Embassy was political reporting to the (NOR MoFA) of the Saudi policies towards the Syrian civil war, which is one of the cases cited in the thesis. In addition, I participated in a seminar at King Faisal Center for Research & Islamic Studies. The outline and strategies of Saudi foreign policy, its relationship to Iran, and its mutually dependent relationship to the United States were highlighted by the former Saudi Director of General Intelligence (GIP), Prince Turki bin Faisal, in addition to a US-diplomat. The seminar was only available to the diplomatic community, researchers, and other prominent individuals and was, hence, an excellent opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge from a former relevant Saudi decision-maker.

2.2.2 Sources and data

Some of the primary sources used in the thesis include official statements from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the UN, King Faisal Center for Research & Islamic Studies, and the Saudi religious establishment. It is, however, important to note that King Faisal Center is not a governmental decision-making organisation. The chairman, Turki bin Faisal does, however, due to his former position in the Saudi state institution, possess valuable information related to Saudi foreign policies strategies. Moreover, bin Faisal has, on several occasions, held seminars and lectures about Saudi foreign policies. Data from all the courses mentioned above has been most valuable, as it addresses how the regime officially perceived the Arab upheavals and how they legitimised their foreign policy. I have reviewed the official website of the Saudi

(MoFA) for statements throughout the period 2011-2014 in order to find useful data, which has uncovered useful information on the objectives of the thesis. Reports from the Saudi (MoFA) official website include: 'Leadership News and Statements', 'Government News', 'The Ministry's News', 'Official Speeches of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques', and 'Official Speeches of the Crown Prince'.

I have reviewed the official website of the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the UN, where statements are given in both English and Arabic. Doing this has uncovered speeches from UN sessions 65th to 69th that include statements from the time period of 2011-2014. I am, to some extent, able to read Arabic but have chosen to use the English sources in the thesis, as the reports include the same information in both languages. Statements from the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the UN have been a valuable source, as they evidence how the Saudi regime handles its high-diplomacy within international relations. Data from the Saudi religious establishment has been provided through Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Portal of the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta`. However, the religious establishment plays a more debated role as decision-makers in the kingdom's politics, as discussed in chapter 3.

In many respects, the state media in Saudi Arabia serves as a representative of the regime and could, given how they usually report the official Saudi policy, be seen as a primary source. I have therefore examined several media archives from the period of 2011-2014, in both English and Arabic. The reliability of articles and statements from the state media and the religious establishment should, due to their link to the royal family and the extended use of censorship within Saudi Arabia, be considered to be infused with regime propaganda. The independent organisation Reporters Without Borders (2014) states, "The kingdom is relentless in its censorship of the Saudi media and the Internet, and jails netizens without compunction." Moreover, the report suggests that criticism towards religion and the system of government have led the Saudi regime to react in many cases. This suggests that state media is highly likely to be subjected to state censorship and, therefore, implies to be 'politically correct' in accordance with the royal family's political view.

A variety of news agencies are in existence in Saudi Arabia, which include political analysis and politically charged opinions. The pro-Saudi and pan-Arab newspaper *al-Hayat* (The life), is owned by Khalid bin Sultan, a prominent member of the Saud royal family. According to

Andrew England (2007, August 29) in *Financial Times*, has *al-Hayat* been in a previous conflict with the Saudi Information Ministry, leading to a publishing ban in August 2007 that lasted almost a week. The owner of the Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (The Middle East) is Faisal bin Salman, a royal family member. Another member of the royal family, Turki bin Salman owns the Saudi newspaper *Arab News*. The Saudi news agency *al-Arabiya* (The Arabic one)*,* was first broadcasted in 2003 as a rival to *al-Jazeera* and is represented in United Arab Emirates (UAE). The general manager of *al-Arabiya* is Adel Al Toraifi, who also ascended to the position of Minister of Information and Culture in Saudi Arabia on January 29, 2015.

Moreover, a broad range of news agencies are in evidence in the wider Gulf. For example, *Gulf News,* an English-language newspaper, which is based in the UAE, with the company, Al-Nisr Publishing as owners. While the Qatari news agency *al-Jazeera* (The Island) is a state-owned news agency. Any assessment of the reliability of the articles from these agencies is considered as their promoting the respective country's political view, based on the close connection of the owners to the ruling elites in their countries.

Another news agency used in the thesis is the online newspaper *al-Monitor*, founded in 2012, and based in Washington DC, USA. *Al-Monitor* received a Free Media Pioneer Award Winner prize in 2014 from International Press Institute (IPI). According to International Press Institute (2014, February 26), "The award is given annually to a media or press freedom organisation that distinguishes itself in the fight for free and independent news." This implies that the reliability of articles in *Al-Monitor* may well give a more nuanced and accurate picture than the regional and Saudi-based news agencies.

2.2.3 Ethical considerations

According to Bruce L. Berg and Howard Lune (2014: 61), the fundamental aspect of ethical considerations in social scientific research is the principle, *do not harm.* This principle is meant to ensure the protection of subjects taking part in the research. Moreover, Laurie A. Brand (2014: 9) discusses ethical principles when studying the Middle East and elaborates, "Fieldwork in the Middle East and North Africa region poses many ethical concerns. Most immediately and obviously, particularly given the authoritarian nature of the regimes in the region, are the need to respect privacy or even anonymity of sources […]". During my

internship in Riyadh I met, as already mentioned, individuals working in the diplomatic community. However, as much of the information was revealed through informal conversations, I have chosen not to cite any of these sources. In addition, it is difficulties regarding verification of the validity of the sources. This consideration also accounts for information I acquired through my work at the Norwegian Embassy, which I cannot use due to restrictions set by the (NOR MoFA). However, I do appreciate the conversations with individuals that provided me with greater knowledge about the topic addressed in this thesis. In addition, all sources used in the thesis have their origins in published books, or are available as open sources online. My assessment in using these sources is considered not to create any harm to any individuals cited in this thesis.

2.3 Validity, reliability and case selection

This section considers the reliability of the method used, the internal and external validity of the study, and moreover, the section outlines the reason for selection of the four cases used in the study.

2.3.1 Reliability

According to Robert K. Yin (2014: 49), one of the goals of reliability is to minimise the errors and biases in a study. By conducting theoretical triangulation that relies on both realism, constructivism, combined with FPA, it may overcome the weakness of conducting a single-theory study, given the present scope conditions mentioned above. There are similarities within realism and constructivism, but to a certain level, there exist epistemological tensions that might provide different answers for, at least, the first research question. In an attempt to overcome the biases in the research, the thesis relies on a broad and supplementary literature review, which contains different perceptions of the same phenomena, in addition to containing extended data from primary sources.

2.3.2 Validity

External validity can, according to Yin (2014: 46), be defined as, "Defining the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized." Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005: 70) expand this by stating, "It is important to recognize that a single event can be relevant for research on a variety of theoretical topics." They further highlight the case of the

Cuban Missile Crisis, which gave useful data for different theories, for instance crisis management, deterrence, coercive management, domestic influence on foreign policy, and personal involvement in decision-making. For testing contingent generalisations, Alexander L. George and Andrew, Bennett (2005: 119) observe, "[…] scholars must clearly specify the scope or domain of their generalizations. To what range of institutional settings, cultural contexts, time periods, geographic settings, and situational context to the findings apply?"

In order to construct external validity for the study, there is a potential for the findings in this thesis being applicable to other domains than specifically Saudi Arabia. I have clearly identified the time period being studied, and the cultural and situational context as the Middle Eastern region in light of the Arab upheavals. In addition, the thesis highlights the foreign policy of an authoritarian regime during a period of regional upheaval. Moreover, the findings might contribute towards expanding theories within the field of state and counterrevolutionary politics, as I will discuss the counterrevolutionary politics by Saudi Arabia in some depth. Theories of the link between internal and external to foreign policy are also highlighted through the analytical framework provided by FPA. In addition, the thesis focuses on how a state perceives ideological threats towards its identity, through the lenses of constructivism.

The four cases of the thesis do not cover all aspects of Saudi Arabia's foreign policies within the defined time period. However, I would strongly argue that the results from the selection of cases would provide valuable information in answering the research questions. Internal validity is described as being the extent to which the results are valid for the selection and the phenomena that are being studied. In order to strengthen the internal validity, I have chosen cases that do not possess similar subject-related variables. The foreign policy instruments have, for instance, been different in several cases cited, and the driving force for undertaking aggressive and counterrevolutionary politics may have been diverse in the different cases. The thesis includes four cases of Saudi foreign policy behaviour in Bahrain, Egypt, Syria/Iraq, and Yemen, in which, moreover, all include Saudi aggressive behaviour to a different degree.

2.3.3 Case selection

The study includes, in addition to the regional balance of power game between Saudi Arabia and Iran, cases where the Saudi regime has feared a violent spill-over effect from the regional instability, and a Saudi fear of political or ideological aspirations could question the regime's

legitimacy. These lines are also supported by Ana Echagüe (2014: 13) where she states, "By 2011 Riyadh was literally surrounded by instability with uprisings in Bahrain to the east, Yemen to the South, Syria to the west and ongoing instability in Iraq to the north contributing to Saudi fears of over-spill […]." Moreover, all cases include an internal-external dimension, while some of the cases show that Saudi aggressive foreign policy is an ongoing event.

The GCC-led military intervention in Bahrain is the first case. It serves as a prime example of Saudi counterrevolutionary politics and the first signal for Saudi aggressive behaviour in the wake of the Arab upheavals. The Saudi role in supporting the counterrevolution in Egypt serves as the second case. This case seeks to demonstrate how King Abdullah worked to keep the authoritarian regime's status quo and to counter threatening aspirations from political Islam such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and at the domestic level. The third case elaborates on the Saudi role in the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars. I have included both countries in one case, based on the integration of the two conflicts during the Arab upheavals. The Saudis have actively tried to direct the civil war in Syria in favour of their regime and have used the civil war as a proxy-theatre for countering Iranian influence. Saudi forces engaged *Dāʿesh*-targets with military means in Iraq and Syria from the autumn of 2014, and has continued these operations in 2015, thus making it a contemporary event.

The fourth case seeks to reveal Saudi politics towards Yemen, and how the regime has tried to influence its internal politics and perceives the neighboring country as a 'dodgy' domestic backyard. The case elaborates on how the Saudis have lost much of their former influence in Yemen, as they have focused on the events in Syria and Iraq. However, the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen March 2015 indicates that the aggressive behaviour is an ongoing event. I will seek to engage with the different cases in a chronological order within each case, complemented by primary and secondary sources where they contribute to a greater understanding of the driving force(s) behind the Saudi foreign policy in the time period of 2011-2014, and if the Saudi regime, in fact, lead a counterrevolution in light of the Arab Spring.

Chapter 3: Theory

Overall, the theory chapter is a mixture of theoretical considerations provided by macro-theories within IR, in addition to including empirical data in order to elaborate the analytical framework given by FPA, as presented in chapter 2. The first aim of the chapter is to present testable macro-theories on two issues: why states behave aggressively driven by certain causal interests, explained by offensive realism through John T. Mearsheimer, and seek to explain the Saudi national interests and role structures between states, with theoretical considerations from constructivism provided by Alexander Wendt.

The second aim of the chapter is to highlight the Saudi foreign policy actors, its identity, and counterrevolutionary politics through micro-theories. There is, however, none testable theories within IR that explains how states engage in counterrevolutionary politics. I have, therefore, tried to present the scope conditions for Saudi Arabia to pursue counterrevolutionary politics. I will diverge from the uniform realism perspective that only considering the hard power capabilities, such as military and economic means when discussing Saudi Arabia's instruments and capabilities. In addition, I will not present an in-depth analysis of each capacity the Saudis possess, but rather seek to outline the major instruments and capabilities the Kingdom currently hold. This perspective is highlighted through micro-theories provided by FPA by Christopher Hill (2003).

3.1 National interests

A country's national interests are essential to consider in exploring its foreign policy behaviour. Joseph, S. Nye Jr. (2004: 60) says, "All countries pursue their national interests in foreign policy, but there are choices to be made about how broadly or narrowly we define our national interests, as well as the means by which we pursue it." As the thesis shows, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has one fundamental national interest: the essential principle of regime security. The Saudis are willing to take great risks in order to ensure their position. In addition, Saudi Arabia has shown an aspiration to expand its regional influence and become a regional hegemon. Moreover, the Saudi Islamic-based identity has an important role in the creation of their foreign policy, as I will discuss throughout this chapter.

3.1.1 Offensive realism and aggressive behaviour

Realism adheres the idea of nation-states as being rational actors in the international system. Moreover, realism explains the anarchy and the states' choices with assumptions such as self-interest primarily driving political behavior. States, from this theoretical view, tend to focus on their security and struggle for power, according William C. Wohlforth (2012: 36). Offensive realism argues that all great powers aspire to become regional hegemons. John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 2) believes, "There are no status quo powers in the international system, save for the occasional hegemon that wants to maintain its dominating position over potential rivals." Mearsheimer (2014: 3) further notes, "Thus, a great power will defend the balance of power when looming change favors another state, and it will try to undermine the balance when the direction of change is in its own favor." Due to the rivalry between the two great regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the latter, as focused upon in the study, has perceived the Arab upheavals as both a risk for losing its influence and an opportunity to gain influence in the region to the longstanding rival. From this perspective, it provides Saudi Arabia strong incentives for defending its balance of power. This idea is in accordance with John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 29) where he states that, "Great powers, I argue, are always seeking for opportunities to gain power over its rivals, with hegemony as their final goal." The argument is especially relevant when discussing the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the wake of the Arab upheavals. In addition, the Arab Spring was also an opportunity for other sub-regional powers to increase their influence as well, as I will show in the case studies.

In the last few decades, Saudi Arabia has positioned itself as one of the most influential countries in the Middle East. This role has been possible through its acquisition of both hard and soft power capabilities, and through its mutual dependent alliance with United States. Anthony H. Cordesman (1997: 20) notes several years ago that, "Saudi Arabia is continuing to seek prestige and influence throughout the Arab world, and to define its legitimacy as the Arab custodian of Mecca and Medina […]." Moreover, there is no indication of Saudi Arabia trying to downplay its regional aspirations. Alongside Saudi Arabia, there exist four great powers in the Middle East: Egypt, Iran, Israel, and Turkey. In addition, Qatar has actively tried to position itself on the Arabian Peninsula and throughout the region by the use of its soft power capabilities and its ideology of political Islam, complemented with significant economic capabilities following its oil wealth.

Due to the anarchy following the Arab upheavals, stronger competition between some of the Middle Eastern great powers can be observed. Saudi Arabia has increased its 'war' of regional influence with Iran. As well as the conflict with Iran, Saudi Arabia has been involved in several political conflicts with Qatar related to the latter country's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and who would serve as the sub-regional hegemon. Israel has not been actively involved in the great power politics among the regional players after 2011, except for diplomatic attempts to remove the possibility of Iran gaining nuclear capability. The Turkey regime has been tightening its position on the domestic level, and has been involved in the Syrian civil war with support to the Syrian opposition, in the attempt to remove the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

March Lynch (2010: 316) elaborates on the assertion of an anarchy in the Middle East, and notes, "The states of the Middle East compete with each other for power, security, and ideological influence in an environment that is formally anarchic but in fact thoroughly ordered by a shared public sphere and ideological concerns." The term anarchy is especially relevant in light of the Arab upheavals, as the competition among regional states has increased. Both realism and constructivism accept the idea of anarchy in the international system. However, within these two theories, there are some great differences in the perception of how states act in an anarchic system.

Anarchy, following a realism definition, is defined as, "When no authority which can enforce agreements exists – a condition theorist's call anarchy – any state can resort to force to get what it wants. Even if a state can be fairly sure that no other state will take up arms today, there is no guarantee against the possibility that one might do so tomorrow. Because no state can rule out this prospect, states tend to arm themselves against this contingency", according to William C. Wohlforth (2012: 38). The assertion of a regional anarchy following this definition is strengthened, as Saudi Arabia has armed itself more extensively in light of the Arab Spring, and, by 2014, became the world's biggest arms importer. This can clearly be related to the wake of the Arab Spring, where several regimes fell apart, new threats by the emergence of terrorist groups such as *Dāʿesh* appeared, in addition to the civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Following the notion that no higher authority can enforce agreements, I would strongly argue that several states in the Middle East viewed the situation in the Middle East from 2011 to be anarchy, as several countries in addition to Saudi Arabia have increased their defence spending.

Aggressive behaviour occurs when great powers aspire to maximise their relative power, serving as an optimal way to ensure its security, according to the offensive realism view on the international system. John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 21) states, "In other words, survival mandates aggressive behavior. Great powers behave aggressively not because they want to or because they possess some inner drive to dominate, but because they have to seek more power if they want to maximize their odds of survival." John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 46) further argues that survival is the primary goal for great powers, alongside non-security goals such as economic prosperity, while they sometimes seek to promote a particular ideology abroad. The notion of promoting an ideology is especially relevant when analysing Saudi Arabia, due to its widespread exporting of the *Wahhabi*-tradition. The realist traditions recognise the non-security goals but do not emphasise them.

There are certain assumptions that need to take place for a great power to strive for hegemony and behave aggressively, according to John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 29-31). The first assumption is that the international system is anarchic. Second, a great power needs to possess offensive military capabilities. Third, a state can never be sure about another state's intentions. Fourth, is based on the assumption that survival is the primary goal of great powers. John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 31) notes, "Specifically, states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of the domestic political order." Fifth, that great powers are rational actors, and that states think strategically about how to survive. All of these five assumptions need to be present in order to explain why states behave aggressively. The argument suggests that, even though a state possesses offensive military capabilities, it will not mandate a situation where states behave aggressively. More importantly, when discussing an anarchic situation, John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 54) states, "In anarchy, however, the desire to survive encourages states to behave aggressively." The latter argument does, however, presume that states may pursue aggressive behaviour in order to survive in an anarchy.

There are, however, some limits to using realism as a uniform theory in explaining a country's foreign policy. John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 10-11) suggest that offensive realism pays little attention to ideology, individuals or domestic political considerations. This is also supported by Fred Halliday (2005: 25), who suggests that realism largely gives less priority to the importance of identity, ideology, and internal factors. In addition, Mehran Kamrava (2013: 6) states that, "No state, of course, is a unitary entity, and the Saudi state, like its counterparts everywhere else, is fragmented. In the Saudi case, this fragmentation runs along institutional,

personal, and ideological lines." I, therefore, sought to explain the complexity of a state's foreign policy from a constructivist perspective, complemented with foreign policy analysis, due to the importance of identity, ideology and personal lines within the Saudi state.

In contrast, constructivism fails to appreciate one important issue, namely the importance of material factors and capabilities. The perspective of offensive realism needs, therefore, to be included, as Saudi Arabia became the world's largest arms importer in 2014. In addition, Fred Halliday (2005: 32-33) states, "[…] constructivism and its outriders run the risk of ignoring interests and material factors […]". I have highlighted the lack of focus on material factors in constructivism. The critique of less focus on interests is, however, remarkable, as interests from the perspective of constructivism are explained by the notion of interaction between states, and that interests are subjectively changed according to the defined situation of the actor.

3.1.2 Socially constructed interests and role structures between states

Christopher Hill and William Wallace (1996) states according to Lisbeth Aggestam (1999: 1), "Effective foreign policy rests upon a shared sense of national identity, of a nation-state's place in the world', its friends and enemies, its interests and aspirations. These underlying assumptions are embedded in national history and myth, changing slowly over time as political leaders re-interpret them and external and internal developments reshape them." This assertion rests on the notion of constructivism and is similar to Wendt's perception of a state's interests.

National interests from the perspective of constructivism is elaborated by Alexander Wendt (1999: 233) who believes, "States are actors whose behaviour is motivated by a variety of interests rooted in corporate, type, role, and collective identities." Wendt's view on national interests differs from the realism perspective and assumes that the behaviour of an actor arises through how a state perceives itself and the role it possesses. Moreover, national interests are a social construction of what states want to achieve. Alexander Wendt (1992: 391-393) is critical of both liberalism and realism, and challenges the realism assumption of state's behaviour in an anarchic international system. Alexander Wendt (1999: 246-247) defines anarchy as, "The absence of centralized authority." This definition is quite similar to the realist definition, but does not take the idea of an arms race for granted as the results of an

anarchy by the realist definition. While Alexander Wendt (1992: 395) argues, "Anarchy is what states make of it", and Wendt (1992: 395) further insists, "Anarchies may contain dynamics that lead to competitive power politics, but they also may not, and we can argue about when particular structures of identity and interests will emerge." This view differs markedly from Mearsheimer's perception of that anarchy encourages states to behave aggressively and always engages in a competitive power politics. Moreover, Wendt (1992: 398) states, "Identities are the basis of interests. Actors do not have a "portfolio" of interests that they carry around independent of social context; instead, they define their interests in the process of defining the situation." This view implies that an actor represents their interests according to how they define and perceive any given situation. More precisely, Alexander Wendt (1992: 406) argues that a state's interests and identities are constituted through a process of intersubjectivity. It is a result of continuous adaption as states interact. Alexander Wendt (1999) argues that realists possess a pessimistic view on international relations and states, "All realists would probably agree, however, that states are inherently self-interested or egoistic," according to Alexander Wendt (1999: 239).

Instead, Alexander Wendt (1999: 251-299) speaks of three structures and roles under anarchy within the international system, whereby the Hobbesian culture serves as an enmity role structure, the Lockean as a rivalry role structure, and the Kantian as a friendly role structure. The logic of role structures is used in the case studies in order to explain the diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and the countries used as case studies. The reason for this is to reveal if there are any specific 'role' structures the Saudis have engaged in more aggressively in comparison to other role structures.

The logic of a Hobbesian anarchy is centred on the notion of 'war of all against all', as the actors engage in the international system of the principles, kill or be killed. Alexander Wendt (1999: 265) considers on the Hobbesian anarchy as being something similar to the realist perception, where states tends to focus on power as a means to dominate. Alexander Wendt (1999: 284) elaborates on the Hobbesian anarchy, and states, "If states think that others recognize their sovereignty, however, then survival is not at stake if their relative power falls, and the pressure to maximize power is much less." The Lockean culture follows another logic than the Hobbesian whereby the international system is based on the role structure of rivalry. In this form of anarchy, the actors respect each other's sovereignty. It is important to note that the rivalry is based on a subjective perception of the 'Self' and the 'Other', whereby a change

towards this perception might also change the structure of rivalry, enmity, or friendship. The last form of culture of anarchy is the Kantian role structure, based on friendship. The macro-level logic of Kantian anarchy is based upon the notion of two guidelines, which are "pluralistic security communities" and "collective security", according to Wendt (1999: 299). However, the realists see the Kantian friendship as utopian and idealistic, and that states act on the notion of being in a Lockean structure rather than a Hobbesian one, according to Alexander Wendt (1999: 298).

I have already highlighted that states pursue their own national interests, but it is up to the decision-makers for how to define them. Christopher Hill (2003: 132) argues that if states have interests (I) and values (V), in which they want to preserve and protect, then they can be classified in the idea of *core concerns* (I+V=C). The core concerns, according to Hill, revolve around four issues: security, prosperity, identity, and prestige. In addition, Cristopher Hill (2003: 118) elaborates on foreign policy actors and states, "When pressed they usually take refuge in the old notion of the national interests, […]. They prefer to hide behind a screen of presumed unity and collective responsibility rather than dissect their own real goals, […]."

Domestic regime security is the overriding objective and interest (I) of the Saudi royal family. Gerd Nonneman (2005: 338) expands on this, stating, "The Saudi foreign policy 'role', or 'roles', must be seen as defined through the lens of Al Sa'ud perceptions about the security of their regime; about the opportunities and challenges presented by both their domestic and their external environments; and about the family's own history and its place in Arabian, Arab and Muslim society and politics". This theory is supported by Ana Echagüe (2014: 3), who compares all the Gulf States and states that, "[…] regime survival becomes the defining characteristic of Gulf states' policies. State interests is conflated with regime security, and the focus of foreign policy is on the regime's dynastic interests." The Saudis are willing to take high risks in order to ensure its survival. Shireen T. Hunter (2015) elaborates on this assertion and states, "Prince Nayef Bin Abdul Aziz put it succinctly: "We got our power by the sword and will keep it by the sword"—even if the sword is wielded by the Pakistanis, Egyptians, IS, or others."

The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented its foreign policy on its official website on September 20, 2011, intimating that pieces from both realism and identity factors are given considerable attention in their foreign policy focus, and assert, "The Saudi Arabia's foreign

policy in the Arab Circle is based on major permanent basis and principles that are: Realism, which is represented in avoiding slogans and overacting, which negatively affect the security and stability of Arab World, and prevent the interference in Arab internal affairs […]. Islam has been always the most important factor affecting the determination of priorities of Kingdom's foreign policy," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011, September 20). The text strengthens my opinion that both realism and constructivism should be used as theories when conducting theory triangulation, as it foregrounds the notions of security and stability, and its focus on identity, which is, more precisely, Islam.

Moreover, Saudi foreign policy has some fundamental goals, which according to Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 193) include, "[…] to protect the country from foreign domination and/or invasion and to safeguard the domestic stability of the Al Saud regime". Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 208) further states that, "When foreign powers directly challenge the legitimacy of Saudi rule and pose direct military threats, the Saudis will take significant risks to oppose them and call upon the United States for support." Stig Stenslie (2011: 12) explores the former US support for Saudi Arabia and states, "Likewise, the Americans have provided security in time of intervention of external forces. The House of Saud called for help in 1963 and again in 1990." Stenslie refers to the conflict between Egypt and Yemen, where Egyptian aircraft engaged targets close to the Saudi border in 1963, and the United States responded by sending military support as a preventive measure. In 1990, the United States provided military support against the aggressive Iraqi state. The United States has, in other words, proven a valuable ally for the kingdom.

3.1.3 Identity and values

Ole Wæver (1994) states according to Christopher Hill (2003: 98) that, "Indeed, the main aim of foreign policy analysis from this [constructivism] viewpoint is to probe 'the deeper questions of the formation of identities and the structural forces at the domestic level.'" In this context, and in order to understand the importance of Islam, which serves as an important marker of identity in Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to consider the kingdom's history and foundation. Madawi al-Rasheed (2010: 48) states, "The holy alliance between Ibn Sa'ud and the Najdi ritual specialists is important for understanding the origins of the Sa'udi polity in the twentieth century." The idea of the Saudi state is built upon the Wahhabi partnership between

the *imām*, and the religious specialists, whereby the political leadership is enforcing the religious doctrine of the Wahhabi establishment. The alliance was established in 1902, as the Wahhabi establishment gave an oath of allegiance, *bay'ah*, to Ibn Saʿud in light of his capture of Riyadh, according to Madawi al-Rasheed (2010: 54). Moreover, Al-Azmeh (1993) notes according to Madawi al-Rasheed (2010: 49), "Wahhabi religious specialists accepted the doctrine that power is legitimate however it may have been seized, and that obedience to whoever wields this power is incumbent upon all his subjects." The alliance between the religious establishment and the royal family provides the legitimation of the Saudi monarchy. Madawi al-Rasheed (2010: 49) suggests that, "In addition, they preached the importance of obedience to *wali al-amr,* leader of the Muslim community. Obedience should be manifested in readiness to pay him *zakat* and respond to his call for *jihad.*"

Moreover, the Saudi regime perceives Saudi Arabia as the heartland of Islam. The Saudi perception of possessing the leading state within Islam is one of Saudi Arabia's core values (V). In this context, Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 194/198) states that, "Their [Saudi Arabia] self-conscious assertion that they are the "most Islamic" of the Muslim countries has been an important element of their domestic legitimation and regional stance […]. Riyadh has been able to use its status as a leader of the Muslim world to advance its foreign policy goals". He further elaborates on how the Saudi regime has used the narrative of Islam when they confronted Nasser and his Pan-Arabism in the 1960s. In these terms, Islam serves as one of the most important factors in promoting Saudi national interest. The Islam-based Saudi identity also affects their foreign policy. Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 202-203) suggests that Islam is one of the factors that defines the role of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. He reveals the central role Islam plays in the Saudi regime's domestic legitimation formula, and how they consider themselves to have the leading political role among other Muslim states. This has been evidenced by the role of Saudi Arabia in the formation and cooperation among several Muslims countries in organizations such as OIC, WAMY, and MWL. However, Lisbeth Aggestam (1999: 5) states that, "It is however important to stress that socio-cultural sources of foreign policy are dynamic and may be subject to change, not least because the state itself contains a range of different social groups with varying interests and identities". These assertions favour a constructivist perspective, which according to Wendt is subject to change. However, there are no indications that Saudi Arabia has reconsidered the importance of its socio-cultural sources from Sunni Islam play in its foreign policy.

Another view of the Saudi foreign policy through their Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, which states, "The foreign policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on geographical – historical – religious – economic – security – political everlasting principles and facts. It is shaped within major frameworks, among the most important of which are; good-neighbor policy, non interference in the internal affairs of other countries, strengthen relations with the Gulf States and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, strengthen relations with Arab and Islamic countries for the benefit of common interests of these countries, as well as advocate their issues, adopt nonalignment policy, establish cooperation relations with friendly countries, and play effective role in the international and regional organizations. This policy is activated through several circles such as Gulf, Arab, Islamic, and international circles", according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011, September 20).

The above statement reveals the Saudi foreign policy as being built upon the notion of a certain identity based upon its geography, history, religion, economy, security, and politics, as explicitly stated in the text. These are, as Renouvin and Duroselle (1968) according to Christopher Hill (2003: 136) calls it, *resources.* The resources are elements that derive from the history and geography and are the primary forces of foreign policy, which contributes to suggest the limits of a country's impact on the world – and its ambitions. It is clear that the text foregrounds a presumed unity and collective responsibility, rather than attempting to directly dissect its own goals. This might imply that the kingdom's decision-makers are under some pressure, based upon Hill's argument that when the decision-makers are pressed, they usually take refuge in the old notion of national interest.

In addition, the Saudi identity, based upon the belief of *Wahhabism* contributes to contradiction towards other interpretations of Islam. The notion of rationality in foreign policy is further explored by Christopher Hill (2003: 111) who states, "Decision-makers cannot avoid having *images* of others which will be as affected by their own cultural and political baggage as much as by the objective evidence." Moreover, Christopher Hill (2003: 112) notes, "But if the politics of a country is built on "othering", or finding its own identity in contradistinction to a feared and hated outsider(s), then stereotypes will persist and compound the existing problems." The Saudi state and its royal family carry its cultural and political baggage, which have existed since the creation of the state in 1932. However, as Alexander Wendt (1999: 246) says, "Within domestic politics states are socially constructed […]". In the

case of Saudi Arabia, this cultural and political baggage is constructed on the notion of 'othering' others that do not fit into the self-imposed identity. This is particularly noticeable in the strong character of *Wahhabism*. Moreover, Peter Mandaville (2007: 247) highlights the notion of 'othering' in the *Wahhabi* doctrine, and states, "The social structure of Arabia, for example, led Wahhabi scholars to lay great emphasis on differentiating true believers from infidels in the name of justifying political expansion and the use of violence against other Muslims." This notion is also highlighted by Laurence Louër (2014: 118) who states, "It [Saudi Arabia] is the only Gulf monarchy where the identity of the state, based on a specific reading of Sunni religious orthodoxy, has led to a widespread state-sponsored policy of sectarian discrimination." While the Saudi state's cornerstones are built upon 'othering', it does, according to this view, contribute to exacerbating the existing problems towards other ideologies and religious interpretations within Islam.

3.1.4 Internal-external link to foreign policy

Regime security is the most significant national interest for the Saudi regime, as highlighted above. In order to ensure the security of the monarchy from external threats, and conduct an effective foreign policy, the royal family is, therefore, dependent on domestic stability and internal politics. Alexander Wendt (1999: 2) believes, "[…] foreign policy behaviour is often determined primarily by domestic politics […]." In the case of Saudi Arabia, Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani (2013: 1130-1131) notes, "A concern with domestic security has long structured how external security is approached, […]." Moreover, the Saudi regime has accused other states, and especially Iran, of trying to expand their influence in the Gulf and inside the kingdom itself, both prior to and after the Arab upheavals. The concept of *Homeostasis* becomes relevant in this context. Ideas of social and domestic peace against external threats are explored by Christopher Hill (2003: 44), where he notes, "*Homeostasis*, or the maintenance of territorial integrity and social peace against external threats. Challenges which come from inside, such as demands for regional autonomy, are not the proper business of foreign policy until they become connected to the outside pressures, when decision-makers have to be careful not to be drawn into confusing "enemies" within and without."

There are several examples of the internal – external link to the foreign policy in Saudi Arabia. During the Cold War period of 1979-1988, Saudi Arabia, and its most valuable ally, the United States tried to counter and destroy the Soviet and Communist influence in

Afghanistan. One of the means used was soft power, and, more importantly, the *Wahhabi* interpretation of Islam, which predominates in Saudi Arabia. The United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan promoted religious training, economic, and arms support to Afghan and Pakistani rebels in their fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. In addition, a high number of Arabs fought, with Saudi and US support, against the Communists. Years later, this foreign policy strategy, support of Afghans, Pakistani, and Arab *Jihad* fighters had a severe impact on a domestic level in Saudi Arabia. The military and religious trained Saudis who fought in Afghanistan subsequently went back to Saudi Arabia, and then threatened the security within the kingdom, and the House of Al Saʿud. Some of the prominent figures in the creation of al-Qaida were Saudis. In addition, there are several examples of Saudis who have been a part of terrorist organisations such as al-Qaida on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) and *Dāʿesh*.

The Gulf War of 1990-91 and the following events provide another example of the internal link to foreign policy. Saudi Arabia feared that Iraq and Saddam Hussein planned to attack Saudi Arabia following its invasion of Kuwait. Saudi Arabia possesses the economic capabilities to pay for US-led military operations, but did not possess the military capabilities to protect the kingdom itself. Saudi Arabia, therefore, allowed foreign, and particularly US troops, to be stationed in the kingdom in order to liberate Kuwait. The decision to let foreign (non-Islamic) troops on Saudi soil was among Saudis considered highly controversial. This was particularly true among the religious establishment, which demanded that non-Islamic troops should not be stationed in the heartland of Islam. The decision to allow foreign troops to be stationed within the Kingdom created space for radical Islamists to propagate their beliefs of a 'corrupt' monarchy, and urged for their removal through violent means. Anthony H. Cordesman (1997: 27) asserts that, "The complex mix of social and economic pressures that arose during the Gulf War led King Fahd to reorganize his cabinet on August 5, 1990, and announce a series of reforms on March 17, 1991." Example on these included the creation of Majlis al-Shura, or a Council of Saudis, introduction of a basic body of governing laws, and a higher degree of autonomy for the provinces. The announcement of the reforms was supported by prominent religious clerics such as Sheik Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz. In 1992, there were, according to Anthony H. Cordesman (1997: 38) "[…] 107 leading religious clerics signed a petition – or "Memorandum of Advice" – which called for the stricter enforcement of Islamic law, severing relations with all non-Islamic countries and the West […]." The implementation of reforms within the kingdom was a result of a series of events. It started

with the external threat from Iraq, which in return created domestic pressure to the royal family as foreign troops were stationed in the kingdom, and later produced more domestic threats, which ultimately became radical groups such as al-Qaida.

3.2 Actors and Instruments

The Saudi Kingdom is a nation-state recognised by the international community, and, in accordance with the realist perception of the international system, thereby an actor. However, the underlying dynamics of the kingdom, predominately ignored by realists, need to be explained in order to understand the internal-external link to foreign policy. Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt (2011: 87) highlight one core element in realism named *statism,* where they refer to the idea of the state as the legitimate representative of the collective will of the people. The notion of statism assumes that states are considered to be the only actors in the international system. However, the challenge in assuming that a one-dimensional unit makes the foreign policy, fails to appreciate the variety of stakeholder that may influence it. To follow the methodology outlined in FPA, Christopher Hill (2003: 51) stresses that, "Decision-makers must be the starting-point if we wish to understand the dilemmas of acting in the international system."

3.2.1 The royal family

The royal family in Saudi Arabia consists of an extended and influential group of approximately 5.000 descendants of the country's founder, Ibn Saʿud. The exact numbers of the House of Saʿud are, however, debated. The descendants are divided into various generations, branches of kinship, and matrimonial descent that determines a prince's position in the family. The royal family has a hierarchical structure whereby the king's closest family would be given the most prominent positions in the state apparatus and government structure. An example of this is when King Salman ascended the throne in January 2015. In order to consolidate his power, he placed his son Muhammed bin Salman in prominent positions such as Minister of Defence and Chief of the Royal Court, while he was given the prominent title as deputy Crown Prince in April 2015. Gerd Nonneman (2006) and Abdulrhman A. Hussein (2012) argue that there are several stakeholders within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but presumes that the royal family and the King determine the country's foreign policy. In addition, the strong influence of monarchy is also highlighted through the Saudi Basic Law of

Government. Article 5 (A) in the Basic Law states, "Monarchy is the system of rule in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia The Shura Council. Laws and Regulations > The Basic Law Of Government > Chapter 2 (1992, March 1). Stig Stenslie (2014 a: 1) elaborates on the Basic Law as, "[…] a constitution-like document adopted by royal decree by the then-King Fahd in 1992." The Saudi Basic Law of Government came a year after the second Gulf War and is ruled in accordance with the principles of *Sharīʿa.*

Given that Saudi is governed as an absolute monarchy, the role of the Saudi monarchy as an important stakeholder in the decision-making of the Saudi foreign policy, should not come as a surprise. Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 204) states, explicitly, that, "The key decision-making body on foreign policy in Saudi Arabia is that group of senior members of the Al Saʿud family who, by reason of their official positions or their standing within the family, decide all major issues of policy." Gregory F. Gause III (2002) accepts that people outside the royal family have important roles as advisors, but the key decisions are nonetheless made within the family. The King's role in the decision-making process should, however, not be underestimated, even though there are several senior members of the royal family that possesses important decision-making positions.

3.2.2 State institutions

When discussing this section, it is important to note that several prominent members of the royal family possess influential positions in the different state institutions. Alongside the members of the royal family, the *Wahhabi* establishment have enjoyed a close link to the state and the royal family due to the political structure of Saudi Arabia.

The foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, Saʿud al-Faisal is one of the longest-serving foreign ministers in the world as he became the head of the Ministry in 1975. Saʿud al-Faisal was, however, replaced by Adel al-Jubeir on April 29, 2015. Christopher Hill (2003: 62) states, "Foreign ministers are vulnerable for removal in the early phases of their tenure, […], but the longer they survive the more vital their experience and contacts become." The kingdom consolidated its important international position after the oil embargo towards Western interests in 1973, implying that Saʿud al-Faisal had been the head of the Ministry throughout the whole period. The Saudi Foreign Minister has experienced the dynamics of the region,

and international affairs for the last forty years, thus providing him a significant position in Saudi foreign politics and relations with other states.

King Abdullah created the National Security Council (SNC) as an organisational mechanism in 2005 to handle security related issues. The NSC was, however, dissolved on January 29, 2015, when King Salman ascended the throne. Instead, Salman implemented a similar mechanism - Council for Political and Security Affairs. The NSC importance as a decision-making organisation is, therefore, only relevant for the thesis defined period of 2011-2014. Sager Abdulaziz (2005, November 11) in *Arab News* states, "Although the executive leadership makes the final decisions that determine state policy, this only takes place following consultation with appropriate institutions. By providing options and solutions to the executive leadership in order to enable them to adopt the best option, these institutions participate in the decision-making process. In this respect, the work of the National Security Council secretariat is considered vital." Abdulrhman A. Hussein (2012: 51) argues the council was created in response to major geopolitical developments, while Sager Abdulaziz (2005) suggests that the creation took place in the wake of domestic developments as well.

The council had responsibility for the creation of Saudi Arabia's national security, intelligence, and foreign policy strategies. In addition, the council had the power to declare war and investigate the country's security agencies. However, the council's power was, however, limited by the King, as Article 62 of the Basic Law states, "If an imminent danger is threatening the safety of the Kingdom, the integrity of its territories or the security and interests of its people, or is impeding the functions of official organizations, the King may take urgent measures to deal with such a danger. When he considers that these measures should continue, necessary arrangements shall be made in accordance with the Law," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia The Shura Council. Laws and Regulations > The Basic Law Of Government > Chapter 6 (1992, March 1). Stratfor Global Intelligence (2005) states, "Saudi Arabia has created an enhanced National Security Council that will enjoy wide-ranging powers related to domestic and foreign policy." Furthermore, Stratfor Global Intelligence (2005) observes that what makes NSC interesting is the council's composition. In 2005, the NSC consisted of King Abdullah as Chairman, Crown Prince Sultan as deputy chairman, and the former Saudi Ambassador to the United State Prince Bandar bin Sultan as the secretary-general of NSC. In addition, other members of the council included Saudi National Guard Deputy Commander Badr bin Abdel Aziz, Interior Minister Nayef, Foreign

Affairs Minister Saʿud al-Faisal and the Chief of the General Intelligence Department Nawaf bin Abdel-Aziz.

The composition of the NSC in September 2014 included King Abdullah as Chairman, Crown Prince Salman as Deputy Chairman of the Council, Saʿud bin Faisal, Bandar bin Sultan, who served as the Secretary General, Khalid bin Sultan, who serves as the General Intelligence President, Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah, who serves as the National Guard Minister, and Mohammed bin Nayef, who served as the Minister of Interior. Given the prominent royal family members included, the NSC is considered to have been an important stakeholder in the decision-making process of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. This assumption is also supported by Stratfor Global Intelligence (2005) who noted that the council consist of figures in the top layer of the royal family, which, in return, suggests the royal family as being in charge of the major foreign policy decisions.

Anthony H. Cordesman (1997: 21) states that, "The monarchy remains the key source of power in the Saudi Arabian government." Moreover, Cordesman (1997) suggests that there is a lack of a formal constitution and that elections and political parties are, however, prohibited in the Kingdom. The Saudi Basic Law of Government was established in 1992, but, as Cordesman asserts, that the King's power is, however, limited by the need for support by the religious leaders. The support from the religious establishment may be explained by the strong Islamic narratives that took place when Saudi Arabia was founded, in addition to the mutually dependent political alliance between the *Wahhabi* establishment and the King that still exists. In order to ensure the governance as an absolute monarchy, the Saudi religious establishment has issued a *fatwā,* prohibiting political parties. The *fatwā* states, "It is not permissible for Muslims to divide into separate religious groups and parties, with members cursing and fighting each other. Allah not only forbids such factionalism, but censures those who introduce or follow them and threatens them with grievous punishment. Both Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him) renounced this practice," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Portal of the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta`(n.d).

The role of the *Wahhabi* establishment in the decision-making process is, however, debated. Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 205) suggests that there exists an ongoing discourse among observers of Saudi foreign policy in relation to the role of the religious establishment in the decision-making process. He argues that some observers suggest that the religious

establishment has considerable power to claim veto in cases, while others perceive its power is greatly attenuated from previous times. Gause himself believes that the religious establishment has restricted power in foreign policy decision-making. The religious establishment has often been used as a tool for the royal family, whereby senior clerics usually issue *fatwās* following the King's political stance. There are several examples where the royal family uses the religious establishment and prominent clerics to validate and approve decisions on both domestic and foreign policy, as the case studies will show. A prime historical example of how the royal family has used the religious establishment for political validation, is as Gregory F. Gause III (2002: 205) observes, when King Fahd ordered the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz to justify the request for US troops to assist the kingdom in 1991, and of the hostilities against Iraq the same year.

In contrast, Mai Yamani (2008: 146) states that, "Meanwhile, the Wahhabi clerics are continually indulged as the kingdom's *de facto* rulers." Mai Yamani (2008: 146) further says, "The Wahhabi establishment controls not just the juridical system, but also the Council of Senior Ulama; the General Committee for Issuing Fatwas, Da'wa, and Irshad; the Ministry of Islamic Affairs; the Supreme Headquarters for the Council for International Supervision of Mosques; and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prohibition of Vice." Several of these agencies have an international orientation and provides the religious establishment an important function, as the Saudi legitimate much of its foreign policy through Islamic terms. Moreover, the *Wahhabi* establishment controls all religious education, the Ministry of *Hajj*, and endorses great influence in the Ministry of Finance through the control of *Zakat*. In addition, Article 8 in the Basic Law states, "Government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on justice, shura (consultation) and equality according to Islamic Sharia," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia The Shura Council. Laws and Regulations > The Basic Law Of Government > Chapter 2 (1992, March 1). Article 8 in the Basic Law of Gowenment suggests that the religious establishment enjoys considerable power at the domestic level, but I will argue that the *Wahhabi* clerics also have a direct impact on the external sphere as well. The case of the foreign troops stationed in the kingdom during the second Gulf War suggests that the royal family needs to gain political validation.

3.2.3 Instruments and capabilities

Realism tends to focus on military power and capabilities, and assumes that nations use their military capabilities in order to gain more power. John T. Mearsheimer (2014: 55) explores the importance of military capabilities, stating, "In international politics, however, a state's effective power is ultimately a function of its military forces and how they compare with the military forces of rival states". Moreover, the use of military instruments are often a controversial strategy, due to the risk it involves, according to (Mearsheimer 2014: 147).

I do not dismiss the importance of hard power as focused upon in realism. Hard power capabilities need to be given attention if the critique of constructivism is taken into account. However, I do believe that the national attributes and self-imposed identity markers that Saudi Arabia possesses through soft power capabilities are of crucial importance when assessing its foreign policy. I have highlighted that Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is complicated by the importance of transnational political ideologies within the region, in addition to the present balance of power game. These conditions complicate Saudi calculations in terms of power and threats, and the use of instruments. The Saudi regime not only needs to be aware of military shifts in the region, but also to political and ideological threats, which could question their domestic legitimacy, and thereby the essential national interest of regime security.

Saudi Arabia has conducted an aggressive foreign policy through its, admittedly, rare use of its military capabilities abroad, as in the US-led coalition against *Dāʿesh* from September 2014. Thus, a significant problem occurs when explaining this behaviour in terms of realism in IR-theory, as *Dāʿesh* is not recognised as a legitimate state among other nations in the international system. To handle non-state, or transnational actors, Christopher Hill (2003: 195) suggest a basis for categorisation of actors, which are not recognised as states. 1. *Territorial,* a group or organization either use or seek some territorial base. 2. *Ideological/cultural,* whether they may try to promote certain ideas or ways of thinking across national frontiers. 3. *Economic,* their primary focus on wealth creation. This categorisation of transnational actors is used throughout the thesis, in an attempt to distinguish states from transnational actors.

To differentiate the foreign policy instruments, there are, as Christopher Hill (2003: 128-129) argues, limited possible instruments that can be used in foreign policy – that can be classified as diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural. These instruments are rarely used in isolation

and are mostly used in conjunction to strengthen the desired impact. Military force can be used as coercion, deterrence or protection of sovereignty as foreign policy instruments towards other states, though military force can also be used as a repressive tool against a state's own population. Economic power as an instrument can be used in promoting interests abroad, as economic aid, or economic sanctions, though it can be used to co-opt the population on the domestic level. In order to distinguish the different instruments and capabilities, I have included a figure that presents the possible instruments, capabilities, and resources a state may possess.
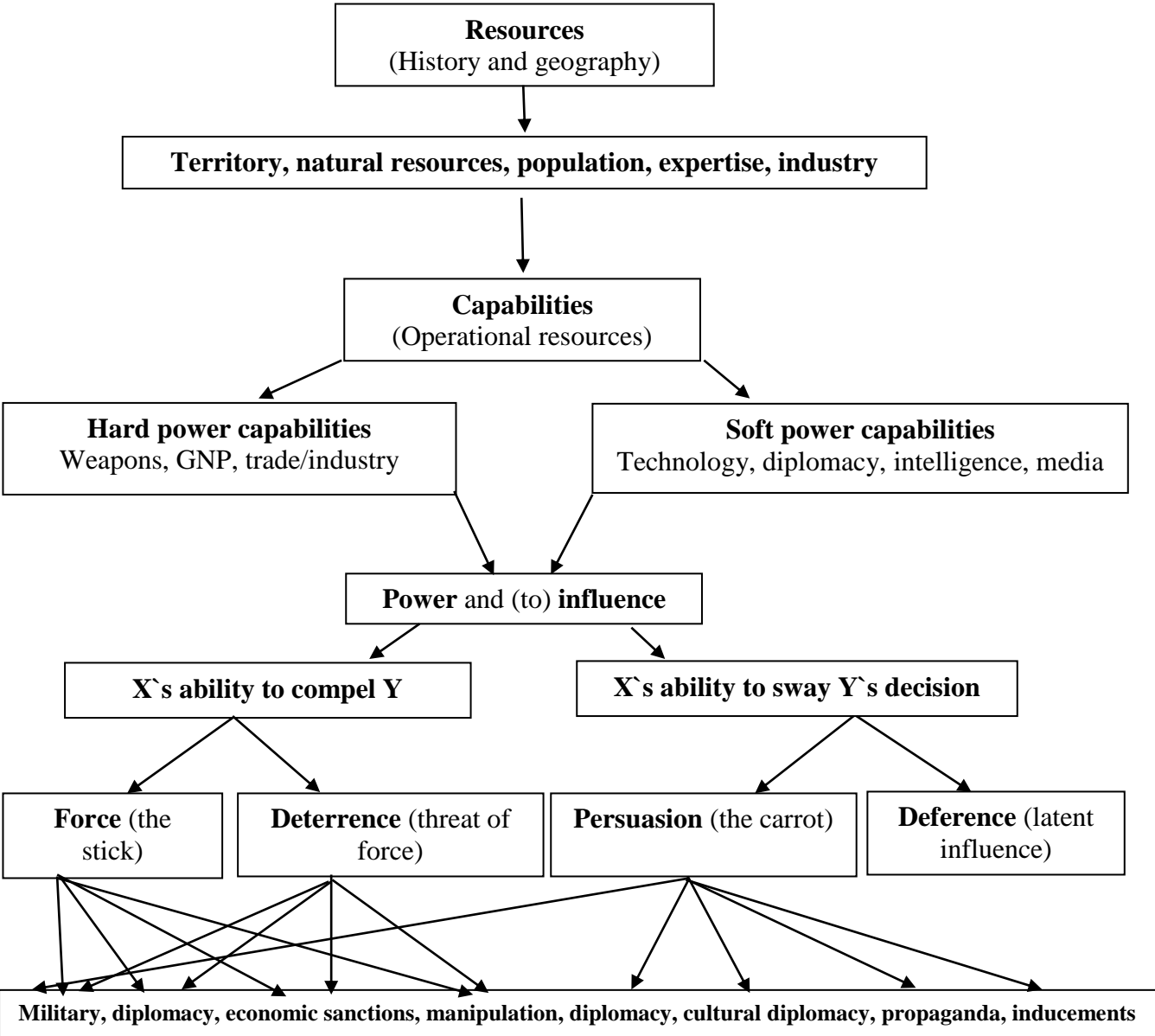

Figure 3.1 – Resources, capabilities and instruments.[1]

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[1] The figure is taken from Hill, Christopher (2003: 137) with some modifications in order to distinguish hard and soft power capabilities.

Saudi Arabia possesses the whole spectrum of both soft and hard power capabilities, but has more effective economic and soft power capabilities, rather than offensive military capabilities. The term soft power, in contrast to hard power, has been debated. Christopher Hill (2003: 135) states, "Hard power is that which is targeted, coercive, often immediate and physical. Soft power is that which is indirect, long-term and works more through persuasion than force […]. Whereas hard power focuses on the target itself, soft power seeks primarily to change the target's environment." These arguments suggest that both hard and soft power aim to change the behaviour of another state or non-state actor, but involve different time perspectives for the desired effect to impact and the means used.

Saudi Arabia's hard power capabilities rest on its economy and military assets. The kingdom has, in recent years, increased its defence budget drastically, and imported advanced military equipment and capabilities. The Military Balance Press Statement (2014: 2) states, "Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have bought, or are buying, Western missile- and air-defence and strike systems, including stand-off air-launched munitions." According to the report, these capabilities are imported as a preventive measure for deterring Iran's missile arsenal. Therefore, the significant proportion of the imported Saudi military capabilities to a greater extent are defensive military capabilities, rather than offensive ones. However, Christopher Hill (2003: 147-148) states, "Even the build-up of apparently defensive arms in peacetime can be seen as an act of aggression and lead at best to unstable arms races and at worst to pre-emptive strikes." Despite this, the kingdom has, over the last few years, imported a large number of fighter aircraft and other offensive military capabilities.

In addition to an increased defence budget, the Saudis possess great economic capabilities, as instruments that can be used to shape the international environment in their favour. Christopher Hill (2003: 188) elaborates on economic capabilities, "Foreign economic policy will be foreign policy when it seeks to shape the international environment and/or projects the fundamental concerns of the society from which it derives." More relevant to the time period in light of the Arab Spring, Bernard Haykel (2013: 1) states, "Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia seek to use their wealth as an instrument of their foreign policy, shaping the external environment in order to secure their internal one." The kingdom possessed 15.9 % of all global proven oil reserves in 2013, and contributed 13.1 % of the world's oil production, according to BP Statistical Review of World Energy (2014: 6-15). The huge levels of Saudi

economic capabilities offer the Saudi regime with an extended package of options in promoting their interests abroad and on the domestic level.

In order to analyse the politically economic perspective for Saudi Arabia through the prism of IR-theories, I would argue the need to explain it through the mercantilist tradition. This assertion is supported by the explanation of the mercantilist perspective on international political economy by Ngaire Woods Ngaire Woods (2011: 253) where he notes that, "For this reason, the aim of every state must be to maximize its wealth and independence. States will seek to do this by ensuring their self-sufficiency in key strategic industries and commodities,[…] Obviously, within this system some states have more power and capability than others. The most powerful states define the rules and limits of the system: through hegemony, alliances, and balances of power". Saudi Arabia was one of the promoters of founding OPEC in 1960, and the organisation is characterised as an alliance or hegemon within the international oil market. Moreover, I would argue that Saudi Arabia to a large extent, is economic self-sufficient and independent, even though they are vulnerable to for instance decline in oil prices. This argument is based on the size of the kingdom's oil reserves, the oil production volume, and its ability to adjust the levels of production. All these factors indicate Saudi Arabia as being an important player in the global economy.

The kingdom's soft power capabilities primarily rest upon its diplomacy, culture, intelligence services, media, and the religious establishment. Christopher Hill (2003: 141) states, "Diplomacy in multilateral institutions is an important part of any foreign policy." In the case of Saudi Arabia, a country who holds membership of a wide range of powerful multilateral institutions, can promote its interests through a variety of channels. These institutions range from among the UN, G20, OPEC, The Arab League, and other Islamic organisations. Diplomacy through Islamic organisations falls under cultural diplomacy, whereas the UN and Arab League remains primarily under political institutions, and the G20 and OPEC are economic/political institutions. Christopher Hill (2003: 152) distinguishes between propaganda and culture, where the latter is a soft power tool and the use of propaganda is a coercive instrument. Nevertheless, he argues that both culture and propaganda aim to reach peoples more than the decision-makers of a state. Christopher Hill (2003: 152) elaborates on the argument and states, "By changing the domestic environment of other states that they are intended to undermine hostile regime and/or to spread the values of those seeking to act". I would argue that culture used as a soft power foreign policy instruments can be promoted

through state institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, intelligence services, media and religious institutions, all of which they propagate certain values, beliefs or political stances. The cultural and political values Saudi Arabia possesses primarily rest upon the notion of its identity through *Wahhabism* and the importance of the monarchy.

The sectarian instrument has been highlighted as one of the means Saudi Arabia uses to promote its interests. The use of sectarianism as an instrument is a soft power tool, whereby the desired impact is to attract others to its cultural and political values over time. The Saudi religious establishment, the Saudi media, and the Saudi intelligence services have all played an active role in promoting the Saudi sectarian narrative throughout the Middle East. The sectarian tension between Sunni and Shiite Muslims has escalated across the Middle East in past years, and especially in light of the Arab upheavals. The religious establishment and the state media have proclaimed anti-Shiite attitudes in television, preaches, and through the publication of *fatwās*. It is difficult to determine whether the anti-Shiite proclamation has taken place through the religious establishment's own initiative or been approved by Saudi decision-makers. However, the Saudi religious establishment and the state media serves, in many ways, as an efficient and powerful actor in the promotion of Saudi culture and political values.

The last soft power capability discussed in the thesis regards the use of intelligence services. Intelligence material and data are important elements in foreign policy-making for all states. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States have, according to Austin Long (2015), expanded both the use and capacity of their intelligence services. Austin Long (2015) highlights three reasons for this expansion. First, the growth of terrorist organisations on the Arabian Peninsula from the early 2000s precipitated the need for counter tactics. Second, the Arab Spring created new challenges and opportunities. Third, Iran as a perceived threat towards regional stability. General Intelligence Presidency (GIP) is Saudi Arabia's primary intelligence agency and has been previously led by high-ranking figures within the royal family. Khalid bin Bandar held the position from June 30, 2014 until February 2015. The agency was previously led by the experienced diplomat and former Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Bandar bin Sultan, in the time period from July 19, 2012 - April 14, 2014. The Saudi intelligence services do not, however, play an independent role vis-à-vis the King, but is an important state institution in promoting Saudi interests abroad.

3.3 Counterrevolutionary politics

One of the thesis research questions addresses whether Saudi Arabia, did, in fact, lead a counterrevolutionary foreign policy in the Middle East during the period of 2011-2014. It is, therefore, necessary to clearly define how I understand the term *counterrevolutionary* and suggest factors that may motivate Saudi Arabia to engage in counterrevolutionary politics, based on the scope conditions elaborated through chapter 1-3.

3.3.1 Definition and the normative aspect of the term

The term *counterrevolutionary* should in the context of this thesis be understood as a nation that seeks to overturn or reverse a revolution in order to restore the state of affairs, which were in effect before the pre-revolutionary period, by using the available resources, capabilities, and instruments the state possesses. Counterrevolutionary politics also includes countering any other ideological, religious, or political aspirations that are not consistent with the worldview of an actor (here a state) which were in effect before the pre-revolutionary period.

The term *counterrevolutionary* contains a normative aspect. Fred Halliday (1990: 210) discusses the term revolution, and states, "As with all other concepts in social science, the concept 'revolution' has evolved over time, and contains variant meanings." Moreover, the concept of counterrevolutionary politics has perhaps been even more debated and subject to change. The term counterrevolutionary has been used towards both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements, and vice versa. Who to engage in counterrevolutionary politics is often defined and dependent on who to label the actor - (the participants or the observers) to a given group, movement, or others that take part in these activities. The participants in the Hungary uprisings in 1956 were labelled as counterrevolutionary by the ruling parties, while the participants of the uprising labelled themselves as revolutionary. The term counterrevolutionary has been widely used in China, but contains another aspect than in the first example. Following victory in the civil war in China after the Second World War, the Communist Party established the People's Republic of China in 1949. The Communist Party has repressed all political opposition and labelled opposition activities as counterrevolutionary. Article 28 of the CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1982) states, "The state maintains public order and suppresses treasonable and

other counter- revolutionary activities; it penalizes actions that endanger public security and disrupt the socialist economy and other criminal activities, and punishes and reforms criminals." The constitution of China thereby labels all opposition activities as counterrevolutionary. The difficulties related to the normative aspect of the term counterrevolutionary is however solved, as I have clearly defined the concept before engaging the cases, and discuss whether Saudi Arabia has, in fact, lead a counterrevolutionary foreign policy in the wake of the Arab upheavals.

There are few studies of revolutions within IR, and the lack of focus upon this concept, by inference, means less focus on counterrevolutionary politics as well. Fred Halliday (1990: 207) states, "Study of war, in its historical, strategic and ethical dimensions, as well as in policy terms, is central to the academic study of IR. Revolutions, by contrast, enjoy a marginal existence. Standard textbooks and theoretical explorations devote little space to them." However, in order to explain how revolutions affects the international system from a realism perspective, Fred Halliday (1990: 211) states, "For Realists, revolutions tend to be seen in terms of the changing foreign policy styles and priorities of states, such that these now constitute a 'revisionist', 'dissatisfied' or unbalancing factor in the international system and must be suitable tamed: revolutions are a breakdown in an otherwise orderly world." The regional revolutionary wave, could, from this perspective, have been seen as an unbalancing factor that needed to be suitably tamed for status quo powers. In addition, the realist perspective towards revolution strengthens my argument that the Arab upheavals served as a catalyst for Saudi Arabia to change their foreign policy, as states change their foreign policy styles and priorities in light of revolutions.

3.3.2 Historical examples and Instruments

There are several notable historical examples of states, or groups within a country engaging in counterrevolutionary politics. The word counterrevolutionary primarily originates from the 1789 French Revolution, where French royalists started a counterrevolution to reinstate the monarchical system. The struggle resulted in a violent and bloody denouement, as the Royalists and Catholics armed themselves against the supporters of the Republican state. The revolution lasted for eleven years and changed the social, economic, and political structure of France, which affected Europe to this day. Thoughts of liberalism, nationalism, and democracy gained momentum as a direct consequence of the French Revolution. However, as

these ideas spread across Europe in the wake of the French Revolution, they threatened other European monarchies. The four great powers of Europe in this period consisted of the Russian Empire, the United Kingdom, Austria, and Prussia, who all found themselves under a threatening situation. One of the leading figures and known diplomats from this period was the Austrian Prince Klemens Von Metternich. He became known for trying to conserve the status quo of the monarchical systems, and aspired to reshape Europe as it existed prior to the French Revolution.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 is another example of confrontation between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. The Bolsheviks undertook a revolution against the rule of the former Tsar. However, not all Russians were supportive of the revolution, and the Bolsheviks met opposition from the 'White movement', which favoured a monarchical and conservative governance of Russia. The civil war and the fighting between these two parties lasted for four years, ending in 1921 with a Bolshevik victory. Counterrevolutionary politics in both the case of the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution lead to further civil war.

It has proved difficult to outline specific instruments used in states that engage in counterrevolutionary politics. However, Kermit J. Johnson (1998: 34) has explored the ethics and counterrevolution through focusing on American involvement in internal wars, and states, "Revolution/counterrevolution is a protracted political-military struggle to determine who and what system will rule a country." This argument suggests that both military and political instruments can be used to promote counterrevolutionary politics. Moreover, he highlights the political nature of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary warfare. Kermit J. Johnson (1998: 11) notes, "Nonconventional warfare describes only the military aspect of revolution and counterrevolution. This type of warfare encompasses struggle and war in all areas of society: political, economic, communications, social, cultural, psychological and religious." Kermit J. Johnson (1998: 11) specifically outlines that revolutionary or counterrevolutionary warfare is a nonconventional form of warfare. The instruments used in revolutionary or counterrevolutionary wars embrace, from his perspective, all the instruments outlined in chapter 3.2.3

Moreover, for a state to remain secure in times of revolutions, Fred Halliday (1990: 219) speaks of security between states and security within states, concluding that, "Security requires stability and counter-revolution." This argument contributes towards legitimising

counterrevolutionary politics, as a necessity for a state to remain secure, from a realism perspective in times of a revolution. However, revolutions and counterrevolutionary politics challenge the realist perspective on international politics, as Fred Halliday (1990: 216) argues in respect to the relationship between the international system and domestic politics. The internal dimension is, as argued, less prioritised within the realist view towards the international system, and it, therefore, complicates the realist focus on revolutions or counterrevolutions as these (more or less) always come from within a state.

Fred Halliday (1990: 215) discusses who provokes whom, the revolution or the counterrevolution, and observes, "[…] both processes begin, for internal and systemic reasons, and feeding on each other lead to confrontation. If revolutionary internationalism is an almost universal result of revolutions, so is its opposite, counter-revolutionary internationalism, the attempt by status quo powers to prevent the spread of revolutions and reform and, where possible, overthrow revolutions." This logic is in accordance with the definition of counterrevolutionary politics used in this thesis, as a nation that seeks to overturn or reverse a revolution in order to restore the state of affairs, which were in effect before the pre-revolutionary period.

In an attempt to distinguish the two concepts of conducting revolutionary politics and counterrevolutionary politics, I have chosen Saudi Arabia and Iran as regional examples. Iran, as it is today, evolved after the Islamic revolution of 1979 in opposition to the monarchical governance. Iran has been labelled as a revolutionary force by promoting its revolutionary Shiite-doctrine, *vilayet-i faqih*, which includes an ideational factor. Iran has sought to export its revolution with the aim of increasing its political influence throughout the Middle East. The propagation of the revolutionary doctrine has achieved success among the Hezbollah in Lebanon, and other branches of Hezbollah throughout the region, and more recently, to the al-Houthi's in Yemen. However, the Iranian revolutionary doctrine was perceived as a threat towards the Saudi state, legitimised, as it is, through Sunni Islam. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has sought to counter Iranian influence by supporting other Sunni groups with the aim of mitigating Iranian influence. Saudi Arabia has therefore been labelled counterrevolutionary, as the kingdom has actively tried to counter the Shiite doctrine that threatened the Saudi regime.

In reference to Halliday regarding the concept of who provokes whom, the revolutionary or the counterrevolutionary, in this particular example, Iran (the revolutionary), provoked Saudi Arabia (the counterrevolutionary), and the regional rivalry between the two states started. However, it would be far simple to label Iran as being revolutionary based on these circumstances. The role of ideology and interference is highlighted by Fred Halliday (1990: 214) who states, "But this ideological challenge to the norms of international behaviour is, at most, a secondary issue: ideology and interference also play a part in the foreign policies of status quo powers, and revolutionary states have distinctive foreign policies above all because of the different goals they pursue, rather than just the methods they use." Saudi Arabia has been highly active in promoting *their* interpretation of Islam and ideology by supporting a variety of *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* movements and mosques across the world. It is, therefore, necessary to look at the definition presented above. It is, therefore, not counterrevolutionary politics per definition to support different religious or ideological movements. However, it would be counterrevolutionary to engage in politics that aims to reverse or overturn a revolution in order to restore the state of affairs with the available capabilities and instruments.

3.3.3 Scope conditions for Saudi Arabia to pursue counterrevolutionary politics

Due to the lack of testable and well-employed IR-theories of counterrevolutionary politics, and in reference to the normative aspect of the term counterrevolutionary, I have sought to outline three potential factors for Saudi Arabia engaging in counterrevolutionary politics. These factors are based on the scope conditions I have presented through chapters 1-3, and will follow the definition given in section 3.3.1 when I discuss the different case studies. More precisely, the scope conditions include the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, the Saudi desire to retain regional stability, and that ideational threats can be perceived as undermining factors for the Saudi regime. The three core motivations for Saudi Arabia to engage in counterrevolutionary politics are as following:

First, the overall and most important Saudi objective is regime security. In times of regional upheaval, there is a reason to believe that the Saudi regime's greatest fear is to be deposed by a domestic revolution, thus losing their legitimacy. In order to prevent this from happening, the royal family needs to maintain the political alliance with the *Wahhabi* establishment and receive the support needed for political legitimacy. In order to sustain this position, it requires

the countering of competing ideologies or political systems that may undermine its position both on the internal and external level. Internal and external challenges to the political and religious legitimacy of its royal family may include democratic uprisings, and other ideologies within political Islam, which affect the domestic security of the Saudi regime.

Threats against the *Wahhabi*-monarchical basis serve as an ideational threat. Threatening ideologies may derive from both an internal and an external level. The royal family have most likely defined the Arab upheavals as a threat towards the institution's survival, in reference to Wendt (1992) and his beliefs that identities are the basis of interests and that an actor defines their interests in the process of defining the situation. A revolutionary situation gives the Saudi regime a high incentive for countering all threatening ideological, political, and religious aspirations that they perceive as threatening. In the context of countering ideological threats, Lawrence Rubin (2014: 37) suggests different ways to accomplish this, asserting that, "Counterframing involves four tactics: denial, defense, counterattack, and neutralization." Rubin (2014: 37-38), elaborates on these tactics as, "Denial is a countermeasure to minimize the spread of the message and subversive ideas. There are two options for (authoritarian) states that control the media: cut of the communication entirely or not allow discussion of the issue […]. Defense is a rhetorical rebuttal to charge that involve positive statements or justifications of policies that are consistent with core and commonly held beliefs about normative values […]. Counterattack aims to undermine the source of the threat and thus deny the claim's validity […]. Neutralization tries to recast the issue and change the environment to affect the resonance of a subversive idea."

Second, Saudi Arabia has another objective, which include keeping regional stability. The Saudi regime may be motivated for countering any unstable political systems to maintain regional stability, which would entail maintaining the status quo regarding the governance of other states. Regional instability is perceived as a significant risk to Saudi security. Saudi Arabia has traditionally conducted a consensual and cautious foreign policy, which may imply, from a defensive realism perspective, that it is unwilling to risk its security to gain more power. An aggressive foreign policy has higher risks and might, in contrast, be applicable to an offensive realism perspective. The Arab upheavals have greatly reduced regional stability. The civil wars, and the growing number of failed states close to Saudi borders, have produced increasing numbers of non-conventional actors that may threaten

Saudi Arabia from a security perspective. To Fred Halliday (1990), this situation suggests that security requires stability and counter-revolution.

Third, Saudi Arabia aspires to become a regional hegemon. The Middle Eastern 'cold war' between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a conflict for hegemonic dominance. From this perspective, the Saudi regime needs to undermine the position and influence of the other regional great powers. The regional aspiration for hegemony gives Saudi Arabia a high motivation for countering Iranian influence in the region. This counter framing has two aspects: to reduce Iranian influence where it already has extensive control, or to reduce the possibility for Iran to gain power in areas where there is a political vacuum. It provides Saudi Arabia a tremendous motivation for downplaying Iranian influence throughout the region; taking the account of offensive realism perspective. The ultimate goal for states is to obtain a hegemonic position in the international system, and that states are willing to risk their security to gain more power for achieving hegemony. Foreign policy behaviour that reduces Iranian influence might take place at all levels, whether domestic, sub-regional, regional or international.

Chapter 4: A region in chaos

The following two sections elaborates on the Arab Spring on a general basis, and, more specifically, how it affected the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the end of this chapter I will seek to nuance the analogy of King Abdullah as a reborn Saudi Prince Metternich.

4.1 The Arab upheavals

The Arab upheavals with all their hopes for democracy and reforms have led to violent conflicts, enormous refugee movements and more countries defined as failed states in the region. Moreover, the revolutionary wave represented as Haykel (2013: 1) puts it, "The Arab Spring represents a set of challenges the likes of which have not been seen in the Arab world for a half century or more." The Arab upheavals and the ongoing chaos have led to battles on different levels. The first involves a fight between the regimes and protesters, the second conflict among different political groups, and the third is a regional and international competition for influence, according to Hussein Agha and Robert Malley (2011: 2).

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia when a young man called Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire late December 2010. Mohamed Bouazizi's reaction was an impulsive action in response to a Tunisian society with a high degree of corruption, governmental repression, and low political freedom. His action received great sympathy from Tunisian society, and protests quickly spread to other cities inside the country. Within a short time, it became clear that the demonstrations were not only isolated to Tunisia. People took to the streets in several cities across the Middle East, and the regional revolutionary outbreak became a reality from January to March 2011. The majority of the regimes within the region had no great plans to comply with the demands of the public demonstrations. Moreover, it became clear that the region's leaders had no moral qualms in ruthlessly repressing the public uprisings. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, rather than arms were perhaps the most effective weapons during the Arab upheavals. The use of social media had two important purposes: it was used for mobilisation of demonstrations and protests, and served as a platform where the public could openly express their political opinions.

Most states within the Middle East have been described as authoritarian, though politically stable for decades. A region in chaos, therefore, challenged the status quo for the political

leaders in terms of their position and the newly emergent threats. However, the majority of the countries in the region did not end up at war, civil-wars or otherwise. Nevertheless, there have been some dramatic and catastrophic consequences for some nations of the region, countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq have experienced the most violent outcomes as a result of the revolutionary fervour. The conflict in Iraq had already started prior to the Arab upheavals, though it was affected by the regional instability caused by the Arab Spring. The conflicts situated in these countries may have the potential to make the region disproportionately unstable. There is no higher authority, either at national, regional or international levels that provide security, and the situation is, therefore, described as anarchy in both the realist and constructivist perspectives. The civil wars in Syria and Iraq involve a high number of actors, including regional and international actors, which includes nation-states and non-state actors. The conflicts in Libya and Yemen affect security in the neighbouring areas and allows terrorist groups to operate freely.

In addition to severe regional challenges, the Middle Eastern powers saw opportunities for increasing their influence as the region became political unstable and sunk into anarchy. Gregory F. Gause III (2014: 25) notes that, "If one of them seems to be emerging as a dominant force, the others will naturally work to balance against it and limit the growth of its power." The Arab upheavals were, therefore, the catalyst for regional states to engage in a more aggressive foreign policy, as it served as an opportunity to gain influence. Aggressive behaviour was evident, especially among Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Qatar as they sought to promote and strengthen their areas of influence. This kind of foreign policy revealed itself through the extensive involvement in proxy wars throughout conflict areas in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran have pursued conflicting interests in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, the politically unstable Yemen, and the uprising in Bahrain. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have both tried to strengthen their position in the Arabian Peninsula, and they have had different views on the Muslim Brotherhood's role in Egypt and the wider region. Qatar has supported the Brotherhood and its sister organisation Hamas in the Gaza Strip, while Saudi Arabia has actively tried to undermine the Brotherhood's influence inside the kingdom and throughout the region.

4.2 Regime stability and the Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia

Regime stability in Saudi Arabia, and how the kingdom handled the domestic uprisings, becomes interesting when discussing the kingdom's external policies in reference to the theory chapter, and Alexander Wendt (1999) where he suggests that foreign policy behaviour is affected by domestic politics. Analysts and diplomats have, for a long time, predicted the end of the Saudi regime. However, the House of Al Saʿud has proved itself to be one of the most stable regimes in the Middle East. The royal family's internal stability can in many ways explain the overall stability of the kingdom. It has been critical for the royal family to remain united in order to handle the serious threats from both within and abroad during times of regional political instability. Saudi Arabia's main external threats to its security do primarily stem from the instable adjacent countries. The non-state actor, *Dāʿesh*, and the chaotic situation in Yemen may have a tremendous impact on the Saudi security if not dealt with. However, the royal family also faces internal challenges, such as maintaining the political and religious legitimacy of the al-Saʿud's regime. Stig Stenslie (2014 a: 3) elaborates on what potentially can undermine the internal stability within the royal family, stating, "Ultimately, the absence of unity among the top echelons of the family could cause weaker leadership. This would undermine the House of Saʿud's ability to effectively address the series of grave threats that it is facing, including rapidly growing unemployment, tremendous economic disparities among the people, sectarian divides, extremism, oil dependency, regional rivalry with Iran, and signs of a rift with the U.S." The royal family has, however, been able to maintain stability within the family in times of both internal and external threats towards its position.

Gregory F. Gause III (2011 a: 5-8) discusses how the regime has retained stability in Saudi Arabia in the wake of the Arab Spring and highlights the kingdom's capacity to co-opt the loyalty of its citizens, by deploying loyal and well-trained security forces, and by mobilising its patronage network. This line of thought is also followed by Guido Steinberg (2014: 5) who believes that the kingdom has conducted a carrot-and-stick strategy at the domestic level. This approach includes both giving enormous economic support to its population, and increasing the presence of its security forces to utterly repress any form of protest or demonstration. According to Gregory F. Gause III (2011 a: 6) the police, security forces, and the Special Forces all come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior and the National Guard, of which are controlled by individuals close to the king. Some of the armed institutions are built

on and controlled by the specific tribal coalition or religious sects. Gregory F. Gause III (2011 a: 6) suggests that the forces belonging to the Ministry of Interior and the National Guard are exclusively recruited among tribes in areas the regime considers loyal. In the initial phase of the Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia, these forces were particularly deployed in the Eastern provinces of the country, where the Shiite population is located. The extensive use of the Saudi economic capabilities and networks in co-opting the opposition has been used for decades to keep the regime stable. However, the royal family has, in several instances, showed its will and capacity to use security forces more actively against any opposition in light of the Arab upheavals.

There is no doubt to the extent that the wealth stemming from the oil has contributed to maintaining internal stability in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is undoubtedly one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East, and had significant advantages, well above the regional medium or non-exporting oil-countries for co-opting their populations. However, it is somewhat unclear how long the royal family can pursue the strategy of co-opting the Saudi population's loyalty and passivity, even though the economic capabilities have been an effective instrument in handling domestic upheavals in order to keep regime stability. According to Mehran Kamrava (2012: 98), the Saudi state had already started to prepare itself, and had taken preventive measures to handle eventual demands for reforms, or change from the civil society in February 2011. The Saudi state spent $130 billion to raise public service salaries, promising to build 500, 000 additional units of low-income housing, and increase the financial support for religious organisations.

Protests and demonstrations were, however, planned on March 11, 2011, on a day named *the day of wrath* (yawm al-ghaḍab). Approximately 30, 000 people had joined a Facebook-group and planned to participate in protests against the Saudi regime. There were, according to Madawi al-Rasheed, (2011: 517) only two Sunni opposition groups that supported the planned protests on March 11: the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA), and the newly established Sunni Umma Party. In addition to the fear of uprisings and demands for reforms by the Sunni majority, perhaps the greatest concerns regarding domestic uprising was caused by those located in the eastern part of the country; the Shiite minority population. During my period stationed in Riyadh, I twice travelled to the Saudi Eastern cities of al-Dammam, and al-Jubail both of which are heavily inhabited by the Saudi Shiite minority population. The Saudi security forces had a greater presence in this part of the country in

comparison to Riyadh, where I spent most of my stay. There are several reports including al-Rasheed (2011) and Rieger (2014), which support my observation of a high number of Saudi security forces present in the Eastern province. These forces have actively quashed any attempts of public uprisings in light of the Arab upheavals.

The initial protests in Saudi Arabia were concentrated in the Eastern part of the country and led by the Shiite minority. These cities are in close proximity to Bahrain and further validate the idea of the Saudi fears of a spill-over, as demonstrations in Bahrain had taken place already on February 19, 2011. In the case of demonstrations in the Eastern provinces, Stéphane Lacroix (2011: 52) argues that Facebook pages urged for demonstrations already in February 2011. Some of these pages focused primarily on the defence of Shiite rights; others supported a project by implementing a constitutional monarchy. Stéphane Lacroix (2011: 52) states, "The activists had two main causes to promote. First, they demanded the release of the "forgotten prisoners" who had been detained without trail since the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing […]. Second, they proclaimed solidarity with the protests that had erupted in Bahrain on February 14."

Demonstrations are, however, forbidden by law according to the Saudi Arabian constitution, legitimised through the Saudi Basic Law. The Saudi Basic Law of Government states in Article 6 that, "In support of the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger(PBUH), citizens shall give the pledge of allegiance (bay'a) to the King, professing loyalty in times of hardship and ease", according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia The Shura Council. Laws and Regulations > The Basic Law Of Government > Chapter 2 (1992, March 1). The Saudi constitution propagates, through Article 6, the tenet of allegiance to the King, and that it should be respected at all times. Moreover, Abdallah received support from the *Wahhabi* establishment in order to reduce the impact of the upheavals. According to the Islamopedia Online (2011)*,* the Council of Senior Scholar's issued a *fatwā* on March 11, 2011 stating, "Since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on the Qur'an, Sunnah, the pledge of allegiance, and the necessity of unity and loyalty, then reform should not be by demonstrations and other means and methods that give rise to unrest and divide the community. The Council affirms prohibition of the demonstrations in this country and the legal method which realizes the welfare without causing destruction rests on the mutual advice." The Senior Scholars stressed the pledge of *Bayʿa* or allegiance, and, through their *fatwā.* According to Asma al-Sharif (2011, March 29)*,* in *Reuters* did the leader of the council, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-

Sheikh, requested 1.5 million copies of the fatwa to be published in in March 2011 for further distribution.

Furthermore, approximately a year after the Arab upheavals took place, in January 2012, Abdullah promoted Abdul Latif Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh to be the head of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, the 'religious police'. Louise Lief (2013) states, "Since taking office, Sheikh Abdul Latif has identified five areas the religious police should focus on: preserving Islam, preventing blackmail, combating sorcery, fighting human trafficking, and ensuring that no one disobeys the country's rulers." The last identified area of focus becomes relevant in the context of a revolutionary wave rolling across the region. Moreover, Abdul Latif Abdul al-Sheikh warned the Saudi population against using Twitter through a statement. According to an article in *BBC* (2013, May 15), al-Sheikh announced that Twitter was a threat to national unity. Saudi Arabia is, however, one of the most active Twitter users per capita in the Arab countries, according to Arab Social Media Report (2014). The strategy of al-Sheikh was a counter-framing measure of denial, where it aimed to minimise the spread of ideas by cutting off the social media platform Twitter. The combination of Abdallah's appointment of al-Sheikh as head of the government agency, and al-Sheik's strategy of minimising the use of Twitter by the Saudis, serves as a clear example of how the royal family uses Islam to promote and preserve its national interest of regime security. However, there are some notable contradictions in al-Sheik's statement against the use of Twitter. Several members of the religious establishment, and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, are themselves active users of Twitter for promoting their opinions.

In addition, the Saudis launched the state propaganda machinery through its Foreign Ministry. During a press conference, the Saudi Foreign Minister Saʿud al-Faisal elaborates on how the Saudis would react in cases of foreign influence during a press conference in March 2011.

"Prince Saud also emphasized the Kingdom's absolute refusal of any infringement on the Islamic principles and values on which the Kingdom's laws and regulations are based, including the regulations that establish the principles of civil society and aim at protecting the society and maintaining its security, stability and integrity against sedition. Such issues are provided for by the teachings of Islamic Law (Sharia) and confirmed by the statements issued by the Senior Scholars Commission and the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom[…] 'We will cut off

any finger comes to the Kingdom. We won't accept at all any interference in the internal affairs of the kingdom, as we do not interfere in the internal affairs of others. We are a State based on Shari' a (Islamic law) and will not accept to be blamed by whoever sees in this system something he doesn't want'[…] 'Change comes by the citizens of this country and not by the theory of foreign fingers[…]'As for Iran, we hope it deals only with the demonstrations in its country. We do not have demonstrations like those in Iran, and I repeat what I have mentioned before that we will not tolerate with any interference in our internal affairs by any party whoever and we will continue this policy, and we confirm that had the Kingdom spotted any interference cases, we will deal with them decisively'," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011, March 9).

The statement from Saʿud al-Faisal suggests that the Saudi regime warned the Iranians for trying to influence its domestic sphere. Saʿud al-Faisal makes it explicitly clear that the Saudi government does not tolerate any interference, and will deal with the interference decisively. The Saudi perception of foreign influence connected to the upheavals, and, moreover, the harsh rhetoric from Saʿud Al-Faisal, coincide with the argument that the Saudis are willing to take huge risks in safeguarding its position against any foreign powers that directly challenge the legitimacy of Saudi rule. Madawi al-Rasheed (2011: 520) describes the speech, and states, "The state propaganda machine described calls for protests as a foreign attempt to cause chaos, divide the country, and undermine its security." The notion of *Homeostasis* now becomes relevant, Christopher Hill (2003) argues that demands for regional autonomy are not the proper business of foreign policy until they become connected to outside pressures, as referred to in chapter 3. Madawi al-Rasheed (2011: 520) argues that this Saudi strategy had two purposes. First, it legitimized the deployment of security forces to the Eastern part of the country as the regime described it a 'Shiite revolt'. Second, the Saudi regime tried to unite the Sunnis as support for the regime.

4.3 Prince Metternich in Riyadh

I have argued that the common perception of Saudi Arabia is that of serving as a counterrevolutionary force within the Middle East in light of the Arab upheavals. However, Gregory F. Gause III (2011 b: 9) strongly disagrees with this characterisation, believing, "Saudi Arabia is against regime change in allied states. It supports its fellow monarchs both out of concern for its own domestic regime security, ideological solidarity, and balance of

power politics.[…] Let's understand Saudi regional policy for what it is, and let Prince Metternich rest in peace." His argument originates from 2011, prior to Saudi Arabia having involved itself actively in the internal affairs of Egypt with its support to Egyptian parties promoting the counterrevolution. The arguments of Saudi support for fellow monarchs and ideological solidarity do, however, not correspond to the Saudi behaviour toward Egypt, as the country is not governed as a monarchy and promotes a different ideology to Saudi Arabia. Despite this, Egypt has for years been a close and valuable ally for the Kingdom. I, therefore, concur with Gause III that Abdullah has not promoted an overall and unambiguously counterrevolutionary politics in all cases of Saudi foreign policy, as was the case with Prince Metternich. There are cases of Saudi foreign policy behaviour, where Abdullah has done the opposite, and even contributed or attempt for regime changes, as I will demonstrate in the next chapters.

More recently, René Rieger (2014: 1) following the lines of Gause III, and states, "However, this [counterrevolutionary] characterization of Saudi policy is an incorrect generalization. It is true that Riyadh has been making significant efforts to safeguard the political status quo in the Kingdom and the remaining Arab monarchies, including in the Gulf." Again, this argument fails to consider the Saudi role in Egypt. Moreover, Renè Rieger (2014: 1) states, "This ostensibly contradictory policy is the result of a pragmatic strategy that aims at safeguarding Saudi Arabia's main policy interests, namely regime security and regional stability." The argument suggests that King Abdullah has orientated the country's foreign policy towards defending its core interests (I), in addition to preserving regional stability, rather than taking the counterrevolutionary lead in the overall foreign policy behaviour.

Both Gregory F. Gause III (2011 a: 15) and Renè Rieger (2014: 1) argue that Saudi Arabia has only became militarily involved in Bahrain in order to crack down on demonstrations. Moreover, they argue that Saudi Arabia has actually contributed to regime change (or attempts at regime change) in many other Middle Eastern countries. The Saudi government, in addition to GCC, created a transition plan for the former Yemeni President. Saudi Arabia did more or less support the NATO bombing of Libya, and gave support for Libyan rebels against the former President. In addition, the Saudi regime has supported opposition groups against Syrian President al-Assad in the wake of the Arab upheavals.

As highlighted in chapter 1 and throughout this chapter, different perceptions of whether Saudi Arabia lead a counterrevolution in the Middle East in the wake of the Arab upheavals exist. I will now change direction somewhat and analyse Saudi Arabia's foreign policy through the four cases, including strategies and patterns of behaviour, and will elaborate the underlying driving force(s) for a more aggressive policy within each case and discuss the counterrevolutionary aspect of its foreign policy behaviour.

Chapter 5: The military intervention in Bahrain

The GCC-led military intervention in Bahrain serves as a prime example of King Abdullah's counterrevolutionary politics. Along with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia was one of the leading countries within GCC that crushed the initial demonstrations in the neighboring country under the flag of the Peninsula Shield Force. The intervention took place on March 14, 2011, when approximately 1500 troops and vehicles rolled across the King Fahd causeway into Bahrain in order to stop the democratic uprisings, and, therefore, follows the definition outlined in section 3.3.3. Saudi Arabia's behaviour in Bahrain can be perceived as the kingdom's first intimation of a more aggressive foreign policy, and a symbolic policy of tightening control over its area of influence. There are three possible factors for the Saudis engaging in counterrevolutionary politics, and these are based upon the arguments presented in chapter 3.3. First, to counter threatening ideologies and political systems that pose a threat to the legitimacy of the political alliance with the Wahhabi religious establishment and the royal family. Second, Saudi Arabia might be motivated to counter any unstable political systems to retain regional stability, which involves maintaining the status quo in other Middle Eastern states. Third, Saudi Arabia possesses a high incentive to counter Iranian influence across the region. The following chapter will show that all three factors were needed in order to explain the counterrevolutionary politics in the case of the Saudi military intervention in Bahrain.

In addition, the five causal assumptions to explain aggressive behaviour from an offensive realism perspective all need to be present in order to assess the foreign policy from this viewpoint. In the case of the Saudi intervention in Bahrain, I would strongly argue that all five of Mearsheimer's assumptions were present. First, the international system was anarchic, according to both the realist and constructivism definition. Second, Saudi Arabia possessed the military capabilities needed to intervene. Third, Saudi Arabia was unsure about Iranian intentions in Bahrain. Fourth, Saudi Arabia strived to maintain territorial integrity and the autonomy of the domestic political order, as presented in chapter 4. Fifth, the Saudi intervention was a rational and strategic action in order to ensure its survival.

5.1 Crushing the democratic uprising

Saudi Arabia has probably seen its relationship with the Al Khalifa monarchy in the neighbouring country Bahrain as a form of a Kantian role structure, according to Wendt's exploration of role structures between states. Whereby the two regimes perceive each other as being in a socially constructed friendship, based on an equal structure of governance as Sunni Muslim-ruled monarchies, in close bilateral cooperation and within GCC. However, a neighbouring democratic uprising in the Saudi near backyard served as a major threat to the Saudi regime legitimacy, and, therefore, to its relative domestic stability. Toby C. Jones (2011a: 4) asserts that the Saudis had several reasons for not wishing the ruling Al Khalifa to be toppled from its position. The Saudi's greatest fears were focused on the possibility of a Shiite government being established through democratic reform. In addition, Lawrence G. Potter (2014: 20) states that, "The possibility that the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain could be thrown by its Shiʿi majority was a red line for the Saudis, who feared that their own Shiʿi community would be encouraged to revolt should the Al Khalifa fall." In this respect, the Saudi regime did take preventive measures on the domestic level in order to counter the uprising at home as shown in chapter 4.

Moreover, the Saudis believed they had every right to take precautionary measures abroad as well, according to a statement from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011, who states,

"The security and stability of the region is the responsibility of the states of the region […]. The Gulf States have the right to defend their security and maintain their independence according to their own discretion and as guaranteed by the international law to confront any internal or international challenges," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011, September 20). This statement was published on September 20, 2011, through the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website. The statement suggests that Saudi Arabia perceived itself as having the right to defend the stability in the region in order to confront any internal or international challenges. As the statement was published six months after the Saudis acted against the uprisings in Bahrain, the Saudis may have needed to legitimise its action for keeping regional stability by referring to the international law. There is, however, an inherent contradiction in this statement. The Saudi regime has, both through Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011, March 9), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011, September 20) and HRH

Prince Turki Al Faisal (2013), all of which state that Saudi foreign policy is built upon the notion of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

Saudi rhetoric was based on the premise that the Al Khalifa regime urged the GCC for help in order to handle the uprisings, such as legitimising the military intervention. HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal (2013: 6), states that, "The deployment of GCC troops at the request of a member country of the GCC to protect its strategic infrastructure like the oil refinery, the airport, the seaport, and economic installations is a duty that the Kingdom was and remains happy to provide." However, Bill Law (2011, December 14) in *BBC* states that, "A source close to Prince Nayef told me two weeks before the troops arrived that the Bahrainis were on notice that if they did not deal with the demonstrations, the Saudis would do it for them." It is difficult, however, to validate this statement without further sources. Bernard Haykel (2013: 4-5) appears to corroborate this by arguing that the Saudi leadership handles Yemen and Bahrain as they were Saudi domestic territory, with the Ministry of Interior as the responsible Ministry in charge of Saudi policies with both Yemen and Bahrain. The Saudi Minister of Interior, Nayef bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud served as Minister of Interior prior to the Saudi intervention, suggesting that Bahrain was, according to Haykel, under Nayef's responsibility. Moreover, this also relates to an assertion by Bernard Haykel (2013: 4), who states, "On February 14, 2011, the Saudi leadership sent a message to the Sunni minority regime in Manama that no political concessions were to be made to the majority Shi'ites." This is also supported by Toby C. Jones (2011a: 3), who considers that Saudi domestic anxieties contributed to the decision to crack down upon the revolution in Bahrain. Regime security is highlighted as being the most crucial aspect of Saudi national interests, might therefore strengthen the Saudi motivation in terms of protecting itself, and the Saudi monarchy, against threatening ideologies or political systems as Shiite governance and democracy.

In order to ensure the security of the Bahraini regime, both military and economic instruments were used to prevent an effective revolution, before the Saudis led the upheavals to a sectarian dimension against the Shiites population, and for preventing Iranian influence. The use of military instruments had only temporary effects in Bahrain, as the uprisings still function as an ongoing 'silent' revolution. Saudi Arabia has, in light of the intervention, backed the Al Khalifa monarchy, offering extended economic support as a preventive measure to maintain the status quo for the Bahraini regime. HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal (2013: 6) states, "The GCC has extended a ten-year economic package of $10 billion dollars, mostly from the

Kingdom." Moreover, the Saudi actions in Bahrain created another proxy theatre between the Saudis and the Iranians, as the Iranian support for the Shiite uprisings increased. Eduardo Z. Albrecht (2013) highlights that the Iranian politician, Ayatollah Ahmed Jannati stated, "All Islamic intellectuals are now called upon to act. All Islamic countries, as long as they`re not themselves involved in the crime, bear responsibility to support the Bahrainis in their fight." The Bahraini Shiite population has suffered a wide range of socioeconomic, political and religious discrimination for years. Iran had, therefore, the possibility to provide the discriminated Shiite the support it needed against the suppression by the Al Khalifa regime.

5.2 Preventing Iranian influence

The Saudi intervention had another crucial objective, which was to limit and/or prevent further Iranian influence in Bahrain, with its close geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia. I have highlighted that the Saudi perception of the uprisings had foreign and Iranian influence, as shown in chapter 4. It is difficult to validate if this was a Saudi socially constructed perception, or if the uprisings actually had foreign influence. However, if the Shiite majority population potentially obtained real political power in Bahrain, the Saudi regime would, in all probability, have perceived this structure of governance as a threat, as it is with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the al-Houthi's in Yemen, and the al-Assad regime in Syria, where Iran has extensive political influence.

Since the Islamic revolution in Iran 1979, in which proclaimed the Shiite-doctrine of the *vilayet-i faqih*, Saudi Arabia has perceived Iran as an ideological, religious, and political threat to its legitimacy. Moreover, the Islamic Revolution through Khomeini challenged the Saudi perception of being the leading state within Islam, as both regimes use religion for legitimacy. The rivalry developed into an ideological and political battle for influence in the Middle East, and this has led both states to attack the other's religious legitimacy and its character. The Iranian threat has, from a Saudi perspective, seemed to have escalated when the Iraqi Shiite majority have gained greater political power from 2003 and onwards. It has therefore been critical to reduce the influence of Iran and other Shiite-movements from a Saudi perspective. Guido Steinberg (2014: 6) notes that, "[…] Riyadh countered Iranian hegemonic strivings more vigorously than before." He highlights the Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain 2011, and the Saudi support for opposition groups in Syria, with the aim to crush the Syrian regime and Bashar al-Assad, a close Iranian ally. Guido Steinberg

(2014: 6) further argues that Saudi Arabia's regional policy, driven by a fear that Iran could or might mobilise the Shiite populations in the Middle East and even within the kingdom.

The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is based on a Lockean structure from Wendt's role structure through a constructivist viewpoint. To Wendt, this form of rivalry is built upon the subjective perception of its 'Self' and the 'Other'. Gregory F. Gause III (2010: 39) challenges the realist and the typical western perspective on Iran as only a military threat, and states, "I think that the Saudi perspective on Iranian regional power is much more accurate than ours. It is not Iranian military power that gives Iran regional influence, but rather Iran's political links to powerful actors in states where the central government is weak. Those links are based on a mixture of shared ideology, sectarian affiliation, common antipathy toward the United States and Israel […]." This argument suggests that the Saudi fear of Iran is not only premised on the belief of a realistic military threat, but also the constructivist viewpoint emphasising the ideology aspect as a threat.

However, the Saudis fear the Iranian nuclear program as well. Lawrence Rubin (2014: 114) states, "Saudi Arabia clearly considers Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons capability a serious national security threat." The Iranian nuclear fear applies according to a realist's perspective, as it involves enormous military and deterrent capabilities, which would change the balance of power within the region. King Abdullah has, according to the former senior US diplomat Dennis Ross, in an article in *Hareetz*, Chemi Shalev (2012, May 30), previously stated, "If they get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons." The Saudi regime, therefore, perceives the Iranian nuclear program as a serious threat. However, the present conditions in the region suggest that the Saudis are more occupied and worried about Iranian political influence in areas such as Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Moreover, one of the concepts within a Lockean anarchy is that the actors respect each other's sovereignty. Saudi Arabia has repeatedly accused the Iranian revolutionary guard of intervening in Shiite populated countries. Therefore, the Saudi actions in Bahrain could, for this reason, have evolved from a desire to counter Iranian influence in Bahrain, but also, given the Shiite population in Saudi Arabia, inside the Saudi Kingdom. Anthony H. Cordesman (1997: 8) observes that, in the years prior to the Arab upheavals that the Iranians were, according to senior Saudi officials, "[…] trying to dominate the Gulf and export its own brand of revolutionary extremism." This perspective is highlighted by HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal

(2013: 6) who states, "Right after the 1979 revolution in Iran, Khomeini began trying to export his revolution to all Muslim countries. […] Those who claim that the recent disturbances were not instigated by Iran forget that Khomeini's creation, Hezbollah in Bahrain, still exists and that Iranian propaganda broadcasts beamed at Bahrain have never ceased."

This Saudi view gives the Iranian historical narrative of being a revolutionary force greater significance, and, therefore, strengthens the Saudi perception of the uprisings to be influenced by Iran. In addition, by following Wendt's assertion of a Hobbesian role structure where he argues that if states think that other recognise their sovereignty, then survival is not at stake. However, if the Saudi regime perceive that Iran threatened their sovereignty, and did not recognise the Kingdom's sovereignty, then survival is at stake, as outlined in the speech of Saʿud Al Faisal. Survival being at stake mandates aggressive foreign policy behaviour, according to Mearsheimer and his offensive realism perspective. Moreover, Mearsheimer argues that states do not behave aggressively purely because they are aggressive, but will under these circumstances need to gain more power as a strategy to ensure survival.

Ana Echagüe (2014: 1) argues that the Saudis saw the uprisings as a risk for regional stability, and, moreover, an opportunity to change the balance of power against Iran. From this perspective, the Saudi intervention in Bahrain could be explained by offensive realism, whereby great powers defend the balance of power, and undermine the balance when the great power sees an opportunity. Saudi Arabia seized its opportunity in Bahrain, with an aim of preventing its longstanding rival Iran from doing the same. This concept is also highlighted by Guido Steinberg (2014: 19) who states that, "At the same time, financial assistance, military invasion and political support made Manama increasingly dependent on Riyadh, turning Bahrain into a de facto Saudi Arabian protectorate." This argument is also definitely supported by Mearsheimer and his offensive realism perspective, whereby great powers seek opportunities to gain power over its rivals, with hegemony as their ultimate goal.

5.3 Sending a message

The Saudi intervention also served as a message. The intervention confirmed that upheavals were not taking place in the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, as Waleed bin Talal stated. I would argue that there were two receivers of the intervention as a message. First, deterring

the Shiite population in both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain taking part in the upheavals. Second, to reassure the other Sunni-ruled monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula.

The military intervention in Bahrain was a strong message to the Shiite population to restrain themselves in taking part of the upheavals. Moreover, the intervention was a message that protests were not to be tolerated and would be rapidly crushed by the Saudis. The Saudi behaviour towards the protesting Shiites in Bahrain demonstrated its underlying connection to the Saudi domestic sphere. Prior to the intervention, the Saudi security forces had confronted the Saudi Shiite population in the Eastern part of the kingdom. However, the intervention led to a domestic spillover. Renè Rieger (2014: 3) states, "The Saudi engagement provoked the largest demonstrations in the Saudi Eastern Province since the beginning of the Arab Spring." This particular example is a clear demonstration of the link between internal and external in foreign policy.

The Saudis escalated the sectarian aspect to a new level by the end of 2014, as the military and economic instruments did not prove themselves to be a well-functioned means in stopping the ongoing Shiite uprisings in Bahrain and the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia. According to Ian Black (2014, October 16) *in The Guardian,* a Saudi death sentence was given to the prominent religious Shiite leader, Sheikh Nimr al-Baqir al-Nimr, considered to promoting sectarian hatred. Al-Nimr is a popular figure and serves as one of the leading voices among the Shiites in the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia. According to Ian Black (2014, October 16) Saudi state prosecutors asked for al-Nimr to be crucified as a punishment for his alleged role in urging sedition against the Saudi state. Al-Nimr was arrested in 2012, charged with 'disobeying the ruler' and being a leader in the Shiite uprisings. However, al-Nimr had urged for peaceful demonstrations against the discrimination of the Shiite population. Moreover, Ian Black (2014, October 16) suggests that the Iranian foreign ministry stated in October 2014, that a potential execution would lead to "dire consequences."

On the other hand, the military intervention served as a powerful signal of Saudi's support to the Sunni monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi support of the other Gulf monarchies is considered to be of great importance, as it demonstrates Saudi's capabilities as a regional power. However, the Saudis did not engage militarily in other Gulf monarchies as precautionary means against the uprisings. Instead, the Saudis exploited their public diplomacy and economic capabilities in order to safeguard the other regimes as, for instance,

in Oman. Ana Echagüe (2014: 14) suggests that King Abdullah encouraged to establish a political rescue plan via a greater integration of GCC members into a Gulf Union. The idea was later dismissed in 2013, as the Omanis threatened to leave the GCC if the Gulf Union were to be established. For the Saudis, the Omani rejection was humiliating, according to Ana Echagüe (2014: 14). However, Oman has not witnessed any dramatic effects on its regime stability in the wake of the Arab upheavals, but rather served as a mediator between the Sunni-led Gulf monarchies and Iran.

The realists' thoughts of a state seizing the opportunity to become a regional hegemon, might also be transferable to the sub-regional level on the Arabian Peninsula. Bernard Haykel (2013: 2) states that, "Clearly, Qatar is a country in search of a regional role, and the Arab Spring has presented the perfect opportunity to catapult it into a more prominent position." There are several examples of Qatar seeking a greater sub-regional role, such as the opening of the news agency *al-Jazeera* in 1996, and, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, its pro-Muslim Brotherhood politics. Qatari aspirations for greater regional influence does threaten the Saudi perception of being a sub-regional key-player, even though the Kingdom of Qatar do not possess the capabilities as Saudi Arabia. The dynamic of Gulf-politics in the wake of the Saudi military intervention in Bahrain challenges Wendt's perception of that anarchy may contain dynamics that lead to competitive power politics, but they also may not. In the case of the Arab upheavals, it did lead to competitive power politics among the great powers on the Arab Peninsula. However, the dynamic did not, as often proclaimed by the realist tradition, lead to military confrontations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, rather it unveiled itself in the Egyptian and Syrian revolutions towards questions about the Muslim Brotherhood, and the armament of the Syrian opposition.

Chapter 6: Supporting the counter-revolution in Egypt

Saudi engagement in Egypt had another counterrevolutionary aspect than it had in Bahrain. The Saudis gave political and economic support to the former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and urged the US President Obama to maintain political support for Mubarak though, however, this did not take place. Both the Tunisian President Ben Ali, who was subsequently exiled to Saudi Arabia, and the Egyptian President Mubarak were deposed within a short revolutionary period. Their removal caused a high level of insecurity for King Abdullah and the royal family regarding their own position. Bernard Haykel (2013: 3) discusses the Saudi view when Mubarak was deposed, and states, "What was disturbing was how the leaders were deposed: mass mobilization in the streets, with the United States unwilling to offer unequivocal support to long-standing allies."

King Abdullah did not manage to safeguard the Egyptian President while the upheavals in Egypt took place. However, the Saudis supported the counter-revolution led by high-ranking Egyptian officers connected with the old regime in their fight against the newly elected Mohammed Morsi, and the Muslim Brotherhood in power. Gregory F. Gause III (2014: 17) states, "This combination of democracy and Islamists politics was unsettling to the Saudi leadership. The upheaval in Egypt had not only removed Saudi Arabia's primary Arab ally, it also brought to power a regime that could credibly contest Saudi Arabia's role as leader of the Sunni Muslim world, and even present an alternative form of Sunni Islamists politics to the Saudi monarchical model." The argument favours a constructivist perspective of a perceived ideational threat that could potentially question the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy. Moreover, Andrew Hammond (2013: 8) states, "Saudi support for the coup against Morsi on 3 July was immediate and absolute, exposing Saudi concerns about the Islamist trend at home." The Saudis, therefore, reacted towards the threat and managed to remove the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Egypt by supporting the counterrevolutionary forces within Egypt promoting its economic and soft power capabilities.

Saudi engagement against the democratically elected Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood falls under the first counterrevolutionary motivating factor: to counter threatening ideologies and political systems that pose a threat to the legitimation of the political alliance with the Wahhabi religious establishment and the House of Al Saʿud. The Saudi regime legitimised their role in Egypt, as that of preventing the radicalisation of the

Egyptian population. This policy falls under the second counterrevolutionary motivation; to counter any unstable political systems in order to maintain regional stability. The third motivation regards downplaying Iranian influence across the region. However, I would argue that Saudi foreign policy behaviour in Egypt was not predominately rooted in the strategy of downplaying Iranian influence. Iran did not enjoy a good relationship with the former Egyptian President, and the population in Egypt are mainly Sunni Muslims. These arguments are based on the historical alliances Iran has enjoyed through states and non-state actors, especially in Shiite populated countries. Yet, as both Iran and Saudi Arabia aspires to achieve regional hegemony, there aroused a possibility for Iran to gain access in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood in the wake of the upheavals was created, while Saudi Arabia wanted to continue its good relationship with an authoritarian pre-revolutionary Egypt.

6.1 A new reality arises

The fall of the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011 might have been the catalyst for King Abdullah to break with his foreign policy doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Saudi Arabia has for decades maintained a good and well-functioning relationship with Egypt and the former President Mubarak, as both Saudi Arabia and Egypt have worked for regional stability. During a press conference with the Egyptian Foreign Minister in June 2013, the Saudi Foreign Minister Saʿud al-Faisal states, "To mention Saudi-Egyptian relations is to bring up a long, storied history between our two countries, a history that is firmly strung with unbreakable ties, mutual respect, and close ties on every level and all fields of cooperation that serve the two countries' mutual interests, Arab and Muslim causes, and international security and peace," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013, June 1).

As with Bahrain, the Saudi-Egyptian relationship was in all probability based upon Wendt's socially constructed Kantian role structure. Whereby the logic is centred on the notion of friendship through "pluralistic security communities" and "collective security". This is further confirmed by HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal (2013: 6) where he states, "Egypt holds a special place in Saudi security interests […]. Abandoning him or any close ally during a revolutionary uprising was not and will never be a policy option for the Kingdom, which must uphold and defend its values."

Hosni Mubarak was forced to relinquish his position on February 11, 2011, i.e., prior to the military intervention in Bahrain. The statement from Al Faisal suggests that the Saudis were caught in a situation they never thought was going to happen – an efficient revolution that deposed a Saudi-friendly regime in the Middle East. Moreover, the speech from Al Faisal strengthens the argument of the Saudi regime breaking with its former non-interference strategy, as he clearly states how it will never be an option for the kingdom to desert any allies. According to Jason Burke (2011, June 29) in *The Guardian,* Dr. Mustafa Alani, from the Gulf Research Centre in Dubai, states that, "The calculation in Riyadh is very simple: you cannot stop the Arab Spring so the question is how to accommodate the new reality on the ground […]". The Saudi regime, therefore, needed to find 'new' ways on how to orientate itself in the 'chaotically' political landscape of the region.

After the removal of Mubarak, the Saudis became unclear of the potential for US support for the Saudi regime in the case, as in Egypt and Tunisia, of a massive domestic uprising. The Saudi (perceived) fear of the lack of U.S support in case of internal instability was confirmed by the U.S. President Obama in 2015. President Obama states, "I can send a message to them about the US's commitments to work with them and ensure they are not invaded from the outside…What I can't do, though, is commit to dealing with some of these internal issues that they have without them making some changes that are responsive to their people," according to Global Security (2015, April 6). This statement by Obama supports my previous argument of that the United States will support the kingdom in cases of an external threat, but not necessary in instances of domestic instability.

The Saudi perspective towards the regional situation with the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian Presidents in February 2011 was almost certainly based upon regime survival. Regime security has been the most important objective for the Saudi regime prior to the Arab Spring. Wendt argues that actors define their interests in the process of defining the situation, suggesting that, in light of the revolutionary wave, the notion of regime security was even more important. A situation of survival can lead to aggressive behavior, as, according to Mearsheimer, survival mandates aggressive behavior. The new reality might also have led to a more independent policy in Saudi Arabia in order to ensure regime survival. These ideas are highlighted by Guido Steinberg (2014: 17) where he states, "Behind the scenes the Saudi government maintained close contact with the Egyptian military leadership and hoped to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood from faring too well in the parliamentary elections, which

were held between November 2011 and January 2012." King Abdullah saw his regime as being capable of countering the domestic revolution, and had, therefore, the capacity to focus on external threats and orientate and direct the regional politics in a favorable direction. I have argued that Saudi Arabia promoted its economic and military instruments in the case of the Saudi intervention in Bahrain, and moreover, the Saudi use of its economic and diplomatic instruments in the case of Saudi engagement in Egypt. However, the Saudis also used their intelligence services to a greater extent in the wake of the Arab upheavals. Austin Long (2015) states, "It underscored the potential for unrest and revolution and the perception (true or not) in the Gulf that the U.S. commitment to regional allies was ambivalent. It also created new opportunities for influence as U.S. influence waned and previously stable regimes fell, some of which was overt (such as aid to Egypt or military support to Bahrain) while some was undoubtedly covert and conducted by intelligence services."

6.2 The Saudi regime Versus the Muslim Brotherhood

Old historical narratives of the Muslim Brotherhood as an ideological threat to the Saudi regime reappeared as the new reality began to sink into King Abdullah. In order to understand the Saudi attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood, one need to look at it from a historical perspective. Bernard Haykel (2013: 5-6) argues that there are four ideological disparities in the Brotherhood's position that contribute to the Saudi regime perceiving the Brotherhood with animosity. First, Muslim Brotherhood members were welcomed and employed by the Saudi regime when the Muslim Brotherhood was subjected to brutal suppression in Egypt and Syria under President Gamal Abd al-Nasser and President Hafiz al-Assad. Under these conditions, some members of the Brotherhood and Saudis developed a group named the *al-Sahwa al-Islāmiyya* (*Sahwa),* the 'Islamic Awakening', with the goal of overthrowing the Saudi regime. The ideology of the *Sahwa* was an ideological and religious mixture of Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood. Second, the Muslim Brotherhood supported Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait in 1990. The Saudi regime, therefore, perceived the Brotherhood as traitors. Third, both the Saudi regime and the Muslim Brotherhood compete within the sphere of political Sunni Islam. The royal family's legitimacy rests on the notion of Sunni Islam, and its Wahhabi interpretation, while the Brotherhood also rests its legitimacy within Sunni Islam, but with a more moderate interpretation. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood represents a Pan-Islamism movement, indicating the group to be present in

several Middle Eastern countries and other Muslim countries worldwide. A Pan-Islamist movement represents a significant competitive ideology for the Kingdom, perceiving itself as the heartland of Islam. Fourth, according to Bernard Haykel (2013: 6), "[…] the Muslim Brotherhood represents the only clandestine and organized political force in Saudi society, and therefore has the wherewithal to mobilize against the regime." Lawrence Rubin (2014: 122) suggests that one of the most important issues the Saudis has with the Muslim Brotherhood is that, "Moreover, Saudi Arabia blames the Brotherhood for infecting their Wahhabism with a Qutbist type [a former influential individual within the Brotherhood] of activism that produced the likes of Osama bin Laden – citizens who were educated by exiled Muslim Brotherhood members."

The Saudi fears of the *Sahwa* movement are supported by Stéphane Lacroix (2014: 1), who states, "The vast majority of the Sunni Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia is constituted by what is known as the *Sahwa*." However, the Sahwa movement was not one of the Sunni Islamist groups that announced their participation in *the day of wrath* mentioned in chapter 4.2. Yet, as I have argued, the Sahwa movement challenges the Saudi regime due to the combination of their own ideology of *Wahhabism* and their strong connection to the Muslim Brotherhood. The fact that the Muslim Brotherhood represents a transnational movement, in addition to being present within the kingdom, might be the reason for the Saudis also to take action against the Brotherhood on a regional level. The Saudis have tried their best to reduce the Muslim Brotherhood's regional influence and its position, while Qatar has done what it can to support the organisation. One of the reason for Qatari support for the organisation is, as Bernard Haykel (2013: 2) argues, "The Brotherhood has not had conflict with the Qatari regime (as it has with Saudi Arabia and UAE) because it has never threatened the regime's legitimacy […]." Another reason for the Qatari support to the organisation is due to the sub-regional rivalry between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, whereby Qatar has sought to gain regional influence through a transnational movement.

Saudi Arabia accepted the new reality, but only to a certain degree. HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal (2013: 6) states that, "However, once President Mubarak resigned and the Egyptian people expressed their will, King Abdullah not only recognized the new reality, but he also extended the hand of friendship to the new leadership." The Saudis did not appreciate the democratically elected new president and his political stance. In June 2012, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Morsi, won the first democratic presidential election

in decades. Morsi and his government promised a long range of reforms implemented in Egypt, though only a portion of these reforms took place, making the Muslim Brotherhood less popular during its term. In addition, to the fact that the Brotherhood did not manage to implement the long range of promised reforms, there were great contrasts within the Egyptian political landscape. The political fractions encompassed *Salafi* movements, other moderate Islamist groups, democracy parties, and the strong military establishment. The disagreement and chaos led the military establishment to seize their opportunity. Morsi was in power at the presidential office on June 30, 2012 until July 3, 2013, when a coup led by military officers removed Morsi.

The Egyptian Army Chief Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi was the leading figure in the military establishment. King Abdallah welcomed the coup by sending a telegram to the former head of Egypt's Supreme Court, Adli Mansour thanking him and al-Sisi for saving Egypt, according to David Hearst (2013, August 20) in *The Guardian*. Guido Steinberg (2014: 18) suggests it remains unclear if the Saudi leadership and the military establishment had discussed the coup prior to July 3. However, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait did give a total of $12 billion in aid to Egypt the week later. The trilateral group that provided economic aid undermined Qatar as the prime economic donor to Egypt, thus reducing Qatar's political influence in Egypt, according to Steinberg (2014: 19). The military establishment started to crack down on demonstrations in a similar manner to the pre-Mubarak period after the military-led government had taken the power in Egypt. The Egyptian military establishment and the security forces were largely in control over the situation, even though there was great political unrest with massive demonstrations. I would, however, argue that it was mainly due to massive foreign critique, and threats of stopping foreign economic and military aid, which led to a 'softer' treatment of the demonstrating masses.

In addition, the Egyptian military establishment banned the Muslim Brotherhood as a representative political party, labelling it as a terrorist organisation, and thereby arrested several leaders, along with other members of the Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia supported these actions, and King Abdullah announced in August 2013, that, "We have followed with deep sorrow the events taking place in our second homeland, the brotherly Arab Republic of Egypt; events which only please enemies of Egypt's stability and security and its people, but at the same time pain all those who love Egypt and care for its stability and unity which are, today, targets for all evil wishers […]. The people and government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

stood and still stand today with our brothers in Egypt against terrorism, extremism and sedition, and against whoever is trying to interfere in Egypt's internal affairs and in its determination, power and legitimate right to deter every spoiler or whoever misleads the people of Egypt. Let it be known to those who interfered in Egypt's internal affairs that they themselves are fanning the fire of sedition and are promoting the terrorism which they call for fighting," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013, August 9) and in *al-Arabiya English* (2013, August 16). By this statement, King Abdullah gave the Egyptian military establishment full support. Moreover, the Saudi King indirectly states that the Muslim Brotherhood was one of the factors for bringing terrorism and extremism to Egypt.

Davis Hearst (2013, August 20), in *The Guardian* suggests that King Abdullah's statement about non-interference in Egypt was directed to Qatar and its important ally, the United States, whom Abdullah accused of creating internal sedition in Egypt. This is in accordance with the idea of Saudi Arabia engaging in a more independent foreign policy vis à vis United States. The United States, Qatar, and many other countries condemned the violent treatment of members of the Muslim Brotherhood by the newly established military government in Egypt. However, the Saudis perceive the Brotherhood as being a terrorist organisation as well. According to Madawi al-Rasheed (2014, February 4) in *al-Monitor*, less than a year later of Abdullah's speech, on February 3, 2014 the Saudi regime issued, by a royal decree, a new terrorism law that prohibits Saudi citizens for fighting abroad, and membership in radical religious and political movements. These groups include al-Qaida, the Saudi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, *Dāʿesh*, and the al-Nusrah Front. The royal decree issued by Abdullah is a counter framing measure within the categorisation denial. The aim of this form of counter framing is to minimise the spread of the message of these ideational thoughts by not allowing discussion of the issues presented by the groups. The Saudi regime has supported the Egyptian military establishment in their drive for power against the Muslim Brotherhood, suggesting the countering of an ideological threat towards the Saudi regime on a domestic and regional level.

6.3 Keeping the authoritarian system

I have argued that the Saudi engagement in Egypt was different from that observed in Bahrain. This is also highlighted by Guido Steinberg (2014: 17), who states, "While the Saudi

Arabia's support for Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Morocco was about preventing the revolution spreading to the monarchies, in Egypt it worked to restore the army and parts of the old regime to power." This analysis suggests that Saudi engagement in Bahrain included preventive counterrevolutionary foreign policy, while the Saudi involvement in Egypt was an explicit counterrevolutionary behaviour according to the definition presented in section 3.3.3. As the region went into chaos, it created a political power vacuum in Egypt because there had not been any actual political competition for the authoritarian system in decades. The combination of an Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood in power, and great division in the Egyptian political landscape created room for a variety of external forces to gain potential influence.

Qatar saw its opportunity and provided the Muslim Brotherhood its political and economic support. However, the Saudi regime was suspicious of possible Iranian influence inside a former Saudi close ally. Guido Steinberg (2014: 17) states, "Ultimately, Riyadh worried that Tehran could exploit unrest in Egypt to expand its influence there." A shared point underscored by Lawrence Rubin (2014: 121) who states, "When Mohammed Morsi came to power, Saudi Arabia was concerned that Egyptian-Iranian relations would warm." I do not totally share this view, and wish to offer a contrasting one, as the Iranians usually seek influence in Shiite populated areas. Prior to the Arab upheavals, the Iranians had not enjoyed political influence in Egypt, and there is no great Shiite population in Egypt worth mentioning. However, the Iranian regime has previously pursued its interest in politically unstable areas such as in Lebanon and Yemen. The Saudis may have perceived the situation in Egypt as similar cases, and therefore, a risk of losing it long-standing ally and political influence.

I would argue that the Saudi regime wanted to keep the authoritarian status quo in order to maintain Egypt as an important ally, thus creating stronger Arab military opposition against Iran, rather than it being Saudi fears of a potential Iranian influence in Egypt. This argument is supported by the Saudi uncertainty of US support for the Saudi regime, as the United States had demonstrated towards its allies in Egypt and Tunisia. However, history has shown that the United States supports its allies and US interests against military threats, as they did in the Gulf war in 1991. From a Saudi perspective it, therefore, suggests that the Saudis perceived the US support as available in the case of a military threat, but not, unless it favoured US interests, in cases of a regime change. This is, moreover, partly supported by the US President

Obama statement above, and the US engagement against *Dāʿesh*, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

Saudi Arabia maintains good relations with the Egyptian government in post-revolutionary Egypt. Ana Echagüe (2014: 15) states that, "[…] On 20 June 2014, King Abdullah was the first foreign head of state to visit Cairo and congratulate President Sisi on his inauguration." Moreover, it was reported in *Gulf News* (2014, November 4) that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other Gulf states were planning to set up a joint military force in order to intervene in states within the Middle East. The creation of the force has, according to the article, two purposes. First, to ensure the possibility for intervention against the Islamist threat in theatres such as Libya and Yemen. Second, to serve as a strong military force to counter Iran, according to *Gulf News* (2014, November 4). The statement validates the argument of the Saudi desire to keep Egypt as a close ally, rather than the Saudi fear of Iranian influence in Egypt. Egypt has engaged militant Islamist groups in air strikes in Libya after the publication of the article, but Saudi Arabia has not taken part in these actions. However, the joint Arab military was, according to *Arab News* (2015, March 26 a)*,* formally established at the Arab Summit in Egypt, on March 25-26, where the Arab leaders had agreed to create a unified Arab military force. The creation of the force has its origins in the growing security threats in Yemen and Libya. Formal regional military cooperation between Sunni Muslim states has not been present for decades, and might be a signal for stronger cooperation in order to confront the serious range of events and challenges the region have.

Chapter 7: Turning the upheavals into a proxy war in Syria and Iraq

The extensive Saudi economic and political support to Syrian opposition groups suggests that Saudi foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis does not have a counterrevolutionary aspect, as, following the definition used in the thesis, it had in Bahrain or Egypt. King Abdullah has not worked to restore the political landscape in Syria and Iraq which was in effect before the pre-revolutionary period. Saudi strategies towards the theatres in Syria and Iraq has, in contrast, been to direct the politics in their favor as much as possible in order to downplaying Iranian influence. My argument that Saudi did not follow the counterrevolutionary path, in this case, contrasts with the mainstream opinion of Saudi Arabia as engaging in counterrevolutionary politics, as an overall foreign policy strategy in the wake of the Arab upheavals.

King Abdullah urged the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to stop the killing machine in order to restore regional stability in August 2011, whereby the statement highlights the Saudi view of keeping regional stability. In addition, the Saudi regime has used high-diplomacy by encouraging the international community to stop the violence in the Syrian civil war. The Saudi ambassador to the UN stated in 2012, "The Security Council must resolve to end to end the violence, take all necessary means to stop the Syrian killing machine and save the civilians trapped in Homs, Hama and all Syrian cities […]. The countries of the GCC are ready to serve at the forefront of any joint effort that aims to save the Syrian people and strengthen its ability to protect itself from an authority that lost all its legitimacy once it's started killing its people," according to H.E. Abdallah Y. Al-Mouallimi, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations (2012, March 2, p. 2-3).

However, Saudi politics towards the Syrian crisis changed the year after King Abdullah's speech to Bashar al-Assad. Gregory F. Gause III (2014: 15) states, "By the start of 2012, though, Riyadh was "all in" for the Syrian rebellion." Saʿud al-Faisal states in late December 2012, "Though this tragic scenario continues to play out for going on two years now, we do see a glimmer of hope today. A coalition of Syrian opposition has been formed that aims to bring the various factions of the Syrian opposition together under a singular leadership. […] I am heretofore pleased to announce that the government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques will donate 100 million dollars in aid through the Syrian National Coalition," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2012, December 16). The Saudi regime tried to unite a consistent opposition block against the Syrian President Bashar

al-Assad with the use of its economic capabilities. By 2012, the Saudis sought to strengthen the Syrian National Coalition (SNC).

The extended use of harsher rhetoric by Saudi Arabia through diplomatic channels continued, whereby they criticised the UN Security Council for not doing enough to find a solution to the Syrian crisis. According to a Saudi diplomat to UN in 2013, who states, "The Syrian crisis continues without anon-partial and effective solution that realizes the aspirations of the Syrian people and reflects the will of the international community represented by the General Assembly and its adopted resolutions, which were not properly effectuated by the Security Council. All this reaffirms the danger manifested in the delay in taking appropriate timely decisions to achieve peace in the region and in the world; and the results manifested in the spread of chaos, wars, murder, and destruction," according to H.E. Counselor Dr. Abdulmohsen Farouk Alyas Chargé D'affairesa.i. Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations (2013, October 29, p.3).

As diplomacy did not end the Syrian civil war, the Saudi regime raised the stakes by arming opposition groups. The Saudi involvement might have contributed to the further escalation of the conflict, turning it into yet another proxy war against Iran. By 2012, the Saudi engagement in the Syrian civil war may be categorised under the third motivation factor; Saudi Arabia possesses a high incentive to counter Iranian influence across the region. I have highlighted the Saudi-Iranian geopolitical rivalry that appeared after the Iranian revolution in 1979. Given the opportunity for both Saudi Arabia and Iran to increase its area of influence in light of the Arab upheavals, the two great powers did not change their perception towards each other, thus making the Lockean culture of rivalry to remain in the case of respect for each other sovereignty.

Moreover, the rivalry may have gone so far that a Hobbesian anarchy unveiled itself in proxy theaters. This argument is based upon the idea of the extensive interests both Saudi Arabia and Iran have pursued in the conflict, which, in terms of human lives and tragedies, is one of most significant conflicts since the Second World War. In addition, the sectarian violence in the Middle East has increased in recent years and can be related to the geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Saudi engagement in Syria and Iraq should, therefore, be seen through the prism of a 'balance of power game' between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

7.1 Challenging the Iranian 'belt' of influence

Offensive realism suggests that aggressive behaviour occurs when great powers aspire to maximise their relative power, as it serves as an optimal way to ensure their security. In the case of Saudi engagement in Syria and Iraq, these provide good explanations for Saudi behaviour in their aspiration for regional hegemony. For years, Iran has been a close and valuable ally to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The Iranians have, therefore, enjoyed a 'belt' of political influence, stretching from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, to the Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iranian influence increased in Iraq after the US invasion in 2003 and further increased with the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government from 2005 onwards. According to Lawrence G. Potter (2014: 16), "The fall of Saddam government in 2003 led to a major change in the status of Shiʿis throughout the region and enhanced the power of Iran. For the first time Iraq had a Shiʿi-led government, and Sunnis in Iraq, as well as the Gulf-monarchies, were on defensive." The former defensive policy of the Gulf-monarchies and especially that of Saudi Arabia changed during the Arab upheavals, comprising of a more offensive policy towards the Shiite and Iranian influence in countries as Iraq and Syria. Ana Echagüe (2014: 13) states that, "Over the last decade, Saudi's lack of influence in the Levant, most notably in Syria and Iraq, or in Gaza (such as in 2009), was palpable and offered a start contrast to Iran's maneuvering in Iraq, its alliance with Syria, and its support for Hamas and Hezbollah. In response to what it saw as Iranian attempts to achieve regional hegemony, Saudi Arabia attempted to bolster alliances with friendly states, Jordan and Egypt most notably […]." In reference to her argument, I have already highlighted the Saudi policy towards Egypt as being an attempt to re-establish the cooperation that decreased during the reign of Mohammed Morsi.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has, for years, wanted to break the alliance between Iran and Syria in order to diminish Iran's influence in the Levant. The revolution in Syria, therefore, created an opportunity for the Saudis to change this situation and reduce Iran's position in the region. The Saudi calculation might been built upon the notion that, if Syria was to fall, the Iranians might have lost influence in Lebanon and Hezbollah, thus losing the grip over the Levant. The Tunisian and Egyptian President had recently been deposed, and the Saudis might think the Syrian President was to be the next deposed regime leader. The potential fall of al-Assad would have provided enormous opportunities for the Saudis to change the regional balance of power. Saudi engagement could, in this case, be perfectly explained by Mearsheimer's view

of how great powers defend their balance of power. In addition, the Saudi involvement in the Syrian civil war explains how the Saudi regime tried to undermine the balance when the situation change in its own favour, as the Syrian President and his regime were under severe pressure on all dimensions; domestic, regional, and international.

The Saudi perception of the Arab Spring has been highlighted as the essential notion of regime survival, yet also new challenges and opportunities. Mearsheimer suggests that survival under these circumstances mandates aggressive behaviour, thus suggesting states to act aggressively. However, Mearsheimer's five assumptions that need to take place for states to strive for hegemony and behave aggressively were not all present in the case of Saudi involvement in Syria. The Saudis did not possess the offensive military capabilities needed to intervene on its own initiative in the civil war in Syria. The lack of offensive military capabilities suggests this to be another, and different, case than the Saudi actions in Bahrain. The Syrian regime, backed by both Iran and Russia, serves as a greater enemy and risk for military engagement than the case of the military intervention in Bahrain and the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen, March 2015.

However, there are IR-theories that explain how states engage in wars in order to increase domestic support. The theory is named 'rally around the flag', whereby state leaders, due to domestic pressure or loss of support, engage in wars to raise support. The Saudi population saw the Syrian regime as tyrannical for killing its population, but the Saudi regime had, during 2012, managed to counter domestic pressure for reform. As argued, the Saudis did not possess the capabilities to intervene on its own. Instead, the Saudi regime turned the Syrian civil war and the conflict in Iraq into proxy wars against Iran by using its public diplomacy, economic capabilities and sectarian narratives to promote its interests in Syria and Iraq. Bandar bin Sultan, one of the Saudis responsible for promoting Saudi interests abroad in Syria and Iraq, was appointed as head of the (GIP) in July 2012; a position he held until April 2014. There have been several rumors about the reason for his removal. The rumors have mainly centered around the idea that he was causing the deteriorating relationship with the United States by his critique of Obama's failure to handle Syria and that no military intervention took place after Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons in August 2013, according to Ian Black (2014, April 16) in *The Guardian* and Angus McDowall (2014, April 15) in *Reuters.*

For a long time, Qatar was one of the leading funders of Syrian insurgents in their fight against the al-Assad regime. However, the Qataris did not differentiate between the varieties of opposition groups on the ground. Both the Syrian Brotherhood fraction, *Salafi-Jihadi* groups, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), and others received political, economic and armament support from Qatar. The lack of consistent support and the overall Qatari engagement and policies towards the crisis, in contrast, fuelled the conflict with more weapons and increased the hostility between the anti-Syrian regime groups. Another view of the Qatari support is, "However, a perception is taking root among growing numbers of Syrians that Qatar is using its financial muscle to develop networks of loyalty among rebels and set the stage for influence in a post-Assad era," according to Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding Smith (2013, May 17), in *Financial Times.* This assertion supports my argument of the sub-regional competition that evolved in the wake of the Arab upheavals, whereby both Qatar and Saudi Arabia saw arising opportunities for increased political influence.

The Saudi reality was a growing Qatar, and a Syrian civil war not directed in favour of the Saudi regime. The Saudis, therefore, acquired the 'new' role; that of the main supplier for the Syrian rebels from 2013. Muhammad Ballout (2013, July 19), in *al-Monitor,* states that, "Yesterday [July 18], Saudi Arabia became the exclusive patron of the Syrian National Coalition." The Saudi Crown Prince Salman received the leader of the SNC, Ahmad al-Jarba, in July 2013 in order to officially demonstrate Saudi support for SNC. However, the Saudi attempt to resolve and direct the Syrian civil war in a favourable direction proved to be challenging. Saudi Arabia and the United States had different perceptions on how to engage with the reality on the ground in Syria. Saudi Arabia wanted to provide extensive armament of Syrian rebels while the United States was strongly opposed to weapons to be handed over to radical anti-US movements. Lisa Watanabe and Christian Nünlist (2014: 3) states, "Similarly, the US reluctance to arm Syrian rebels is viewed as having enabled the forces of Bashir al-Assad's regime to make gains of the ground. Frustrated with the US position, Riyadh is eager to provide rebels with anti-aircraft-missiles […]." It has, however, been highly difficult to find reliable sources that confirm whether the Saudis have provided opposition groups with this kind of military equipment.

Moreover, another issue between United States and Saudi Arabia revolved around which opposition groups were to receive arms and economic support. While the US position was to support the secular opposition groups such as SNC and Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Saudis

saw little progress on the ground from SNC and FSA. The Saudi regime, therefore, initiated support to other, more radical groups. According to Gregory F. Gause III (2014: 15), "[…] the Saudis refocused support toward Islamists, and particularly Salafi, opposition groups, other than ISIS and al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra." Saudi Arabia has been a strong supporter of the Islamist group, *Islamic Front* in Syria. The group was created in late 2013 through the amalgamation of several Islamist groups. The Islamic Front rejects thoughts of democracy and wants to implement an Islamic state based on *Sharīʿa*. Edward Dark (2013, December 11), in *al-Monitor*, argues that all the major players in the Middle East, except Saudi Arabia, agreed to create a coalition of opposition groups in order to confront al-Qaida as a necessary means to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Edward Dark (2013, December 11) further states that, "In terms of Saudi calculations, curbing Iranian influence in the Middle East is their number-one strategic goal. As far as Riyadh is concerned, a failed state ruled by Sunni extremists seems preferable to the existence of any Iran-friendly regime in Syria." The Saudi calculation if accepted, suggests that the Saudis are willing to take great risks in their attempt to moderate Iranian influence throughout the region. This kind of aggressive behaviour coincides with the thought of offensive realism, whereby great powers are willing to take high risks, as in the case of the argument presented by Edward Dark, in order to ensure its survival and achieve a hegemonic position.

The Syrian civil war escalated to an alarming level when the use of chemical weapons in proximity to the Syrian capital Damascus on August 21, 2013 became known. During this period, I was stationed in Riyadh, and closely monitoring the situation. Riyadh was ready to engage the Syrian regime with military means, either in a coalition with the United States or a coalition of Arab states. Madawi al-Rasheed (2013, September 2)*,* in *al-Monitor* states, "Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal urged the Arab League to back a military strike against President Bashar al-Assad's regime after the chemical attack on Ghouta in which hundreds of Syrians were killed." The use of chemical weapons was described by Obama as a 'red line' for al-Assad. The international community were tensely preparing for potential military attacks against the Syrian regime, and Saudi Arabia used harsh rhetoric supporting the use of military air strikes. However, as US military vessels were on alert and heading towards the Mediterranean Sea, the United States and, in particular, Russia, found a diplomatic solution in the UN and agreed to remove all Syrian chemical weapons, in order to prevent further escalation of the Syrian crisis. The Saudis appeared disappointed that the incident did not lead to a military intervention against the Syrian regime. The Saudi

perception of US reluctance to act in the Syrian crisis, combined with the new reality that emerged after the fall of Mubarak, may have been factors that led to a more independent foreign policy from Saudi Arabia regarding the US. Lisa Watanabe and Christian Nünlist (2014: 1) states that, "[…] Saudi Arabia's relationship with its Western partners, particularly that with the US, had been tested due to differences over the handling of the Iranian nuclear program and the civil war in Syria, leading Riyadh to conclude that it had no option but to play a more assertive role internationally." The Saudi regime showed, its more assertive international role by rejecting the temporary seat in the UN Security Council, the first country in UN history on November 12, 2013. Nawaf Obaid (2013) elaborates on the Saudi decision to reject the UN Security Council seat, and states, "This unprecedented decision also signals the coming of age of Saudi Arabia's forceful foreign policy and the methods it is willing to pursue to achieve its objectives."

The Saudi regime used the Syrian revolution as an opportunity to challenge and reduce the Iranian influence in Syria. However, by gaining access to the Sunni Muslim populated areas in Iraq, the Saudis have been an active player in trying to achieve regional hegemony over Iran as well. Lawrence Rubin (2014: 115) states that, "Moreover, Saudi Arabia has also provided arms and material to Sunni groups in Iraq in their power struggle against Iranian-backed militia and political organizations." The Saudi policy in Iraq suggests that the Saudis have been willing to use the hard power instruments, in addition to the sectarian and ideological aspects, as means. Increased Iranian influence in Iraq through the Iraqi Shiite President Nuri al-Maliki has been perceived by the Saudis hugely detrimental. The United States withdraw their main forces from Iraq in late December 2011, and, between 2012-2014, there was a massive Sunni uprising in Iraq due to the Sunnis' lack of influence in Iraqi politics. Lawrence G. Potter (2014: 19) states, "In Iraq, with the departure of US-troops, the Shiʿi government of Prime Minister Nuri-al-Maliki became increasingly authoritarian and continued to question the loyalty of Sunnis." The repression of Sunni Muslims in Iraq, and that Iraq was influenced by Iran, might have been a catalyst for the Saudis to increase their focus on reducing the 'belt' of Iranian influence. According to Abdul Hannan Tago (2013, January 6), in *Arab News,* did the Saudi Foreign Minister stated that, "We are convinced that Iraq will not stabilize until it starts handling issues without sectarian extremism […]. Until these issues are addressed, we don't think there will ever be stability in Iraq, which pains us." This statement from Saʿud al-Faisal must have been addressed to al-Maliki and his pro-Shiite

politics that did not take the Sunnis into account as an underlying factor for the Sunni-uprising and the ensuing instability.

7.2 Escalating the sectarian tensions

During a meeting with Arab Foreign Ministers in 2012, the Saudi Foreign Minister Saʿud al-Faisal states, "What is happening in Syria shows beyond any doubt that it is not ethnic, sectarian or guerrilla war. It is a collective clean-up campaign, harassing the Syrian people and imposing state control without any considerations of humanity or morals or religion," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2012, February 11). The statement from the Saudi Foreign Minister suggests that the Saudis have rejected any ethnic or sectarian narratives within the Syrian civil war. However, the sectarian instrument has been used by the Saudi regime in Bahrain in order to prevent Iranian influence. Moreover, the Saudis have used the sectarian instrument more actively, and might have caused more damage than they wished in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The strategy of using the sectarian instrument needs to be addressed in the context of the Saudi desire to change the direction of the Syrian civil war in favour of the Kingdom.

The sectarian violence in the Middle East started as a consequence of the chaotic situation after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, followed by the civil war, primarily based upon sectarian lines. However, the sectarian violence increased in the wake of the Arab upheavals. As the initial support from Qatar and other Gulf states created more division and chaos in the anti-Assad movements, it gave room for more radical groups. Patrick Cockburn (2014, July 13)*, in *The Independent* states that, "The fatal moment predicted by Prince Bandar may now have come for many Shia, with Saudi Arabia playing an important role in bringing it about by supporting the anti-Shia jihad in Iraq and Syria […]. Prince Bandar, secretary-general of the Saudi National Security Council from 2005 and head of General Intelligence between 2012 and 2014, the crucial years when al-Qa`ida-type jihadis took over the Sunni-armed opposition in Iraq and Syria." Saudi intelligence worked to create a moderate Sunni block against al-Assad and al-Maliki, but they failed in their attempt, thus developing sectarian tension to new levels. Moreover, Patrick Cockburn (2014, July 13) in *The Independent* states that, "The problem for the Saudis is that their attempts since Bandar lost his job to create an anti-Maliki and anti-Assad Sunni constituency which is simultaneously against al-Qa`ida and its clones failed." Saudi Arabia experienced great challenges in reaching their goals in Syria and Iraq, as

they, in addition, provided support to Salafi groups, such as the Islamic Front. During the chaos among Syrian opposition groups, the terrorist group *Dāʿesh* took from the beginning of 2014, the lead among the Sunni-opposition groups in both Syria and Iraq. Moreover, the terror group had the goal of removing the al-Saʿud from power alike, in their plan of creating a transnational Islamic caliphate.

The Saudi religious establishment has played a key role in exacerbating the sectarian 'war' against Iran and the Shiites, both internally and externally, while the Saudi intelligence services contributed to escalating the sectarian tension abroad. The countermeasures undertaken by the Saudi state media, the religious establishment and the intelligence services have, in Lawrence Rubin's categorisation of counter-framing, included denial, defence, and counterattack. A range of Saudi *Fatwās,* official opinions, and statements through social media that encourages anti-Shiite attitudes are available. According to an article in *Gulf News* (2014, September 10)*,* has the conservative Saudi clerics, Abdul Rahman al-Barrak and Nasser al-Omar, with more than a million followers on Twitter, accused the Shiites "of sowing strife, corruption and destruction among Muslims." Moreover, Catherine Shakdam (2014) argues that Saudi Arabia has conducted an anti-Shiite policy since the kingdom's foundation, and this policy has intensified in the wake of the Arab upheavals. She highlights an example of this policy, where the leader of the congregation at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Adel al-Kalbani, declared, during an interview with BBC Arabic in May 2009, "that all Shia Muslims were apostate, unbelievers, and as such should be hunted down and killed," according to Catherine Shakdam (2014). A Saudi Wahhabi Sheikh and the faculty member at the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad bin Saud, Dr. Saad al-Durihim posted a tweet on Twitter on April 23, 2013 urging "jihadist fighters in Iraq […] and kill any Shiites they can get their hands on, including children and women," according to Haytham Mouzahem (2013, April 28)*,* in *al-Monitor*. These kind of statements by the Wahhabi establishment contributes to persist the existing problems towards other ideological and religious interpretations of Islam, as I outlined in the theory chapter. In addition, the terrorist group *Dāʿesh* has followed the anti-Shiite policy in their conquered territories in Syria and Iraq by killing those belonging to other Islamic sects or Christians. More interestingly, proclamations of anti-Shiite attitudes, has as shown, also been promoted by the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia.

7.3 New threats arise

The Saudi strategy in Iraq and Syria might have failed, and has not, in the short-term perspective manage to destroy the Iranian 'belt' of influence. Moreover, its foreign policy strategies may have contributed to the formation of new domestic threats against the kingdom. Christopher M. Blanchard (2015: 7) states, "However, if recent trends hold, the Islamic State may pose an even greater ideological and security threat to the kingdom's stability." Moreover, Patrick Cockburn (2014, July 13), in *The Independent* states, "As for Saudi Arabia, it may come to regret its support for the Sunni revolts in Syria and Iraq as jihadi social media begins to speak of the House of Saʿud as its next target." The leader of *Dāʿesh,* Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, proclaimed himself as caliph over the 'Islamic State' in June 2014. The terror group used references to the Islamic conquest in Islam's initial phase, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi labelled himself as a caliph over all Muslims. The proclamation of an 'Islamic State' served as a major ideological and ideational threat towards the legitimacy of the royal family, who possess the title Custodian of the two Holy Mosques and perceive itself as the leading state within Islam. The Saudi regime and the Wahhabi clerics became, therefore, increasingly worried when the 'Islamic State' was established and *Dāʿesh* gained control over huge geographical areas in Iraq and Syria within a short time period during the summer of 2014.

An ideational threat needs to be assessed from a constructivism perspective. Moreover, it is important to note that ideational threats are socially constructed in terms of a perceived threat towards the justification for the existence of the Saudi monarchy. However, *Dāʿesh* also serves as a military threat close to the Saudi border. As *Dāʿesh* is a non-state transnational actor, the group needs to be assessed according to Christopher Hill's basis for categorisation. The group seeks a territorial base and is built upon an ideological manifestation that seeks to promote certain ideas across national frontiers. The combination of its territorial ground and ideological basis suggests that *Dāʿesh* serves as both an ideational and credible military threat to Saudi Arabia. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi threatened Saudi Arabia in November 2014, through the propaganda channel of *Dāʿesh* (*al-Furqan Media Foundation*, November 13, 2014) and states, "[…] al-Baghdadi extolled what he describes as the purported expansion of the Islamic State to the "lands of al-Haramein" (two holy places) in addition to Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Algeria, through its acceptance of oaths of allegiance sworn by local militants to the self-styled caliphate. Al Baghdadi's mention of al-Haramein is notable in that it reflects the radical

Islamic proclivity for avoiding any reference to Saudi Arabia by name, and by implication, any indirect recognition of legitimacy of the Saudi royal family, instead…highlighting Islam's two holiest sights at Mecca and Mdeina[…] Al Baghdadi issued a categorical call to arms: He referred to the Saudi royal family as "the serpent's head," and the "stronghold of disease,' and implored his Saudi subjects to attack the "al Saloul," and "their soldiers," according to R.C. Porter (2015).

When the conflict in Iraq escalated after the establishment of the 'Islamic State' during the summer of 2014, Arabia deployed 30, 000 soldiers on its border to Iraq as a preventive measure, according to *Gulf News* (2014, July 3). In addition, President Barack Obama presented a strategy on how to neutralise the extremist group *Dāʿesh* on September 10, 2014. Moreover, Saudi Arabia expressed the day after, on September 11 that they were willing to host training of moderate rebels in the civil war in Syria against *Dāʿesh* and the Syrian regime, according to *Gulf News* (2014, September 11). The Saudi Foreign Minister Saʿud al-Faisal discussed on the instruments that could be used against the *Dāʿesh* in September, 2014, and states "The meeting today was a good opportunity to discuss this phenomena from all different aspects and perspectives, and to go deep in its roots and causes and reflected keenness to come up with a vision to combat it through military means, security means, and intelligence, as well as economic and financial means, and intellectual means also," according to The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Condemning Extremism and Promoting Moderation (2014: 1). The Saudi regime is, according to the statement from Saʿud al-Faisal, willing to use the whole spectrum of instruments and capabilities in order to neutralise the terror group.

The Saudi focus towards the terror group has also undermined the Saudi strategy in Syria; removing the Syrian President from power, with the overall goal of diminishing the Iranian belt of influence. The new threat posed by *Dāʿesh* has united international society for collective military action against *Dāʿesh* in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, the military campaign against *Dāʿesh* has might only lead to strengthening al-Assad's position, as the international society's primary focus is towards *Dāʿesh*, as the group serves as a greater regional and international terror threat. Obaid Nawaf (2014) states that, "Saudi Arabia's active military participation in the international coalition against *Dāʿesh* is a clear sign of the country's commitment to defeating this extremist group. It also signals Saudi Arabia's intention to be the regional leader in the broader struggle."

Saudi Arabia's air force participated in the US-led bombing strikes against *Dāʿesh* targets in Syria and Iraq, according to and *Gulf News* (2014, September 24). The military operation in Syria, in addition to the military intervention in Bahrain and Yemen, is one of the three rare foreign incursions for Saudi Arabia's military forces. Moreover, According to Amena Bakr and Angus McDowall (2014, September 23) in *Reuters* and *Gulf News* (2014, September 24), Saudi Foreign Minister Saʿud al-Faisal stated in a speech that the campaign against the terrorist group would take years, and will need hard work for all involved. Saudi Arabia was one out of five Arab countries participating in military actions towards the Islamic extremist group, *Dāʿesh*. The others were Jordan, Bahrain, and UAE, while Qatar had a supporting role. The Arab cooperation in the US-led military campaign is the first time since the 1991 Gulf War that the Arab states have made a common effort to join a US-led military campaign.

King Abdullah rallied domestic support against the new threat. As the royal family has built its legitimacy on the religious basis of the Wahhabi interpretation, the heartland of Islam, and as the custodian of the two holy mosques, it has proven challenging for the kingdom to deal with religious competition from other Sunni Islamic branch. Abdullah, in addition to Saudi senior clerics, tried to counter the ideology of *Dāʿesh* and their religious interpretation of Islam. The Saudi campaign against perceived ideational threats posed by a variety of Islamist groups, commenced with the new anti-terror law imposed in February 2014. Abdullah addressed the challenges in an official speech, whereby the religious establishment followed with official statements on August 19, 2014. The official Saudi stance were an attempt to undermine the new threat. King Abdullah outlined extremism as contrary to Islam in July 2014, and states, "These groups have become an easy tool for the enemies of Islam who use them to terrorize and kill innocent people through the distortion of the holy text and interpretation of Islamic law to serve their ends and personal interests," according to The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Condemning Extremism and Promoting Moderation (2014: 7). Abdullah's rhetoric is a counter framing measure of counterattack, where the aim is to undermine the threat and its validity.

Moreover, King Abdullah addressed the Arab world and the international community in August 2014, and states, "I call on leaders and scholars of the Islamic nation to carry out their duty towards God Almighty, and to stand in the face of those trying to hijack Islam and present it to the world as a religion of extremism, hatred, and terrorism, and to speak the word of truth, and not fear anybody. Our nation today is passing through a critical, historic stage,

and history will be witness against those who have been the tool exploited by the enemies to disperse and tear the nation and tarnish the pure image of Islam," according to The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Condemning Extremism and Promoting Moderation (2014: 1). According to Abdulmajeed al-Buluwi (2014, August 20)*, in *Al-Monitor*, the King's speech included a warning about the dangers posed by armed jihadist groups such as *Dāʿesh* as they, among other things, declared other Muslims as being infidels. Abdullah also publicly criticised the religious establishment for not making enough effort in preventing religious radicalisation that may threaten the kingdom itself. Open, and public criticism from both the royal family and the King towards the religious establishment is very rare, according to Abdulmajeed al-Buluwi (2014, August 20)*, in *Al-Monitor.*

The religious establishment quickly responded to the King and condemned *Dāʿesh* on August 19, 2014, and thereafter gave the royal family its political support and validation through speeches and publication of *fatwās,* especially as the military campaign against *Dāʿesh* started in Syria and Iraq. Abdullah, therefore, gathered all possible resources in the kingdom's fight against the new threat. In August 2014, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Shaikh states, "The ideas of extremism, radicalism and terrorism do not belong to Islam in any way, but are the first enemy of Islam, and Muslims are their first victims, as seen in the crimes of the so-called Daash (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda and their affiliated groups," according to The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Condemning Extremism and Promoting Moderation (2014: 1).

In addition, Saudi Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh, in reference to Dāʿesh announced that, "it is the duty of Muslims to fight them back to ward off their evil and keep it away from religion and people", according to *Gulf News* (2014, September 7). He described the *Dāʿesh* and al-Qaida as *Kharijites*. This strategy of countering ideational threats belongs under the counter framing of counterattack where the aim is to undermine the source of the threat and to deny the claim's validity. The article in *Gulf News* (2014, September 7) also highlights that the Saudi government had detained and sentenced several imams that urged people to fight with the *Dāʿesh*, glorified other extremist ideologies and urged Saudis to fight in Syria. This kind of policy remains under the counter-framing of denial, where the aim is to subvert and minimise the spread of the ideas from *Dāʿesh*. As I have already highlighted in chapter three, the kingdom has previously had problems with radicalisation and support for Islamist movements standing in stark contrast to the Saudi *Wahhabi* establishment and, therefore, posed a domestic and later regional security threat.

The more aggressive Saudi behaviour against the terrorist group could be explained by the ideological threat that *Dāʿesh* poses to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it suggests that the social constructed perception of the group may threaten the political alliance of the Wahhabi and monarchical systems of governance. In addition, the establishment of the 'Islamic State' threatened the Saudi perception of being the leading Islamic State in the region, and elsewhere. Saudi Arabia has been in conflict with its own efforts to stop the extremists and the link between the ideology of *Dāʿesh* and the Saudi state *Wahhabism*, according to Bader al-Rashed (2014, September 29), in *al-Monitor*. Bader al-Rashed (2014, September 29) suggests there are several problems for the Saudis in proclaiming the terrorist group as *Kharijites*. The major problem is as he suggests; the terrorist group has distributing Muhammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's books in the territories of their self-proclaimed 'Islamic State', in Syria and Iraq. Bader al-Rashed (2014, September 29), in *al-Monitor* further suggests that the group is explicitly declaring association with Wahhabism. The other problem is as he argues; the *Kharijites* belongs to a totally different school of jurisprudence to that which any Sunni-Jihadist group would associate itself with. In addition, there are severe contradictions in Saudi Arabia distancing itself from *Dāʿesh,* as there have been some elements within the Saudi religious establishment that, by urging Saudis to fight with them, have contributed to supporting the *Dāʿesh*, thereby further escalating sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims throughout the region.

The Saudi aggressive actions towards *Dāʿesh* is an ongoing event, and as argued, may continue for a long time. In addition, the campaign needs a strategic perspective, as the Saudi Foreign Minister Saʿud al-Faisal states in a press conference with US secretary of state.

 "Saudi Arabia underscores importance of this coalition in fighting ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and stresses the importance of providing of the military means necessary to fight this challenge on the ground, and that the campaign should have comprehensive strategic perspective, fighting terrorism wherever it may be and whatever the organizations that stand behind it, in order to uproot terrorism," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015, March 5). Saudi involvement, in addition to a high number of actors in the Syrian and Iraqi internal affairs, has created more tension among the variety of opposition groups, which in return out of many factors have contributed to the rise of *Dāʿesh*.

Chapter 8: Yemen as a dodgy backyard

Saudi engagement in Yemen offers a different perspective than that of the other cases used in this thesis. The Saudi regime has not engaged in Yemen to any great extent in the time period of 2011-2014. Instead, the Saudis have been preoccupied with the dangers to their northern borders, focusing on the Syrian civil war and the conflict in Iraq and the emergence of the *Dāʿesh.* Moreover, Saudi engagement in Yemen throughout the time period of 2011-2014 did not involve counterrevolutionary politics. King Abdullah rather created a political transition plan in cooperation with other GCC-members in an attempt to keep the stability of the neighboring country. However, the lack of Saudi engagement in Yemen changed drastically in March 2015 when the Saudi-led coalition of Arab States launched the military operation 'Decisive Storm', against the country, in order to 'de-liberate' the Yemeni population from chaos and control by the al-Houthi group.

In order to explain the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Yemen within the framework of role structure from the viewpoint of constructivism, it needs be addressed from both a Kantian and Lockean role structure. The two countries have, from a Kantian perspective, perceived each other as being in a mutually-dependent relationship in many ways, as, given its close proximity, Saudi Arabia has worked for security and stability. The necessity of stability is partly due to the Yemeni history of civil wars and the several terrorist groups such as AQAP that have been operating inside the country. Saudi Arabia has become an important country for Yemen in terms of economic dependency, as several hundred thousand Yemenis work inside Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Saudi Arabia provides extensive economic aid to Yemen. In order to explain the Lockean culture marked by rivalry, Anthony H. Cordesman (1997: 9) states that, "Saudi Arabia has for long seen Yemen as a potential threat, in part because Yemen is an extraordinarily poor state with a population that has equalled or exceeded that of Saudi Arabia […]." These assertions are also supported by Simon Henderson (2015) who states that, "Many observers believe that Saudi population statistics are often skewed to show that the Kingdom is more populous than Yemen, thereby denting any Yemeni revanchism for historically territories." However, Yemen as a nation-state has not been perceived as a great military threat towards Saudi Arabia. Rather, it is the challenges related to security issues posed by militant groups operating in Yemen that have proved a headache for the Saudi regime.

As the internal dynamic developed in Yemen after the Arab upheavals, it might have proven to become a nightmare for the Saudi regime. Saudi Arabia has especially focused on two issues in Yemeni affairs during 2011-2014. First, Yemen is described as a failed state, and the Yemeni regime has not been able to create an effective security management in order to provide security for its population. The deteriorating Yemeni internal situation has led to different militant groups such as AQAP and the Shiite group al-Houthi operating freely. Since 2003, Saudi Arabia has pursued an active domestic counter-terrorist campaign against radical Islamist groups, which has led many AQAP-members to operate from Yemen instead. As one of a range of strategies during the counter-terrorist campaign, Saudi Arabia has tried to 'lock' the 1, 800 kilometer long border with Yemen by building comprehensive safety measures such as walls, sensors, and armed border patrols. Second, Saudi Arabia has been profoundly concerned over the growing influence of the Shiite militant group al-Houthi and accused Iran of providing their support. During the time period of 2011-2014, it is observable that the Saudi regime has lost much of their former influence in Yemen to its longstanding rival Iran through the al-Houthi group. However, and perhaps surprisingly, the Saudis have done little do counter Iranian support for the al-Houthi's in Yemen prior to March 2015.

8.1 Strategy for keeping stability in Yemen

The Saudi regime has not pursued a clear counterrevolutionary politics towards Yemen in respect to the definition of counterrevolution used in this thesis during 2011-2014. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and the GCC did not engage militarily in Yemen when the protests started as they did in Bahrain. Instead, the GCC with Saudi Arabia at the forefront, worked to create a transition plan for the former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh in the wake of the Arab upheavals. The transition had the aim of establishing stability in Yemen. However, Abdullah had suffered severe difficulties in directing the internal Yemeni politics in favour of the Kingdom during 2011-2014.

According to an article in *al-Arabiya English* (2011, November 23), "King Abdullah hailed as marking a "new page" in the impoverished country's history." The GCC-initiative of a transition plan received significant international support for developing a democratic transition in a rather chaotic region. However, the Saudi response to the Yemeni uprisings might have been regretful as the political developments have not favoured the Saudi regime. Bernard Haykel (2014: 4) states, "Riyadh's top priority in Yemen has been to end the uprising

that erupted in 2011 and the chaos that it precipitated." By following the logic of the Saudi's top priority being to end the uprisings in Yemen, it can, in many ways, explain the Saudi role in promoting the transition plan in cooperation with GCC, though it has not proved to become a successful strategy.

In an attempt to bring stability through a democratic process, Yemen held an election in February 2012. However, the election had only one participating candidate, Abu Rabuh Mansour Hadi, who won the election approximately a year after the upheavals took place and assumed the Presidential office on February 27, 2012. The new Yemeni President did not, however, represent a 'new' policy in Yemeni politics. Hadi had been former Vice President from 1994 to 2012, and, therefore, clearly closely linked to the previous government and President Saleh. The new President, proposed a plan to solve internal strife through: The National Dialogue Conference (NDC). The NDC was a transitional dialogue process that was a part of the Gulf States initiative, which created the transition plan for the former President Saleh to leave his office. GCC has worked for retaining the political stability after the transition plan as well, and The Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Abdul Latif Al Zayan states, "The GCC States will continue to exert all efforts alongside regional and international parties to ensure the success of the political settlement in Yemen," according to *Gulf News* (2014, February 6). The statement suggests that the GCC worked to create stability within Yemen, but they failed to estimate the degree of internal division, along with the enormous socio-economic problems the country had.

The Saudis tried to keep internal stability in Yemen, by pursuing its economic capabilities, in addition to proposing the political transition plan. During a UN meeting in 2012, the Saudi Vice Minister Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud stated, "As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was keen to support Yemen in restoring economic, political, and security stability; and as the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz was keen to respond to the brotherly Yemeni people's need in the crisis, the Kingdom's contributions exceeded 3 billion U.S. dollars in the last 5 years," according to Prince Abdulaziz Bin Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations (2012, September 27).

8.2 Yemen falls apart

The violence and the internal fighting have escalated in Yemen in the wake of the Arab upheavals, even with the GCC trying to restore stability and President Hadi's 2013 attempt with the NDC to solve Yemen's diverse problems. The al-Houthi's rejected, however, the outcomes of the NDC. The al-Houthi leader states, "We have rejected it because it divides Yemen into poor and wealthy," according to *Gulf News* (2014, February 11). In addition to political disagreement, the al-Houthi's entered into a more intense conflict with the radical Sunni groups AQAP, and *Dāʿesh,* which claimed to have entered Yemeni territory within 2014.

Both AQAP and the al-Houthi group are labelled as non-state actors, and need to be assessed according to Hill's categorisation. Both groups seek a territorial base and promote ideological ideas across national frontiers, rather than a primary focus on wealth creation. However, the groups differ drastically in the ideas they want to promote. The political narrative of the al-Houthi group is similar to what the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Iranian government promote. "The political narrative that Houthis have propagated is "Death to America, Death to Israel," which is modeled on revolutionary Iran's motto," according to Shahidsaless, Shahir (2015, February 12) in *al-Monitor.* In addition, Shahir Shahidsaless in *al-Monitor* (2015, February 12), states, "On Jan. 25 [2015], Hojatoleslam (a Shiite clerical rank just below that of ayatollah) Ali Shirazi, representative of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, said, "Hezbollah was formed in Lebanon as a popular force like Basij (Iran's militia). Similarly popular forces were also formed in Syria and Iraq, and today we are watching the formation of Ansarollah in Yemen." According to Shahir Shahidsaless (February 12, 2015) a brigadier General of the Iranian Revolutionary Corps claimed that, "Ansarollah is a similar copy of [Lebanese] Hezbollah in a strategic area." The Iranian statements convey that the Iranians have seen Yemen as a potential target for extending their regional influence. Then again, AQAP is an affiliate to the central al-Qaida and possesses another ideological basis that stands in stark contrast to the al-Houthi's. AQAP is globally orientated to a greater extent, and has been known for targeting Westerners and is strongly opposed to the Saudi monarchy. AQAP has conducted several terrorist operations in the kingdom and has been responsible for several attacks in Yemen in the time period of 2009-2015.

By 2014, the civil war in Yemen included multiple lines of fighting, such as the internal battle between AQAP and *Dāʿesh*, in addition to the conflict between President Hadi and his governmental forces against the al-Houthi's, which are both in opposition to the radical Sunni Islamist groups. The varied stakeholders all possess different views on how the future of Yemen should look, and create enormous challenges in creating stability within Yemen. As the country has become more instable in the wake of the Arab upheavals, Yemen has posed a great security threat to Saudi security, and Christopher M. Blanchard (2015: 7) states, "In July 2014, AQAP reportedly attacked a remote Saudi-Yemeni border checkpoint, killing and wounding Saudi security officers." The Saudis did, however, not focus towards the AQAP threat in which had attacked the Saudi border. As I have argued above, the lack of focus towards its Southern borders must be addressed towards the rising threats from its Northern frontiers.

The international community saw the internal dynamics within Yemen in great turbulence in the beginning of 2015. A UN special advisor states, "The transition has encountered serious obstacles in the past, yet time and again Yemenis have managed to push forward. Today, Yemen is at a crossroad: either the country will descend into civil war and disintegration, or the country will find a way to put the transition back on track. This largely depends on the political will of Yemeni leaders. They all bear responsibility for the current status of affairs, as well as responsibility for finding a way to pull the country from the brink," according to Jamal Benomar (2015).

8.3 Loss of Saudi influence

The Shiite insurgent group al-Houthi's and their emergent role in Yemen might, in the case of Yemeni internal affairs, have worried the Saudi regime most. Saudi Arabia has military engaged the al-Houthi's in 2009, when internal fighting between the Yemeni government and the Shiite-group had a spillover effect on the Saudi border. Lawrence Rubin (2014: 129) states that, "By 2009, the Houthi rebellion came to be seen largely as a larger struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia along sectarian lines. Saudi Arabia's military intervention was partly justified by accusations of Iranian support for the rebels." The military campaign of 2009 was a rather humiliating affair for the Saudis, which did not prove to be an efficient engagement to stop the al-Houthi uprising. Moreover, the Saudi-led military campaign in March 2015 has its roots in preventing Iranian influence in their close proximity.

The al-Houthi group were in control of the country's capital Sana'a from September 21, 2014. Simon Henderson (2015) states that, "President Mansour Hadi did not block their initial advance on the capital last September, apparently out of fear that he would be accused of human rights violations; whether he will lesson his customary caution is unclear." However, Maysaa Shuja al-Deen (2014, October 22), in *al-Monitor,* suggests that the reason President Hadi didn't prevent al-Houthi's advance to the capital could be an attempt by President Hadi to allow the al-Houthi group to emerge to power in case the jihadist fighters from *Dāʿesh* may find a safe haven if the military campaign against them in Iraq and Syria escalates. Whatever the reason for Hadi accepting the influential role of the Shiite militant group in Yemen, the Saudi regime perceives it to be highly problematic. Simon Henderson (2015) states, "For Saudi Arabia, the events in Sana mean Riyadh must increasingly cope with two fronts: Sunni ISIS forces to the north, and Shiite Houthi forces – in Saudi terms, Iranian proxies – to the south." With the emergence of two fronts in terms of both military and ideological threats against the kingdom, the Saudis have focused on its northern front rather than the southern in the time period of 2011-2014. The focus on its northern front may be explained by the fact that Saudi Arabia sees *Dāʿesh* as a greater threat from both a military and ideological perspective. The terror group seeks its legitimacy from the Sunni branch of Islam, and, therefore, serves as a greater threat towards its religious principles than the Shiite branch, far distanced from the *Wahhabi*-tradition.

However, even though the thesis looks at the time period of 2011-2014, it is worth addressing the Saudi-led coalition with other GCC-states, Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt, which launched a military campaign in Yemen on March 25, 2015. An article in *Arab News* states, "Saudi Arabia and Gulf region allies have launched military operations including air strikes in Yemen, officials said, to counter Iran-allied forces besieging the southern city of Aden where the Yemeni president had taken refuge," according to *Arab News* (2015, March 26 b). This may suggest that the 'joint' military coalition including Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States, and Egypt that was planned to be set up in November 2014, has been activated in order to serve as a strong military force against Iranian influence and the Islamist threats in the region. It was reported through Saudi state media that Saudi Arabia participated in the 'joint' operation with approximately 150, 000 soldiers stationed at the border areas, and that 100 planes participated in air-strikes. In addition to support from other Arab states, the Islamic organisation IOC supported the Saudi-led military campaign. "The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has backed the military action in Yemen and slammed the Houthis for undermining the

country's legitimate government," according to Saeed al-Khotani (2015, March 27) in *Arab News*. The IOC support indicates that Saudi Arabia pursued its cultural diplomacy in order to gain wide support from the Sunni Muslim community.

An official statement from Saudi Arabia and other GCC-states suggests that the intervention has the purposes of both reducing the Iranian influence and engaging the Islamist threat that has evolved in Yemen. The joint statements claims, "This sinful aggression executed by internal Militias supported by forces from within who sold their conscience and are only concerned about their self-interests, and also supported by regional powers, whose objective is to dominate this country and to make it a base for their dominance in the region. This threat is not only menacing the security of Yemen only, but also the security of the entire region as well as the world peace and security […] including military intervention to protect Yemen and its people from continuous Houthi aggression and deter the expected attack to occur at any hour on the city of Aden and the rest of the southern regions, and to help Yemen in the face of al-Qaeda and ISIS," according to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015, March 26). The joint statement accused regional powers of supporting the 'militia', which are more precisely Iran supporting the al-Houthi group.

However, Shireen T. Hunter (2015) explores the Saudi paranoia about Iran and states that, "It [Saudi Arabia] has justified its aggression against regional states on the grounds that Iran and its regional proxies are threatening its security by trying to entice Shia populations throughout the Middle East to rise against existing political orders." The justification of an Iranian threat that provoked Saudi aggressive foreign policy behaviour is seen in both the case of Saudi engagement in Bahrain 2011, and, more recently, in Yemen 2015. Moreover, when considering the Saudi military campaign in Yemen March 2015 and how to explain the aggressive behaviour from an offensive realism perspective, I would argue that all five assumptions were present. First, the international system was anarchic, according to both the realist and constructivism definition. Second, Saudi Arabia possessed the offensive military capabilities it needed to undertake the campaign on its own. Third, Saudi Arabia was not sure about Iranian intentions in Yemen. Fourth, Saudi Arabia strived to maintain territorial integrity and the autonomy of the domestic political order in fear of the potential Iranian political influence in its proximity. Fifth, according to the realist thought of survival in an anarchic system, the Saudi intervention was a rational and strategic action in order to ensure its survival.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The Saudi 'paradigm' shift, from a cautious to a more aggressive and confrontational foreign policy, is related to the new challenges and opportunities conferred by the Arab upheavals. The Arab Spring led to pressure on Saudi Arabia on several fronts – internal, sub-regional, regional, and international. I do not follow the 'law-given' explanations for cause and effect, as usually seen through the prism of positivism. However, the Arab Spring is the most prominently observed cause for Saudi Arabia to undertake an aggressive foreign policy. This argument is based on observed foreign policy behaviour and the Saudi discourse, which contrasts significantly to that prior to the Arab upheavals. In the initial phase of the revolution, King Abdullah became uncertain about the potential for US support in the case of a massive domestic uprising along the lines of that of Egypt and Tunisia. The uncertainty led the kingdom to undertake a more assertive and independent regional and international role in order to ensure its regime security. However, the thesis shows that the aggressive foreign policy has to some extent contributed to creating new threats to the Saudi regime in terms of both ideational and military threats. These new threats need to be addressed in relation to the Saudi foreign policy, especially in the cases of Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in the attempt to diminish Iranian influence. The threat posed by *Dāʿesh* is the most prominent example, where King Abdullah has gathered all possible capabilities to neutralise the group. The international community, along with several regional countries and Saudi Arabia, have gathered to collective military campaign against the group.

In addition, there are many similarities in the roles played by King Abdullah and Prince Metternich. Abdallah strived to keep the status quo for the Middle Eastern monarchical regimes, in addition to that of its longstanding ally Egypt. The Saudi regime was in opposition to revolutionary aspirations for democracy and competitive ideologies within Sunni Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, over the period of 2011-2014. Most academics and analysts following Saudi Arabia and its foreign policy agree that the behaviour of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy follows counterrevolutionary politics. However, as the study shows, Saudi Arabia has not subsequently been following the academics' 'consensus-based' counterrevolutionary politics. The Saudi regime has not tried to reverse the Arab Spring as much as possible, but rather orientated itself to the new political reality.

The decisive factors for Saudi Arabia to engage counterrevolutionary politics in the wake of the Arab Spring, are as the thesis shows, primarily based on three factors. First, its strong opposition to democracy, as shown in the case of Bahrain and Egypt. Second, it's historical and present animosity to the Muslim Brotherhood, as shown in the case of Egypt. Third, Saudi Arabia's desire to downplay Iranian influence through the region, as also shown in the case of Bahrain, Syria/Iraq, Yemen, and, to some extent, in Egypt. All these factors include the notion of *Homeostasis*, or the maintenance of territorial integrity and social peace against external threats. Challenges which come from inside, such as demands for regional autonomy, are not the proper business of foreign policy until they become connected to the outside pressures. All three factors became connected to outside pressure as shown through the kingdom's foreign policy behaviour within the four cases.

The thesis shows that Saudi Arabia has pursued both its soft and hard power capabilities for reaching their national interests during the time period of 2011-2014. However, I have highlighted that regime security and the notion of survival could be seen from both a realism and constructivism perspective. As ideational and ideological threats can potentially undermine domestic stability and regime survival, I have found that Saudi Arabia has tried to counter-frame, especially to other Sunni Muslim groups. Groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and *Dāʿesh* have been particularly targeted, even though the vast majority of Sunni Muslims distance themselves from *Dāʿesh*. The Saudi regime's handling of the Muslim Brotherhood and *Dāʿesh* has both an internal-external influence on the kingdom's policy. On the other hand, from a realism perspective, Saudi Arabia has tried to remain influential in a regional context by cultivating its traditional allies and downplaying the Saudi traditional 'enemy', Iran. Saudi Arabia has worked to limit Iranian influence throughout the Middle East. The Saudi politics to reduce or prevent Iranian influence also have an internal-external influence in its policy. The kingdom has officially stated that Iran tries to influence the Gulf and Saudi internal politics upon several occasions.

The Saudi intervention in Bahrain is a prime example of Abdullah pursuing the counterrevolutionary path, as it crushed the democratic uprising. The intervention had a preventive character, as it worked to ensure the survival of the Al-Khalifa monarchy. However, the military intervention contained several other factors, such as deterring the Shiite population in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The kingdom also showed its capacity as a sub-regional great power in safeguarding other monarchies. Perhaps the most important issue by

intervening in Bahrain was to prevent and reduce the potential Iranian influence in its close proximity. This notion strengthens the view of Saudi foreign policy actions to be assessed through the prism of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Abdallah has pursued counterrevolutionary politics in Egypt by supporting the military establishment led by President al-Sisi against the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohammed Morsi. The Saudi strategy in Egypt focused on reversing the revolution that was in effect before the pre-revolutionary period. Moreover, the fall of the former Egyptian President Mubarak was perhaps the catalyst for King Abdullah to break with his foreign policy doctrine, previously described as cautious in its character. The Saudi regime needed, therefore, to orientate itself in the new Middle East, as the new reality became present for the Saudi monarch. Saudi involvement in Egypt has been focused on keeping the authoritarian system status quo in order to remain the role structure as a Kantian culture and a close regional ally. This policy has been done by countering the 'unstable' political system led by Mohammed Morsi for keeping regional stability with economic and diplomacy instruments, as Abdullah spoke of preventing radicalisation in Egypt. The other focus has been related to preventing the further growth of the Muslim Brotherhood, both regionally and domestically, as a political basis challenging the Saudi monarchy. Saudi foreign policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood remains as that of countering threatening ideologies and political systems that pose a threat to the legitimacy of the political alliance with the *Wahhabi* religious establishment and the royal family.

Saudi Arabia has not pursued a counterrevolutionary politics in Syria and Iraq during 2011-2014. Abdullah urged the Syrian President to initiate reforms when demonstrations started in Syria. The aim was to ensure regional stability in the initial phase of the Arab upheavals. Moreover, Abdullah has tried his best to depose the Syrian President al-Assad with the aim of downplaying Iranian influence in both Syria and Iraq. The Saudi strategy has focused on supporting opposition groups consisting of Sunni-Muslims against al-Assad and former Iraqi President al-Maliki. In addition, the Saudi regime has taken a distinct international role through its diplomacy related to the Syrian crisis. Saudi Arabia used harsh rhetoric for intervening military in the case of Syria, but did not possess the military capabilities it needed in order to engage alone. Instead, the Kingdom urged for collective military actions against the Syrian regime. As the collective military intervention did not take place, the Saudi regime has instead created a proxy theatre against its rival Iran, in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia has

with great help from its religious establishment and media, escalated the sectarian violence in this theatre.

Yemen is the other case that demonstrates that Saudi Arabia has not pursued counterrevolutionary politics in all instances in the wake of the Arab upheavals during 2011-2014. The Saudi regime did not safeguard the former Yemeni President; but rather created a transition plan through cooperation with other GCC-members in order to keep and ensure the stability in the proximity of the Kingdom. Yemeni internal affairs did, however, develop into a nightmare to Saudi Arabia in the wake of the Arab Spring. The country became defined as a failed state where anarchy flourished. Both the Sunni-radical group AQAP and the militant Shiite group al-Houthi fought for political/ideological and geographical influence in strong opposition to the Yemeni state, while Saudi Arabia was preoccupied with the situation in Syria and Iraq. The al-Houthi's gained control over the Yemeni capital during September 2014, and the internal fighting increased. By March 2015, the Saudis engaged militarily in a Saudi-led joint campaign towards the al-Houthi's, with strong support in GCC, Egypt and other regional monarchies with the aim of reducing Iranian influence.

The theory of realism, related to why states engage aggressively has not proven itself to be a great explanation of Saudi foreign policy in all the selected cases. The five causal assumptions, in order to explain aggressive behaviour, have been present to explain the Saudi intervention in Bahrain, but not in the case of Egypt, Syria/Iraq and Yemen in the period of 2011-2014. However, the causal assumptions have proved to be a good explanation of the Saudi military campaign in Yemen March 2015. In the case of Egypt, Saudi Arabia utilised its economic and diplomatic instruments rather than its military means. Saudi Arabia used harsh rhetoric for military intervention in the case of Syria, but did not possess the military capabilities it needed in order to engage alone. Besides the significant concept of regime security, Saudi Arabia has a national interest to serve as a regional hegemon over Iran, and at the sub-regional level on the Arabian Peninsula over the other GCC-members. I will strongly argue that Saudi Arabia saw its opportunity to change the political discourse and direction in light of the Arab Spring. Prior to the Arab upheavals, the Saudi regime had lost much of its influence to Iran, such as in Iraq, and, due to the Iranian 'belt' of influence, lost its political power in the Levant. Abdullah, therefore, perceived the uprisings as a great possibility to achieve its goal of becoming a regional hegemon. This perspective can, in many ways, explain the aggressive Saudi foreign policy behaviour that took place in the Syrian revolution

and the increasingly more instable Iraq. Already in the early phase of the uprisings, Abdullah found itself capable of countering the domestic revolution. Due to its political stability, Saudi Arabia has been able to focus and promote its foreign policy interests to a greater extent. Moreover, the Saudi regime saw the need to reduce the regime changes in other Middle Eastern countries, which had earlier been close allies to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In addition, the King Abdullah has tried to prevent other states such as in Bahrain, Egypt, and more recently in Yemen from emerging as Iran-friendly regimes.

However, the theory of constructivism has revealed itself as a good explanation for the Saudi behaviour in all cases. The Saudi regime has acted against socially constructed threats such as democracy and aspirations within political Islam. Examples of ideational threats posed by transnational groups are that of *Dāʿesh,* the Muslim Brotherhood and the al-Houthi's. The role structure between states, explored by Wendt, has shown that the Saudi regime has pursued counterrevolutionary politics towards countries the Saudis have enjoyed a Kantian role structure of diplomatic relations. The argument suggests that Saudi Arabia wanted to safeguard its allies by preventing regime changes and maintaining the Kantian role structure. The kingdom has enjoyed good diplomatic relations with both Bahrain and Egypt, built upon the notion of security and cooperation. Moreover, the Saudi regime has shown itself capable of exerting aggressive behaviour with military means towards countries that enjoy a Lockean role structure with Saudi Arabia. Examples of these cases involve the Saudi actions towards the Syrian regime, in Iraq, and in Yemen. All these actions have mainly concentrated on the Saudi strategy of reducing Iranian influence.

My findings have not contributed towards a definitive conclusion regarding what results the paradigm shift has led to in a long term perspective. It is difficult to predict the future stance of Saudi foreign policy. However, based on the findings of the study, there is a reason to believe that the Saudi regime want stronger cooperation between allied Sunni-Muslims states to counter the Saudi fears of the Shiite-Iranian regime and its allies. The argument is partly supported by the latest event of the Saudi-led coalition in operation 'Decisive Storm' and the formal agreement in the Arab League to create a joint military force. Saudi Arabia has regarded the talks in P5+1 and the Iranian nuclear deal with great scepticism. The kingdom fears that Iran would have the possibility to engage more actively in regional politics if the economic sanctions are to be removed or reduced, and thereby possess greater economic and political freedom. The aggressive foreign policy behaviour in the period of 2011-2014 has, as

already argued, contributed to create severe challenges to the Saudi regime. These challenges need to be confronted, in both a short and also a medium term of perspective, in order to safeguard regime survival. Saudi military operations such as that in Yemen strengthens my argument that the aggressive foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is an ongoing event. In addition, the Saudi Foreign Minister confirmed that Saudi involvement in the campaign against *Dāʿesh* will continue as long as it takes to neutralise the threat. These lines suggest that Saudi aggressive behaviour may continue in a long-term perspective.

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Appendix: Important Saudi decision-makers in the period 2011-2014

Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1924-2015): The Saudi King from 2005-2015, and the head of the House of Saʿud until he died January 2015.

Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1935-): Crown Prince under King Abdullah. He became King of Saudi Arabia after his half-brother, King Abdullah died in January 2015. He served the prominent role as the Governor of Riyadh from 1963 to 2011, and was appointed as Minister of Defence in 2011.

Saud bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1949-): Minister of Foreign Affairs during 1975-2015, April 29.

Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1963-): Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs 2011-present. Has previously served in the Saudi National Guard in different positions for fifteen years. Has worked as a delegate of the Saudi King in regional issues, and held many files on international relations in political and diplomatic tasks.

Bandar bin Sultan Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1949-): Appointed as the Saudi Ambassador to US from 1983-2005, and head of the Saudi General Intelligence Presidency from July, 19 2012 – April, 15 2014. He was the secretary general of the National Security Council from 2005 to January 2015. Served as director general of the Saudi Intelligence Agency from 2012 to 2014. He was appointed as King Abdullah`s special envoy on July 2014, which lasted until January 2015.

Sultan bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1928-2011): Served as the crown prince of Saudi Arabia during the period of 2005-2011. Appointed as Minister of Defence and Aviation during 1963 to 2011, and was Second Deputy Prime Minister 1982-2005.

Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1959-): Nephew of King Salman. He was appointed as Crown Prince on April 25, 2015, in addition to hold the position as Minister of Interior from 2012-present. He was appointed by King Salman to be chair of the Council for Political and Security Affairs in January 2015.

Nayef bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1934-2012): First Deputy Prime Minister from 2011-2012, and prior to this he served as Second Deputy Prime Minister from 2009-2011. Served the longstanding position as Minister of Interior during 1975-2012.

Turki bin Faisal al-Saʿud (1945-): Serves as the chairman of King Faisal Center for Research & Islamic Studies. He has previously been Director General of the General Intelligence Presidency (GIP), Saudi Arabia's main foreign intelligence service, from 1977 until 2001. In 2002 he was appointed as the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, a position he served until 2005, when he was appointed as Ambassador to the United States until 2006. He retired in 2007.

Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1949-): Deputy Minister of Defence 2011-2013.

Mutaib bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saʿud (1952): Serves as the Minister of National Guard from 2013-present. Had previously the position as the Chief of National Guard during 2010-2013.

Abdul Latif Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh (1941-): A direct descendant of the founder of Wahhabism, Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Was appointed as the Grand Mufti in Saudi Arabia in 1999. He serves as the Chairman of the Saudi Council of Senior Ulama. In addition, he serves as the head of the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas.

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