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A Comparative Study of Middle Eastern Foreign Policy: How Middle Eastern Intelligence Agencies Shape Current Events

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A Comparative Study of Middle Eastern Foreign Policy

How Middle Eastern Intelligence Agencies
Shape Current Events

by

Megan Fink

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
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ABSTRACT

This study monitored the intelligence and foreign policy actions of Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia from August 2013 to August 2014. Data was collected from coverage by Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, and Al-Jazeera, three reliable and respected news sources that cover global events. The actions taken by foreign policymakers in these countries were recorded throughout the study period.

These actions were organized into a taxonomy based on whether they were intelligence-based or non-intelligence based. Within those broad categories, more distinguishing characteristics were analyzed to show patterns of behavior within national intelligence services of the nations studied. These patterns show a lot about how these nations approach diplomacy and national security.

Conclusions were drawn with respect to these nations' intelligence communities by focusing through the lenses of comparative religion, economic considerations, colonial background, and cold war history. By concentrating on the socioeconomic environment behind these foreign policy actions, political scientists and policymakers can more completely analyze foreign affairs, particularly in the Middle East, and can make more valuable contributions to the global intelligence community and to cultural understanding between nations.

Key Terms: foreign policy, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Intelligence, spies, global affairs, Middle East

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INTRODUCTION

Spies, by their nature, are illusive. Intelligence communities and the Middle East are both the frequent subjects of romance novels, action movies, and conspiracy theories. In this paper, the two will be combined in an academic light. Foreign policy and particularly intelligence has sociopolitical, economic, and historical influences and ramifications that, if analyzed, may tell a lot about the politics and culture of a nation.

This study will monitor the intelligence and foreign policy actions of three Middle Eastern countries from August 2013 to August 2014 and draw conclusions about their intelligence communities by focusing through the lenses of comparative religion, economic considerations, colonial background, and Cold War history. The nations studied will be Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel.

It is important to note that this study will be using the actions of these nations, as opposed to the decisions (which may not be properly executed) or the news coverage thereof. While the intentions of policymakers and the news coverage of events are important and will be used as analytical considerations, the actual data is the event itself.

This study compares the historical and economic backgrounds of the nations studied to their modern foreign policy decisions. What makes this study truly different from scholarly work so far is its focus on intelligence communities within those nations. This emphasis on intelligence communities serves to limit the study for the sake of brevity, as well as provide more concrete analysis on the topic of Middle Eastern intelligence than is currently available to readers without a security clearance.

Little research has been done specifically on Middle Eastern intelligence communities and how these communities are involved in the foreign affairs of the nations that they serve. It is therefore the purpose of this research to deduce through current international news the involvement of intelligence work in foreign policy decisions in the Middle East region.

The second goal is to analyze why these agencies have the roles that they do. This analysis will employ the background information of religious predisposition and recent history to offer some explanation for the decision-making processes behind the actions that will unfold in the next year. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel were chosen because how little those nations have in common. Israel is a Jewish state that was inserted into the region mostly by European influence; Saudi Arabia has a stable monarchy and a fundamentalist Wahhabi religious tradition; Iran has a Shia majority with mystical Sufi influence and a recent history of political turmoil and revolution.

The purpose of the study is to improve scholarly understanding of the complicated nature of affairs in the Middle East. Without a knowledge of historical and religious differences between the countries, one can only make decisions based on the assumption that everyone is an American; that is, that any rational actor holds the same values and ideas of importance as the West. Though the study is written from an American perspective, its intention is not to serve U.S. foreign policy goals, but rather to analyze the actions of the nations studied for a better global understanding.

METHODOLOGY

PROCEDURE

The foreign policy decisions and actions of the nations studied (Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel) were monitored over a period of 13 months from August of 2013 to August of 2014. The data for the study was collected from the Wall Street Journal, the Associated Press, and Al Jazeera English. That data was cross-referenced and analyzed to find references to the intelligence networks that were involved in the events.

From there, the analysis will look at sociopolitical, historical, and economic factors at work in the nations studied. This study aims to analyze some of the political reasons for and ramifications of the actions of Middle Eastern foreign policymakers and, by extension, intelligence operatives involved in those events. The work of the intelligence communities will be categorized and analyzed according to criteria designed to separate significantly different activities.

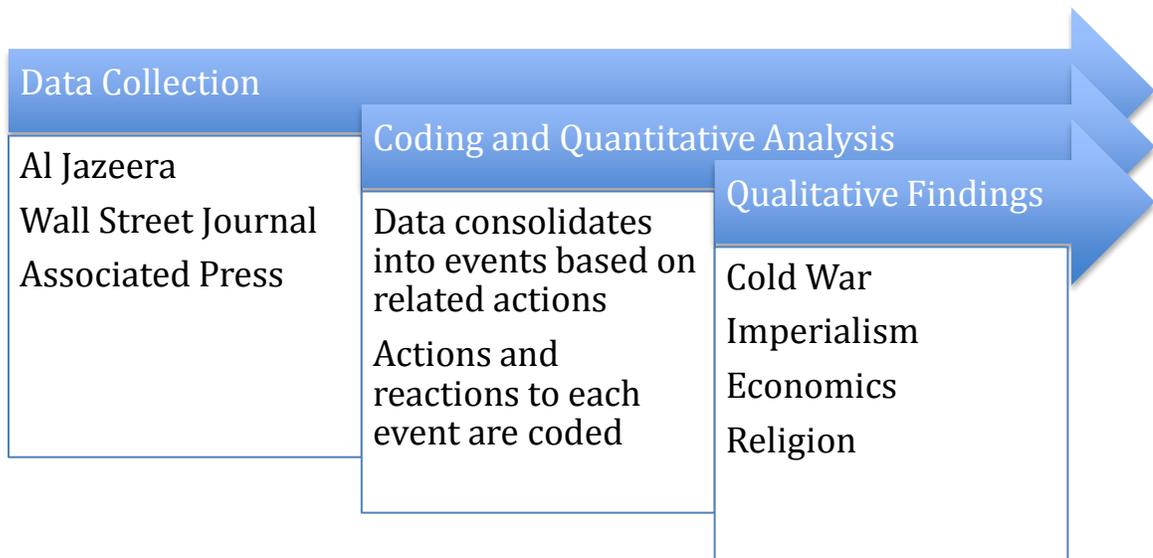


Table 1: Methodology Process

CRITERIA OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Each reference to intelligence-related activity will be categorized according to emerging patterns. Three basic patterns are expected.

CAPTURED HOSTILE PERSONNEL

Hypothetically, a captured Iranian spy held in Mossad custody could provide valuable information that would change Israeli foreign policy. Such activities would be classified in this category.

DATA COLLECTED SURREPTITIOUSLY FROM FOREIGN SOIL

For example, photos taken at the Israel-Syria border that show Israeli troop movement could inspire Iran, Syria's ally, to take action. Stolen documents, artifacts, photos, or other physical but non-human evidence would be classified here. This is expected to be prevalent if spy drones are widely used.

PARAMILITARY OPERATIONS

Saudi Arabian intelligence services' efforts to train Syrian rebels in military operations would be considered a paramilitary action, as would, for instance, an Iranian operative's attempted assassination of a Saudi Arabian prince.

Other foreign policy decisions may not directly involve intelligence communities. These events will also be recorded and categorized as follows.

- DIPLOMATIC STATUS MANIPULATION
 - Ending or forming ties with a nation or group; for example, President Rouhani calls President Obama to discuss an improvement of relations.

- WAR GAMES
 - Moving troops within or between countries or mobilizing any military forces, but without directly engaging in combat, will be categorized here.

- MILITARY OPERATIONS
 - Any act of war or open violence between the nations studied will be categorized here.

If patterns emerge from the recorded foreign policy actions of a specific country, or if the intelligence communities of each country seem to specialize in one or two of the categories, this taxonomy will be invaluable in creating a reliable picture of that nation's intelligence culture and patterns. Further, this paper will try to analyze how that nation's specialization can be tied to its religious, colonial, or economic, and/or Cold War background.

DATA SOURCES

The Associated Press is a syndicated global news network. It was chosen because its publication generally offers little analysis, which may distract from the data. An advantage of this publication is that it is not written by one nationality or political group of writers. The wide range of nationalities of its writers might make it more likely to cover stories that may not be covered by a predominantly American or Arab news outlet, for example. The variety of journalists working for AP may allow for a wider range of data to be collected.

The Wall Street Journal was chosen for its detailed global news section and attention to the Middle East. Prior to the study, the publication was known to have several reporters stationed in the area to provide first-degree accounts of events without relying on syndicated reports. The Journal offers a bit more analysis than the Associated Press, but not as much as most network news sources.

Al-Jazeera English will be used because of its intensive coverage of Middle East politics. There are many stories that only Al-Jazeera tends to cover, and that makes it invaluable as a source of as much data as possible. The downside to Al-Jazeera is that the publication has largely Arab writers and editors, so it may be more likely to include biased accounts of, for example, Israeli wrongdoing in Gaza. This effect will be mitigated by the presence of Wall Street Journal, which tends to be geared towards U.S. conservatives, who will be more pro-Israel.

Over 180 news articles were recorded over the course of the study that gave information about or attempted to analyze the intelligence or foreign policies of Iran, Israel, or Saudi Arabia. These were organized according to relevance, then categorized by date and topic into four major events: The Syrian civil war, Iran's change in diplomacy, the Gaza War, and the rise of ISIL.

These events are certainly not all-inclusive of everything that has happened in the Middle East over the past year, but many other important topics can be thought of as cohesive with this general timeline.

After this quantitative analysis, the events, the foreign policy actions that make them up, and other nations' reactions to them will be analyzed according to the

sociopolitical and economic backgrounds of those nations. Factors of religious identity, economics, cold war history and colonial history will be considered in an analysis to suggest causative cultural influences on the foreign policies of nations studied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is one of the most economically affluent Arab states in the modern Middle East. Its religious, conservative Wahhabi majority sees the centuries-old al-Sa'ud ruling family as legitimate because of the religious origin of the family's rule. Revolt or offense against the monarchy would be a religious as well as political crime, as long as the family remains loyal to Wahhabi and Islamic sensibilities. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia has been one of the friendliest states to Western oil interests because of the opportunistic capitalism that guides Saudi foreign policy towards the west. Saudi Arabian intelligence has been active in recent years with public cooperation with the US and a few somewhat-less-public "spy"¹ movements.

WAHHABISM

Saudi Arabia is home to a large concentration of Wahabi Muslims. Wahhabism, a subset of Sunni Islam, is founded on the teachings of Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, who lived in the early 18th century in what is now Saudi Arabia. The name "Wahhabi" was given to the group by its detractors, and implies that the sect is not to be followed or trusted.² Followers of the sect instead refer to themselves as al-da'wa ila'l-tawhid, which translates to something like "Unitarian."³

¹ This study does not use the word "spy" to mean an employee or agent of a state's intelligence service except when quoting this usage of the word by a news source.

² Most Western writers have used the word "Wahabi" in studies of the sect for its clarity and recognition with Western audiences, without any derogatory connotation. That is how it is intended here.

³ George Rentz and Arberry, A. J. "The Wahhabis." *Religion in the Middle East: three religions in concord and conflict*. London: Cambridge U.P., 1969. V.2, pp 270-284. Print.

Wahhabism was inspired as a response to the common practice of “shirk,” or syntheism in other Muslim traditions of the time, such as that of Jaliyyah. This concept involves association of animals or objects with the divine, thereby making them seem artificially sacred. Al-Wahhab, who was theologically educated in Medina, saw this practice as heresy and idolatry, and considered those who engaged in it to be not Muslims at all. He instead preached the concept of “tawhid,” or unity.⁴ He stressed the omnipotence and uniqueness of God’s divine nature and the importance of avoiding any changes to doctrines and religious practices, in order to avoid heresies like syntheism. He instead sought to return to the Qur’an and Hadith to the exclusion of later teachings and additions to Islam.

Muhammad al-Wahhab was known to say, “We, praise be to God, are followers, not innovators.”⁵ A study of the cultural and political implications of Wahhabism can be focused on its ritualistic traditionalism and resistance to change. These concepts are rooted in the fabric of the sect’s core teachings, but came to fruition during its period of Western influence and colonization.

ACHIEVING INDEPENDENCE

In 1744, Muhammad al-Wahhab struck an agreement with a minor ruler named Muhammad Sa’ud, securing Sa’ud’s support of the new Wahhabi religious movement in exchange for promised political power.⁶ Muhammad Sa’ud’s successors continued to gain power and lands through military dominance and connection to the popular Wahhabi movement. The Sa’ud family seized Mecca and Medina from the Ottoman occupation,

⁴ Rentz, p. 271

⁵ Rentz, p. 270

⁶ Rentz, p. 272

but was defeated by Egypt under Muhammad Ali in 1818.⁷ The family became important again in 1902 with Abd al-Aziz, commonly known as Ibn Sa'ud.

Ibn Sa'ud was deeply religious. The only formal education he received was of a very staunchly traditional Wahhabi nature. However, he had a pragmatic view of non-Wahhabi cultures and states because of his adolescence spent living in exile in Kuwait.⁸ During a time of global industrialization, Sa'ud was able to modernize without losing his domestic Wahhabi traditionalism (or at least the appearance of it). This pro-modernism allowed him to achieve military and diplomatic success even against global powers like Great Britain, which protected petroleum interests in the Arabian Peninsula with military force. In a campaign to evict British rule from the Arabian peninsula, Ibn Sa'ud called upon the religious loyalty of the Bedouin nomads, which represented a large portion of his military force.

After the wars with the British, the militant Wahhabi Bedouins accused Ibn Sa'ud of practicing watered-down Wahhabism because of his restraint and discouragement of Bedouin "jihad" in the wars. They revolted against the king in 1928, but the rebellion was crushed. This rebellion and its end marked the transition from religious to more political goals in the Saudi monarchy.

In 1932, Saudi Arabia was declared a consolidated state that would bear the name of King Ibn Sa'ud, the first in the still-ruling line of Al-Sa'ud rulers in the modern Saudi Arabian kingdom. The 1930's brought the discovery of Saudi oil and its importance, and

⁷ Bowen, Wayne H. (2008). *The History of Saudi Arabia*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press. p. 153

⁸ Ibid.

the economy of Saudi Arabia profited immensely. It also brought a new tolerance for the Christian geologists who were coming from the West to seek oil. The oil industry and its incredible profitability forced the industrialization of a naturally revolution-resistant Wahabi culture, which in turn forced a change in Saudi society. The Wahhabis transitioned from a staunchly fundamentalist, religion-based society to one that is concerned with global economic and political affairs.

The traditionalist fabric remained at the core of Saudi culture, so it was some time before domestic Saudi government caught up with its tolerant foreign policy. At the time of Ibn Sa'ud's death in 1953, Saudi Arabia had no constitution, parliament, political parties, or bureaucracy.⁹ The al-Sa'ud family's legitimacy was based on its 18th century pact with Muhammad al-Wahab, and the laws of the nation were Shari'ah in essence.

In the mid-20th century, King Faisal instituted education and social welfare programs that created a Western-educated elite to staff the new bureaucracy. However, the new elite were excluded from the decision-making process, preserving the monarchical nature of the government's core.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

A disconnect still exists between the tolerant, capitalistic nature of the al-Sa'ud royalty's foreign policy towards the West and the fundamentalist Wahhabi source of its legitimacy. The ability to keep those spheres separate is itself a Western political idea,

⁹ Cleveland, William L., and Martin Bunton. "The Arabian Peninsula in the Petroleum era." *A history of the modern Middle East*. 5th ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2013. 394-398. Print.

and probably stems from the British (or even Ottoman) overtones of its modern oil-based state.

Saudi Arabia's GDP was 748 billion USD in 2013, and 55% of that is a result of the oil market. Its economy is mostly oil-based.¹⁰ About 93% of Saudi budget revenues and 90% of its exports can be attributed to the energy sector.¹¹ The country controls about 18% of the world's proven oil reserves.¹² Saudi Arabia has been trying to diversify its income with manufacturing, but most of the manufacturing laborers are immigrants from Africa. About 31% of the Saudi population is made up of non-nationals, and only 15% of foreign workers are classified as skilled labor. Economists have noticed an ethnic hierarchy that determines the sort of job one may expect to find in Saudi Arabia, ranging from unskilled labor from Africa and the Indian subcontinent to Western or Arab skilled labor.¹³ The Saudi government wants Saudi people in these positions, but faces similar issues that the US government faces with immigration control and employment rates.¹⁴

There are more educated, skilled Saudi Arabians than there are careers for educated and skilled people in Saudi Arabia. This makes skilled laborers one of the chief exports of Saudi Arabia, much to the government's chagrin.¹⁵

The duality between Saudi Arabia's ultra-religious domestic face and the petroleum-infused pragmatism of its foreign relations leads to some very complicated

¹⁰ "Data by Country: GDP (current US\$)." *The World Bank*. n.p., n.d. Web. 12 Oct. 2014. <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>>.

¹¹ "2012 Exports figures of Saudi Arabia". CIA World Factbook.

¹² "Saudi Arabia". OPEC. 1995-01-01. Retrieved 2014-10-08.

¹³ Lytras, Miltiadis D. (2009). *Knowledge Ecology in Global Business: Managing Intellectual Capital*. pp. 7–8.

¹⁴ "Saudi Arabia. Profile". *11/2001*. US government. Retrieved 12 May 2014.

¹⁵ Ibid.

foreign policy decisions for the al-Sa'ud family. However, in contrast to Iran, Arabia has the advantage of centuries-old monarchical tradition and the domestic power security to make unpopular decisions without fear of immediate domestic revolt from its ultra-traditionalist population.¹⁶ This stability comes in handy to a country as economically influential as Saudi Arabia.

RECENT FOREIGN POLICY AND INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITY

Al-Mukhabarat al-Amaah, the Saudi intelligence service, has been active in the news in recent months. In spring of 2013, Saudi Arabian counterintelligence arrested a “foreign spy ring” of 18 suspected intelligence operatives. Most were Saudi Arabian nationals, but there were also one Lebanese and one Iranian in the roundup.¹⁷ The Saudi government’s willingness to publicly announce this discovery might be rather telling about who they considered to be their biggest political threats at the beginning of the study. Even more telling is with whom they openly cooperated: in February of 2013, the CIA used a Saudi Arabian military base as a literal launch pad for strikes against militants in Yemen.¹⁸ That instance is not unusual; the two agencies have over a decade of cooperation behind them dating back to September 11, 2001.¹⁹

The impression given by recent events is that Saudi intelligence officials have the authority and ability to participate in paramilitary attacks, and that the foreign policies of

¹⁶ Obaid, Nawaf E. “In Al-Saud We Trust.” *Foreign Policy* No. 128 (Jan. - Feb., 2002), pp. 72-74

¹⁷ Al Jazeera. "Saudi Arabia arrests 18 suspected spies." *AJ English- Middle East*. n.p., n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

¹⁸ Al Jazeera. "CIA 'using Saudi base for drone strikes'." *AJ English- Middle East*. n.p., n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

¹⁹ Grenier, Robert. "Misconceiving the intelligence war." *AJ English- Opinion*. n.p., n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

the current administration tend to be more pro-Western, either for political or economic reasons.

As data on current foreign policy is gathered, it is important to realize Saudi Arabia's particular position in the Middle East. The leadership has an interest in playing up its sense of obligation to other Arab states in the region because of its affluence and reputation of religious conservatism.²⁰ However, due to almost completely non-religious differences, it has rocky relationships with Yemen and Iraq, two Islamic states. The irony cannot be ignored that the religious tradition that gives the al-Sa'ud family its power is the same tradition that makes its policy decisions so complicated.

²⁰ Kechichian, Joseph A. "Trends in Saudi National Security." *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 232-253.

IRAN

Iran differs from many of its neighbors in that it is not Arab. The majority of the people of Iran are Persian by ethnicity and Shia Muslim by faith, and those two factors influence much of Iranian politics. In contrast to Saudi Arabia's centuries-old royal lineage, Iran has seen revolution after revolution since its formation, and their foreign policy remains unpredictable.

PERSIAN ISLAM

Ancient Persia's religious identity was originally Zoroastrian, a tradition that highly centralized angels, the moral nature of mankind, and the existence of an afterlife.²¹ After the defeat of the Sasanid empire by Arab forces, the two religions existed together for more than two hundred years. The rise of Islam's popularity in Iran was done gradually, and usually through conversion rather than force.

The split between Sunni and Shia Islam had a great effect on Iranian spiritual identity. When Mohammed died, some of his followers believed that succession according to the Quran should be by consensus among Muslims, and wanted Abu Bakr, Mohammed's father-in-law, to lead the Muslim community. This group became the foundation for the Sunni tradition. The Shia sect is a global minority, and is the result of a group of Mohammed's followers who believed that only direct descendants of the prophet should succeed him. They wanted Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, to be the next leader, followed by Mohammed's grandsons.

²¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Arberry, A.J. "Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism and Iranian Islam." *Religion in the Middle East: three religions in concord and conflict*. London: Cambridge U.P., 1969. 96-118. Print.

In early Islamic history, Iran was mostly Sunni, even though Shi'ism is of Persian origin. Shi'ism did not become the state religion of Iran until the establishment of the Safavid empire following the Mongol conquest of Persia. Shi'ism spread rapidly, again through evangelism more than force. Today Shi'ism dominates Iran except for areas such as Khurasan and Kurdistan.²²

Sufism, a mystical sect of Islam, also influences Iranian religion significantly. The inner, most esoteric teachings of Sufism are reserved for those who have been qualified for their study; the movement is largely cloistered. However, Sufi poetry, music, and art have been raised to such a status as to make a significant mark on Persian culture.

Shia spirituality is focused on the duality between Allah's omnipotence and man's obligation to free will. Mankind must choose the "right path" without compulsion. Another important concept is the transient nature of physical things. Persian culture is very much taken with art and literature, but recognizes that something beautiful can never be truly experienced again. Shia prayer commonly involves a musical chanting of the Qu'ran during which worshippers achieve a kind of trance that removes them from the worldly cares of life.²³ The physical world, therefore, can bring Shia worshippers closer to a oneness with God, which is the ultimate goal of the spirituality. No part of the world surrounding a Shia Muslim can be ignored for its religious and divine significance. (This may sound rather at odds with the purist Wahhabi commitment against syntheism and idolatry.) However, Shi'ism is always pursued with a rueful acknowledgement that this goal can never be fully realized without divine intervention. Therefore, intermediaries are

²² Nasr, p. 100

²³ Nasr, p, 103

needed between mankind and the divine: these mediators are the twelve Imams that succeeded the prophet Muhammad. These Imams are rather like saints, and devout Shia often pray to them for intercession.

This focus on the leadership of holy men allows for religious judicial authorities like that of Ayatollah Khomeini, who led the 1979 Islamic revolution and established the current, religion-based Iranian government.

COLONIALIZATION

Until the late 18th century, a family of religious Shia monarchs ruled Iran. The Qajar shahs based their religious validity on their piety and depth of learning rather than a natural divine nature. This was the first step away from a purely religion-based government in Iran. However, the rulings of the Mujtahids, religious judges headed by the Ayatollah (eye of God), were considered more valid than even those of the Shah. This is similar to the modern role of the Ayatollah over the president of Iran.

Iran was culturally stable in the 19th century, and avoided the European-inspired reforms that were being undertaken by Turkey and Egypt.²⁴ Russia occupied territories claimed by Iran by the Caspian Sea, including parts of Azerbaijan. In 1828, Russia imposed the Treaty of Turkomanchai on Iran, which granted Russia economic rights of passage through Iranian waters and lowered tariff rates on trade between the nations. Iran was militarily unable to refuse, but the British challenged Russia's influence by presenting their own very similar treaty with Iran in 1857. This allowed economic

²⁴ Cleveland, William L., and Martin Bunton. "Egypt and Iran in the Late Nineteenth Century." *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 5th ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2013. 103. Print.

competition between Britain and Russia on Iranian soil, which brought Iran into a global economy with cheap imports with which it could not compete. Iran would export raw materials and import manufactured goods from Europe. This meant that Iran would be unable to economically disentangle itself from Europe, giving both Britain and Russia a position of political power over the shah.

COLD WAR IRAN

The Cold War was an especially turbulent period for Iran. Reza Shah overthrew the Qajar regime in the early 1920's with a British-supported coup d'état. He did much to modernize Iran during his 20 years of often-despotic rule, but was forced by the invading British military to abdicate the throne in 1941 because of his refusal to aid the Allies during WWII.²⁵ His abdication thrust his son, Mohammed Reza Shah, into an insecure throne in Russian and British-occupied Tehran. The new ruler was forced to share power with several factions and political parties, which encouraged public disapproval of the monarch. When he was pressured into signing a domestically unpopular oil deal, the situation worsened.²⁶

Growing sentiment against a Europe that was seen as taking economic advantage of Iran came to a tipping point in the early 1950's, when Mohammed Mossadeq, a popular nationalist leader, convinced Iran's legislative body to nationalize Iran's oil resources. The West responded with a boycott on Iranian goods. This effectively shut

²⁵ Milani, Abbas. *The Shah*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

²⁶ Cleveland, William L., and Martin Bunton. "Democracy and Authoritarianism." *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 5th ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2013. 271-279. Print.

down Iran's oil income. Mossadeq became Prime Minister and continued to reform the Iranian government and remove power from the Shah, including that of the military, which weakened Iran's defenses.

Some of the military officers that had lost their positions in the reinvention of the military formed a secret plot in 1953 to overthrow the new leader. The U.S. provided CIA assistance, both to support British oil interest and to prevent the new Iranian government from steering the country toward the Soviet side of the Cold War. Mohammed Reza Shah was returned to power and fortified his throne with heavy-handed repression of dissent, enforced by his secret police, called SAVAK. SAVAK was known to abduct and torture Iranian nationals, which added to the mystique of fear and hate around the shah's regime.

To this day, public opinion in Iran detests and distrusts any attempt by the U.S. or Europe to change the course of Iranian governmental policy or any attempt by an Iranian leader to improve relations with the West. The Iranian people, who since the early 20th century had been unable to gain freedom from European involvement, were near to that goal until the U.S. and Britain interfered in the name of economic and Cold War gains.

In 1979, the Islamic Revolution was led by Ayatollah Khomeini, a strict religious cleric and public critic of the Shah who had been exiled to Europe. The Shah, dying of cancer, was overthrown and forced to flee the country. He was granted asylum in the United States. Because of this, the U.S. embassy was attacked and many of its employees were held hostage for 444 days in an event referred to as the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Since the revolution, Iran has been fairly secluded on a global scale, and has shut out contact with most other nations.

Ayatollah Khomeini's government was based on the validity of his own religious power; the Ayatollah's word is the ultimate source of law in Iran. The Revolutionary Guards to have taken the place of SAVAK as the secret police whose job it is to protect the Supreme Leader. However, Iran also has executive and legislative bodies that resemble those of the United States. These sources of law are underneath the authority of the Ayatollah.

When Khomeini's government shut the West out of Iran, diplomatic relations iced over for decades. Khomeini similarly alienated Arab allies with his message of religion-based Shari'ah government and his wish to export his revolutionary ideas, leading many of them to side with Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war.²⁷ The West has viewed Iran as a threat since the Hostage Crisis, and the introduction of a nuclear program in Iran after the conclusion of the Cold War lead to even more strained relations.

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Iran has a mixed economy with a strong reliance on its hydrocarbon resources, which include both oil and natural gas. Prior to this study, Iran did not have a large amount of trade with the West, though several companies have gained permission to look for oil in Iranian territory. Much of the government is centrally controlled²⁸, and heavy taxation and regulation burden private ventures. Islamic organizations called Bonyads have until recently controlled about 20% of Iran's GDP and are not taxed.²⁹ The subsidy reform act passed in early 2010 was meant to replace sweeping subsidies on food and

²⁷ Cleveland, 359

²⁸ "A survey of Iran: Stunted and distorted". *The Economist* (2003)

²⁹ Molavi, Afshin, *Soul of Iran*, Norton, (2006), p.17

energy with targeted social reform and to move the country towards market prices by 2015.³⁰

Many economists expect Iran's economy to improve with lessened government control and improved relations with the West.³¹ If sanctions are lifted, the Iranian economy can be expected to improve drastically, very quickly.³² That may be a big "If," though. The conservative, anti-west voices in Iran would prefer to improve Iran's economy from within, and see any seeking of Western favor as a betrayal.

FOREIGN POLICY AND INTELLIGENCE ACTIONS

Iran had not until very recently warmed to any Western powers. Ayatollah Khomeini died and was succeeded by Khomeini. The more radical President Ahmadinejad, who participated in the 1979 revolution as a student, was replaced in 2010 by the comparatively moderate Rouhani, who began to make diplomatic appeals to the West, particularly the U.S. The effects of this dramatic change in policy are included in this study, as are the effects of Iran's pride in its nuclear power program.

The Ministry of Intelligence and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (MOIS in Farsi), Iran's intelligence ministry, is a crucial and highly trusted source of

³⁰"Cut those subsidies." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 30 Apr. 2014. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

³¹ "Countries at the Crossroads 2007: A survey of democratic governance." *Freedom House*. Freedom House, n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

³² Lynn, Matthew. "Are you brave enough to invest in Iran?" *MarketWatch*. n.p., n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

information in Iran.³³ It provides a security brief to all senior executives in the Iranian government each morning, just like the CIA.

The MOIS has made headlines in recent years mostly for executing suspected spies caught on Iranian soil³⁴ or for allegations that it was behind a terrorist plot.³⁵ Little is directly known about Iran's intelligence actions, but the state-run Iranian media isn't shy about disseminating stories (and plenty of corroborating evidence) to outlets like Al-Jazeera about the strength of their Intelligence service and nuclear program.

³³ Marashi, Reza, and Sahar Namazikhah. "Tehran looks ready to tango." *AJ English-Opinion*. n.p., n.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

³⁴ Al Jazeera. "Iran executes two suspected spies." *AJ English- Middle East*. N.p., 19 May 2013. Web. 14 Oct. 2014. , ³⁴ Al Jazeera. "Iran executes 'Mossad spy'." *Al Jazeera English*. N.p., 22 Nov. 2008. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

³⁵ Al Jazeera. "Probe identifies suspects over Lockerbie bomb." *AJ English- Europe*. N.p., 11 Mar. 2013. Web. 14 Oct. 2014. , Carlstrom, Gregg. "Iran's 'involvement'." *Al Jazeera English*. N.p., 25 Oct. 2010. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

ISRAEL

Israel definitely stands out from its neighbors in the Middle East. It is Jewish by official religion and by overwhelming majority. Many non-practicing or non-religious Israelis would describe themselves as Jewish because of ethnic or other secular backgrounds. Many Israeli citizens moved to the country from Europe. The history of the state of Israel as we know it doesn't even date before the 20th century. Instead of being constantly at odds with Western influence, Israel was created by the United Nations at the hand of countries like the U.S. and Britain. Most of Israel's Middle Eastern neighbors don't acknowledge the nation's sovereignty or even its existence.

ISRAELI JUDAISM

Israel is made up of a collection of mostly European, mostly Jewish immigrants. Because of its patchwork of backgrounds and ethnic origins, the nation is home to a variety of sects of Judaism. The one common thread connecting most of the different subgroups is Zionism, the idea that Israel is the scriptural Jewish homeland and that the Israeli state has an ancient, lawful claim to and responsibility for the territory.³⁶

The Torah says that Israel has always been “a nation dwelling by itself, not counted among the peoples.”³⁷ Many Jewish prayers and rituals have a central theme of returning to the homeland that God intended for his “chosen people.” While many Jewish communities see this call as a return to a closeness with God or a metaphorical home in

³⁶ Many Arab and Muslim sources use the term “Zionist” in a derogatory context, and the word has a political meaning in Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East beyond the definition provided. This explanation is given to define the word's use for purposes of this study only.

³⁷ Numbers 23:9

their faith, most Israeli Jews interpret this call to be a literal command to return to the area that was once held by the ancient Hebrew tribes.

FORMATION OF ISRAEL

The modern Zionist movement was popularized by the publication of Dr. Theodor Herzl's Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State) in Vienna in 1896³⁸. After the publication of that book, the Jewish communities in urban Europe began speaking in earnest of a Jewish homeland, particularly in the Middle East, in much more realistic terms. The idea was now less of a thought experiment and more of a political position.

Anti-Jewish sentiment existed in Europe from before the Crusades, but World War I began a period of mass migration of Jews out of Eastern Europe. Many of them went to Vienna, New York, or London, but others went instead to Palestine. There, Jewish communities would commonly live in communes known as "kibbutzes," which employed co-operative economic systems in small groups. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 formalized the British support of a Jewish homeland, at least in theory.

The provisions of the declaration began to materialize with waves of Jewish settlers in the region in the 20's, but the state of Israel didn't officially exist until after World War II. A new wave of Jewish refugees escaping Nazi persecution flooded Palestine. European sympathy for survivors of the Holocaust and desire to establish a state in the Middle East that was friendly to European interests inspired the U.N. to carve a Jewish state out of the occupied territory surrounding Jerusalem.

³⁸ Norman Bentwich and Arberry, A. J. "Judaism in Israel." *Religion in the Middle East: three religions in concord and conflict*. London: Cambridge U.P., 1969. V.1, pp 59-119. Print.

In 1948, U.N. Resolution 181 created the sovereign state of Israel. The U.S. and most European states immediately recognized the nation. Most Arab countries, however, viewed the Jewish settlement as another sort of European occupation that had to be ousted in order to achieve cultural and political independence from their colonial owners. Israel's gradual military acquisitions of territory over the next decades only exacerbated the hostility and challenged the religious sentiment of the Muslims who also considered the land to be holy in their own tradition.

20TH CENTURY ISRAEL

This hostility was very apparent during and after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Both sides of the war were thoroughly entrenched with Cold War superpowers: Israel with the United States and the Many Arab nations, such as Syria and Egypt, with the Soviet Union.

Syria attacked the Golan Heights while Egypt launched an offensive across the Suez Canal, successfully crossing over to and maintaining the East bank.³⁹ Anwar Sadat of Egypt did not wish to gain more territory than the eight miles of desert east of the Suez Canal. That was enough to secure the canal and regain the military image lost in Egypt's defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War that lost them the entire Sinai Peninsula. Israel's defenses reclaimed the land that Egypt had gained in the first days of the conflict by launching an offensive during a cease-fire that was called for the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. They came within striking distance of Cairo, forcing Sadat to accept the cease-fire arranged between U.S. and Soviet officials.

³⁹ Cleveland, William L., and Martin P. Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 4th ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2009. Print.

In 1978, Sadat and Manachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister, signed the Camp David Peace Accords that had been arranged by U.S. President James Carter. The following year, the two signed a formal peace treaty that normalized the relations between the two countries. Egypt, the Pan-Arab, nationalist stronghold of the Middle East, recognized the state of Israel and exchanged ambassadors with the Jewish nation. This move forever changed the dynamic between the two countries, as well as between Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. At the time of this writing, the only two Arab nations to recognize Israel's sovereignty are Egypt and Jordan, which under King Hussein had friendly relations with Israel.

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Israel has a highly developed market economy, which is made up of a diverse range of industries such as tourism, high technology, diamonds, and telecommunication. Its 2014 GDP was \$286.840 billion USD. Large Israeli cities are similar in size and technology to those of Europe or the U.S. However, the ultraorthodox Haredi Jewish and Israeli Arab minorities, which make up about 25% of the population together, make up about 60% of Israel's poverty.⁴⁰

Israel relies on OEPEC for economic support and Britain and the U.S. specifically for political support. Israeli officials will rarely have to choose between those two very necessary sources of stability in Israeli policy.

MODERN FOREIGN POLICY AND INTELLIGENCE

⁴⁰ Haaretz. "BoI chief: Haredi unemployment is hurting Israel's economy." *Haaretz.com*. n.p., 22 July 2010. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

Egypt and Jordan are the only Middle Eastern states to have formally recognized Israel. This means that Israel lives in a constant state of wariness, especially in regards to Palestine, Iraq, and Iran. Israel has reported consistent rocket attacks launched from the Gaza Strip for some time⁴¹, where Palestinian refugees rebel against Israeli control of the land. The West Bank of the Jordan River is another contested territory with many Palestinian residents. While Israel certainly has the military power to take over the Gaza strip, it has avoided open confrontation or war with Palestine so far in an effort not to provoke the Arab Muslims on all sides who would tip the tides against Israel's advantage.⁴²

Mossad, Hebrew for "Institution," is the name of Israeli intelligence service. Mossad has claimed credit (or responsibility) for several assassinations, kidnappings, and other paramilitary operations of the Cold War, but recently has only been openly pursuing more subdued, modern tactics. Much of Mossad's culture is based upon the CIA that originally trained it, but the main purpose of Mossad is the same as the main goal of Israeli foreign affairs in general: survival of the Jewish state.

Israel has many unfriendly if not openly hostile neighbors. Many of those nations are bolstered by oil wealth, while Israel relies on European and American aid. Much of Israel's foreign policy is built around intelligence and defense from hostile neighbors. It's a simple foreign policy, but Mossad's tactics could have drastic complications if it alienates Israel's western allies. This, more than any changes in ideology, may be a

⁴¹ IDF. "Rocket Attacks on Israel from Gaza Strip". *idfblog.com/facts-figures/*. Israel Defense Forces. Retrieved 15 August 2014.

⁴² Beauchamp, Zack. "What does Israel want out of the Gaza offensive?" *Vox*. N.p., 22 July 2014. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.

restraining factor to an intelligence community that would otherwise be given to brazen paramilitary operations.

DATA

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

At the beginning of the data collection period, the war in Syria was front-page news every day. When allegations and photographs of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons surfaced online, the war gained international attention.

Saudi Arabia wasted no time in forming a paramilitary operation (with CIA cooperation) to train and arm Syrian rebels.⁴³ The CIA did not come through with the arms and help that the Saudi operation had expected, leading to intelligence chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan's holding the U.S. at arm's reach. "Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief said the kingdom would make a 'major shift' in relations with the U.S. in protest over its perceived inaction on Syria and its overtures to Iran⁴⁴," Al-Jazeera reported in late October. As the U.S. sought to improve relations with Iran by seeking to solve the problems of Syria without removing Assad, this divide worsened. Secretary of State John Kerry said that Bandar was "the problem," and described him as erratic and hot-headed.⁴⁵ Bandar indicated that he would step up involvement in Syria, rather than ease off.

⁴³ Entous, Adam, Nour Malas and Margaret Coker. "Veteran Saudi Power Player works to build support to topple Assad." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, 26 Aug. 2014. Print.

⁴⁴ Al Jazeera. "Friends of Syria meeting reveals obstacles to peace | Al Jazeera America." *Al Jazeera English*. N.p., 22 Oct. 2013. Web.

⁴⁵ Knickmeyer, Ellen. "Saudis shift approach in Syria Diplomacy Aim" *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, n.d. Web.

Israel's cabinet called 1,000 reservists to secure the Syrian border and canceled all home leave.⁴⁶ AIPAC (a pro-Israel American political group) lobbied the U.S. congress to vote “yes” on authorizing a Syria strike in an effort to protect Israel. Israelis responded to this negatively, preferring to focus on Iran as a threat and not to involve themselves explicitly in any U.S. military action.⁴⁷ Netanyahu asked his cabinet to withhold any opinion about the possibility of a U.S. strike from the media. Ten days later, Israel conducted airstrikes against an Assad base in an effort to prevent Hezbollah from receiving weapons from the Syrian military.⁴⁸ The airstrikes were carried out with aircraft purchased from the U.S. government, and upon the release of the story the U.S. agreed to sell more of the vehicles to Israel.⁴⁹

Before Israel’s airstrikes, an official in Iran’s Revolutionary Guard threatened to counter any U.S. or Middle Eastern attack on Syria with the destruction of Israel in cooperation with Hezbollah.⁵⁰ Young Iranian militia members petitioned the Iraqi government to allow them to respond to the Israeli border in case of attack, and senior Iranian officials debated sending preemptive missile attacks into Israel. The state-run news service in Tehran reported all of this, but no actual action was taken.

Syrian War in Brief

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Carlstrom, Gregg. "Israel and AIPAC clash on Syria strike." *Al Jazeera English*. N.p., 12 Sept. 2013. Web.

⁴⁸ Barnes, Julian, and Joshua Mitnick. "Israeli Warplanes Strike Assad Base." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, n.d. Web.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fassihi, Farnaz, and Maria Al-Habib. "Syria's Allies Debate Response." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, 29 Aug. 2014. Web.

Saudi Arabia conducted a paramilitary operation and distanced itself from the U.S. Israel- conducted a military strike against an Assad base. However, the action did result in a military contract with the U.S.

Though Iran threatened to strike against a possible Israeli attack, they did not follow through after the Israeli airstrike against Assad. Iraq did not allow Iranian militia to respond to the border, but Iran made no obvious attempt to circumvent that.

IRAN'S NEW DIPLOMACY

Iran's apparent change of policy towards the West began in late August, when the chief intelligence minister invited opposition activists (who in 2009 protested the result of the contested re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) to return to Iran under his ministry's guarantee of safety.⁵¹ In a country dominated in the past fifty years by autocratic regimes that limit seditious speech as much as possible, that was a huge change.

Rouhani's UN speech in September 2013 was the culmination of the diplomatic changes that began with the appointing of a new Iranian cabinet the previous month. President Rouhani said before his UN speech in September 2013, "The world should use the opportunity that the Iranian nation has provided through the election."⁵² He then followed that up with a personal phone call to President Obama. This was the first time that the presidents of Iran and the U.S. spoke since the late 1970's. Rouhani's main objectives in the talks were to address the sanctions against Iran's nuclear program and to reconnect an isolated, financially struggling Iran with the rest of the world.

The objectives of much of Iranian government, however, remain unclear. The dismal media access to internal Iranian politics makes it difficult to analyze the domestic political situation that allowed this to happen. Some of the collected data, however, sheds some light into Tehran.

⁵¹ AP Wire Service. "Iran says refugees from 2009 protests may return." *Associated Press* 21 August 2013. Web.

⁵² Karimi, Nasser, and Brian Murphy. "Iran's New President Seeks to Begin Outreach at UN." *AP Online* 12 Sept. 2013. Web.

Israel rejected and opposed Iran's UN outreach. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Israel would use any level of force, unilaterally if necessary, to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. He insisted that Iran's promise not to develop such weapons was a lie, and even said that Iran had been planning to attack the US embassy in Tel Aviv. The Wall Street Journal quoted a White House official as saying, "We are aware that Israel has detained an alleged Iranian spy," as explanation for where those accusations may have come from.⁵³

Saudi Arabian foreign policymakers were already disenchanted with U.S. diplomacy before Rouhani's speech because of the administration's apparent change of position on ousting Assad. When the international community saw what appeared to be U.S. support of Iran's political goals, Saudi Arabian-U.S. relations worsened considerably.⁵⁴ While its economic dependency on the U.S. put some limits on how far it was willing to draw away from the West, Saudi Arabia seemed to prioritize keeping any U.S.-Iran deal off the table.

Saudi Arabia made a public display of increasing their closeness to France as an option to replace their ties with America. Meanwhile, other gulf states such as Oman distanced themselves from Saudi Arabia,⁵⁵ rather than from the U.S. Intelligence chief

⁵³ Solomon, Jay, and Carol Lee. "Netanyahu, in U.N. Speech, Assails Iran's New President." *The Wall Street Journal* 1 Oct. 2013. Print.

⁵⁴ Murphy, Brian, and Matthew Lee. "Test for Saudis: How Far to Push Ire over America?" *AP Online* 23 Oct. 2013. Web.

⁵⁵ Kholaf, D. (2013, December 15). Oman: No gulf-wide union for us. *Al Jazeera*.

Prince Bandar again made critical public comments about U.S. foreign policy that would later contribute to the loss of his position.⁵⁶

There was even some conjecture that Saudi Arabia and Israel may establish a relationship during this period over the mutual enemy found in Iran. At the end of the data collection period, however, Saudi Arabia had still never formally recognized the state of Israel.

In Brief

Israel allegedly detained an Iranian spy and used his or her words to inform at least part of their policy. Netanyahu's public UN position was very firmly against any accommodation of Iran.

Saudi Arabia and Iran were recorded using only diplomatic resources in actions directly related to this event. Saudi Arabia used public diplomacy in a negative sense; that is, to discourage diplomatic intercourse, whereas Iran sought to encourage it for its own benefit.

⁵⁶ Saudi prince bashes US over foreign policy in Iran, Syria. (2013, December 13). *Al Jazeera*.

THE GAZA WAR

Tensions between Israel and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip gradually built up in the months leading to the summer of 2014. In November 2013, Israeli settlements and housing projects were planned but canceled because of the international backlash.⁵⁷ In January, Iran-backed Hezbollah caused Israel to upgrade its missile threat level.⁵⁸ In March 2014, Israeli forces intercepted a shipment of rockets allegedly sent by Iran to Gaza⁵⁹. Later that month, Israel refused to free the 26 Palestinian prisoners whom they had agreed to free as part of previous peace agreements.⁶⁰

In June, the alleged kidnappings of three Israeli teenagers embroiled the two governments in a confrontation.⁶¹ Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas publicly condemned the kidnapers and blamed Hamas, saying that they had destroyed the political negotiating power of his administration. The Israeli government responded with military raids into Gaza. Hamas responded with rocket attacks, and Israel deployed its own rockets.

The death toll rose as these attacks continued from both sides almost daily until the end of the data collection period in August. Though several short cease-fires that were

⁵⁷ Mitnick, Joshua. "Israel Shelves Settlement Plan." *WSJ*. 12 Nov. 2013. Web.

⁵⁸ Entous, Adam, Charles Levinson and Julian E. Barnes "Hezbollah Upgrades Missile Threat to Israel." *The Wall Street Journal* 3 Jan. 2014. Print.

⁵⁹ Federman, Josef. "Israeli Naval Raid Nabs Rocket Shipment." *AP Online* 5 Mar. 2014. Web.

⁶⁰ Israel offers Palestinians new talks proposal. (2014, March 31). *Al Jazeera*.

⁶¹ Casey, Nicholas, and Joshua Mitnick. "Israel Crackdown on Hamas Shows New Path." *The Wall Street Journal* 18 June 2014. Web.

brokered by Egypt and the U.S. lasted a few days, they were all eventually broken. Hamas fired first, ending every negotiated pause.

Iran's religious leadership called for all Muslims to support Palestinians in Gaza. Ayatollah Khomeini called for arming Hamas to fight Israel.⁶² However, no data or reliable mention could be found of Iran itself openly sending money or weapons to Gaza during the conflict.

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah condemned the war as a tragedy, calling it a "collective massacre." He did not, however, blame either side for the conflict directly. In previous clashes with Gaza, he had condemned Israel for its part in it, but in summer 2014 he only blamed "various forms of terrorism."⁶³

In Brief

Israel's actions included paramilitary strikes, diplomatic posturing, and eventually military invasion.

Iran and Saudi Arabia used political posturing to varying degrees of severity. Neither engaged in any concrete action against Israel.

⁶² "Iran Leader Calls for Arming Gaza to Fight Israel." *AP Online* 29 July 2014. Web.

⁶³ Al-Shihri, Abdullah and Aya Batrawy. "Saudi King condemns Gaza war but not Israel." *AP Online* 1 Aug 2014. Web.

THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

In late 2013, the political situation of Iraq began to destabilize. Sunni protests against the Iraqi government had President al-Maliki of Iraq asking for international help before the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant even became a major force. Political analysts and media outlets have discussed greatly the use of the word “Islamic” when referring to this militant group. “Islamic State” and the abbreviation “ISIL” are used here in imitation of AP style and the pattern by U.S. policymakers to avoid confusion; it is not intended as an analysis of this issue.

Saudi Arabia and Iran were involved in the rise of ISIL from the beginning.⁶⁴ Saudi Arabia backed Syrian rebels against Assad’s forces in Syria, and Iran backed the Assad regime. The Saudi-backed rebels were losing in Syria, but Tehran’s influence in Baghdad was weakened by the ISIL threat. Saudi Arabia decided to back ISIL in its takeover of the Iranian-backed Al-Maliki government in Iraq. Saudi intelligence officers made it clear that Riyadh would stop short of helping ISIL capture Kurdish territory, and directed the militants toward Baghdad instead. Later, Riyadh policymakers argued that the turmoil and ISIL threat were due to Tehran’s meddling in Iraqi affairs.⁶⁵

As Iran was trying to boost its relationship with the U.S., its hold on Iraq was slipping. They used the opportunity to show that they were on the side of the conflict that did not support the group and its horrific acts. As the violence and taped beheadings

⁶⁴Batchelor, John. “As US withdraws, regional powers vie for control of Iraq.” (2014, June 24). *Al Jazeera*.

⁶⁵ Almarzoqi, Mansour. "Saudi Arabia: Don't Blame It All on the Islamic State." *Al Jazeera English*. 9 July 2014. Web.

gained media attention, the U.S. began to take on an active role in fighting ISIL. This placed Iran, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and pretty much everyone in the world on the same side. Speculation existed of a U.S.-Iran collaborative military effort, which did not happen. Saudi-Iranian cooperation was made impossible because each blamed the other for allowing the crisis to begin.

Israel was relatively silent in the first few months of ISIL's growing threat, preferring to allow groups that it considered dangerous to weaken each other before intervening. This tactic has been referred to as the "plague on both your houses" policy.⁶⁶ After the data collection period, they began collaborating with Egypt on air strikes against ISIL. Egyptians publicly denied that these strikes occurred, and Israeli policymakers would neither confirm them nor deny them.

⁶⁶ Ungar, Amiel. "It's Time to Be Proactive against ISIS." *Haaretz* 27 June 2014. Web.

ANALYSIS

SAUDI ARABIA

For Saudi Arabia, the paramilitary operations in the Syrian Civil War were the beginning of a shift in diplomatic approach to the West as well as an indicator of the way that they would conduct intelligence operations. Its interest in overthrowing the administration of Bashar al-Assad is largely influenced by historical conflict. Saudi Arabia has had poor relations with Syria historically, in large part because of their dealings with Iran: Syria has been a source of missile technology since Iran was cut off from American technology. Since 2005, the relationship has been openly confrontational because Saudi Arabia blames Assad for the assassination of pro-Saudi Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafic Hariri.⁶⁷ Saudi bad blood with Iran goes back to the early Cold War, and is rooted largely in regional competition for power, though the Islamic Revolution of 1979 highlighted the sectarian differences in the religious identity of the two nations.⁶⁸

Though Iran is not a large exporter of oil on the Saudi Arabian scale, it may pose a threat to Saudi Arabia's position of power in the Gulf. Nations like Oman and the Emirates, for example, are influenced by the wealthy Saudi monarchy. If Iran returns to the influence it had before the revolution of 1979, the competition may weaken Saudi power in the Gulf. Iran may pose a national security problem, as well, especially if it

⁶⁷ Berti, Benedetta, and Yoel Guzansky. "The Syrian Crisis and the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry." *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (2012).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

develops a nuclear weapons program. Saudi Arabia found itself on the same side of the debate as Israel, but could not partner with them for similar reasons that it opposes Iran. The majority of Arab states does not recognize Israel's sovereignty and opposes its very existence. Saudi Arabia is trying to gain and maintain a position of leadership among Arab states. Acknowledging that it shares common ground with Israel, even to oppose Iran, would have caused major political fallout in the Gulf.

This background explains Saudi Arabia's response to the U.S. when it pulled away from its initial involvement in Syria. Saudi policymakers may have seen a lack of commitment in Syria by the Obama administration, followed by a willingness to discuss a nuclear deal with Iran, as a major threat to its position and security. If the U.S. begins to value Iranian friendship as highly as it does its relationship with Saudi Arabia, it would be bad news for Iran. Prince Bandar's response was ire; he publicly denounced the actions and positions of the Obama administration. For this, he was called a "hothead" by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and distanced from King Abdullah and from the intelligence community. Bandar eventually lost his job. Saudi Arabia relies on the U.S. as a principal buyer in its oil market and as a source of military technology and support.⁶⁹ Though it has economic reasons to get closer to the U.S. instead of further away, Bandar valued those economic concerns below the influence of recent conflicts in making this decision. The rest of Riyadh did not seem to approve of this prioritization of influences.

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah avoided taking a strong position against Israel during the Gaza War. This decision is very telling, especially considering their

⁶⁹ "U.S. Energy Information Administration - EIA - Independent Statistics and Analysis." *Saudi Arabia*. Web. 1

aspirations for power among Arab states. Arab nations that do not recognize Israel tend to support Palestine as the rightful owner of the territory occupied by Israel. However, very few nations financially or militarily help Palestine, especially in recent conflicts.⁷⁰

Saudi Arabia in particular has taken a moderate stance on Palestine in recent years. In 2002, and again in 2007, King Abdullah presented the Arab Peace Initiative, which proposes recognizing the 1967 borders, which do not include the territory Israel has gained since then, such as the Golan Heights, in exchange for normalization of relations with Israel. If Saudi Arabia has decided to keep Palestine and Israel at an equal distance, their careful reaction to the Gaza War makes sense.

Riyadh, and specifically Saudi Arabian intelligence, supported ISIL in its infancy. In an effort to undermine al-Maliki and Iran by extension, they backed the extremist Sunni group. The Sunni-Shia divide was likely a major contributing factor, but the effort to attack Iranian influence was at the core of their initial pro-ISIL decision. Later, when the international community learned of ISIL's atrocities, the militants lost all Saudi support. The Saudi government blamed Iran for the problem because of its support of al-Maliki. Iranian meddling in Iraq, according to Saudi Arabia, caused the turmoil that allowed ISIL to form in the first place.

Many Saudi foreign policy actions stem from a need to posture themselves in a politically advantageous way. Because they seek to hold influence over other Arab

⁷⁰ Kuttab, Daoud. "Arab Lip Service to Palestine." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Mar. 2014. Web.

nations in the Gulf, they need to appear to be the great Arab leaders. Their distrust and hostility towards Iran stems from both this competitive desire and from the sectarian differences in their populations; the Saudi monarchy is under pressure to be Sunni leaders as well as Arab. Internationally, Sunni Islam is more common than Shia, so this is an advantageous position as well.

ISRAEL

There are definitely economic benefits to Israel's course of action in the Syrian civil war. By acting parallel to President Obama's desire to intervene in Syria, they secured a military contract between the two countries, in which Israel was able to purchase American military aircraft. However, this was likely not the most important reason for the decision. Especially interesting is that the top Israeli policymakers were silent about the attack until it happened. That may mean that the action was less about posturing and appearing to take this course of action for all to see, and more about what was actually done. Much of Israel's reasoning behind the attack was probably for immediate national security alone; Syria is a nearby state in chaos, and the possibility of chemical weapons has practical implications for Israeli safety.

Though there was international conjecture at the time that Israel may partner with Saudi Arabia to intervene in Syria, it never happened. When the US drew back from involvement in Syria, Israel and Saudi Arabia both had an interest in remaining involved in the conflict, but they never were reported cooperating publicly. Israel's lack of public partnership with Saudi Arabia is largely due to Saudi Arabia's decision so far not to acknowledge Israel's sovereignty. Intrinsic in this lack of public acknowledgement is the icy nature of Israeli and Saudi Arabian relations.

However, Israel striking against Assad on its own had political rewards. Israel would benefit from a less hostile administration in Syria. If the rebels overthrew Assad with Israeli help, this would be a more likely outcome. Saudi Arabia had already been

involved with rebel aid, and Israel may have wanted a part of that arrangement after the violence ends.

Israel's capturing of alleged Iranian personnel during Rouhani's UN outreach certainly isn't out of character for the Mossad. In this case, Mossad intelligence directly fed into the Prime Minister's UN speech, and that is very telling about how Israeli foreign policymakers treat their intelligence community. This connection between Netanyahu's speech and Israel's intelligence activities suggests that the Mossad is seen as part of Israeli foreign policy, not part of the military or an extension of the executive offices.

Israel's waging of the Gaza War was largely about national security and logistical advantages of changing territorial boundaries. Tel Aviv didn't seem to prioritize public relations or diplomacy with third parties nearly as much as they did conducting the raids and missiles. Netanyahu made several media appearances in English and was quoted by Associated Press saying as much:

“Every Palestinian civilian's death costs Israel in its fight for world opinion, but the Jewish state must not cede its security for the sake of public relations, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said as he pressed his nation's case on America's Sunday news programs.”⁷¹

Israel's actions against ISIL came about the same time as the reactions in the international community. They were secretive about their strikes in cooperation with Egypt, though they had nothing to lose politically by doing so publicly. Their actions in

⁷¹ Elliot, Phillip. "Netanyahu: Israel Can Lose on PR but Not Security." *Associated Press* 27 July 2014. Web.

Syria and in the Gaza War, similarly, were largely kept secret until after the fact. This and the direct quotes from Netanyahu suggest that political posturing is not a priority for Israeli foreign policy as it is for Saudi Arabia. Rather, Cold War and recent history informs the Israeli perception of national security threats Israel's identity as the Jewish homeland may be a factor in the decision-making processes of its foreign policymakers, but the highest priority in Israeli relations seems to be national security. Economic concerns tie into national security as well, especially where the ability to trade military technology with the US is concerned.

IRAN

Iran's hostility towards Israel in the wake of the Syrian civil war is no surprise. Iran has had no warm relations with Israel since its founding in the early Cold War, but the religious conservative element in Iran since the revolution of 1979 is even less tolerant of the Israeli state. The discord has its roots not only in religious differences with the Jewish state, but a history of European and American interference in the Middle East to Iran's disadvantage, such as in Operation Ajax. Iran has, however, had good relations with Syria since its cooperation with Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War.

Iran did not send preemptive attacks into Israel as it had threatened to do, nor did they follow through with their threat after Israel attacked. The militia was not allowed to go near the Israeli border, and no Iranian missiles were launched at Israel. This may have been due to a lack of genuine hostility or desire to attack, but it is likely a measured weighing of the consequences of such an action. Iran had just inducted 15 new members to its cabinet of senior policymakers,⁷² many of them moderates who saw the economic and political gains of less hostile situation with the West. Perhaps, if they wanted to avoid hostility, the new president and cabinet members simply wanted to avoid the Ayatollah's threatened violence. The troop movements that did take place may have been posturing alone, done entirely for the benefit of their allies so Iran would not appear to have changed its policies too drastically or to lack follow-through on its public stances.

⁷² AP Wire Service. "Key Figures in Iran's New Government." *Associated Press* 13 Aug. 2013. Web.

Rouhani lost some domestic popularity in his overtures to the UN.⁷³ He was seen by the conservatives in Iran as pandering to Iran's enemies who had colonized and taken advantage of Iran in the past. Rouhani's decisions were based largely on economics. The religious clerics and leaders of the Revolutionary Guard who hold immense power, however, were probably influenced by all of the bad experiences with the West that Iran has had, both in the early Cold War and during Iran's revolution.⁷⁴ The conservative, religiously based powers in Tehran seem at odds with the newly elected officials as far as what is most important to them; the new cabinet wants to rejuvenate the economy with the aid of Western allies, and the clerics and revolutionary guard want to protect Iran from further abuse at the hands of powerful enemies.

In the past, the Revolutionary Guard has held arguably more power than the president, and has used the presidency as its platform to exert power.⁷⁵ This disagreement between the two offices may signal a move in Tehran towards freer elections, or at least a less monolithic government; if the guard had been able to control the election, they would now control the presidency. Rouhani's moderate policies are apparently popular among Iranians who are struggling in the slow economy, but support for his policies is not universal. He was elected without the influence of the conservative clerics. However, it is unlikely that Rouhani would ever have been able to appear before the UN without the blessing of the Supreme Leader of Iran. From the beginning of the negotiations, the international community predicted that much of Iran's desire for a new state of affairs with the U.S. could be attributed to their desire for nuclear weapons. Current sanctions

⁷³ Fassihi, Farnaz. "Iran Hard-Liners Blast Tehran's Diplomacy." *The Wall Street Journal* 4 Nov. 2013. Print.

⁷⁴ Coughlin, Con. "Tehran's Double Game." *The Wall Street Journal* 2 Oct. 2013. Print.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

against Iran prevent its development of nuclear technology. It is possible that Rouhani's desire for easier relations with the West were for economic reasons, but the religious clerics allowed him to reach out to the UN in order to eventually gain nuclear weapons. Their two desires dovetailed into the change of policy seen during the data collection period.

Iran did not gain anything from the rise of ISIL in the way that Saudi Arabia did during the group's infancy: it already had significant influence over Iraq under al-Maliki's campaign. This is largely due to the influence of the Ayatollah over the significant Shia population of Iraq. Iran's use of diplomacy with the U.S. since Rouhani's election is very different from its Cold War public relations, and we can see this clearly in their handling of the ISIL threat. Iran publicly denounced ISIL, and may have sought to strengthen their new ties to the US by cooperating militarily to strike against their territory in Iraq.⁷⁶ Though this was not reported to have happened, it would have been helpful to Iran's nuclear incentives.

Rouhani's foreign policy decisions for Iran were largely based on economics. Rouhani has a base of support in Iran largely made up of people who want economic prosperity instead of the religious isolation that it has seen since the 1979 revolution. Rouhani reflects these priorities in his foreign policy. The nuclear incentives of Iran are also present and important, especially for the religious clerics, but also for Rouhani, who may see them as a way to gain political clout, economic opportunity, and national security.

⁷⁶ Slavin, Barbara. "US-Iran Cooperation on Iraq Tricky but Will Boost Nuclear Deal Incentives." *Al Jazeera America*. Al Jazeera, 16 June 2014. Web.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study, there was no guarantee that anything of importance would happen within the 13-month data collection period that would be conducive to the analytical framework I had planned. However, the Middle East couldn't stay quiet for a whole year. Scholars and journalists looking to explore the new administrations or policies of nations could definitely repeat this study in the future. The historically based part of the analysis, for example, will only get richer with repetition as history is made. Though different yearlong periods may be just as fruitful as the one I chose for my study, this study could also be repeated with smaller periods of time in order to focus on a specific event, or on a specific possible causation for analysis.

The purpose of the study was to contribute to the scholarly understanding of the foreign policies of Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Hopefully, this thesis will also contribute to a public understanding of Middle Eastern cultures. The socioeconomic and political causations behind the data collected are unique to the region and the nations that make it up, and the methodology of this analysis revealed that.

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