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The sociology of power applied to Saudi Arabia's elites and its impact on foreign policy. The case of the military intervention in Yemen (2015-2018)

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Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN
RELACIONES INTERNACIONALES, SEGURIDAD Y
DESARROLLO**

**THE SOCIOLOGY OF POWER APPLIED TO
SAUDI ARABIA'S ELITES AND ITS IMPACT ON
FOREIGN POLICY.
THE CASE OF THE MILITARY INTERVENTION IN YEMEN
(2015-2018)**

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7 de septiembre 2018

Declaro, con mi firma al pie, que el presente trabajo es original y que no contiene plagios o usos indebidos de otras fuentes y acepto las consecuencias que podría tener contravenir el presente compromiso.

Firma



Abstract

In March 2015, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign against the Houthi rebels who have seized power in Yemen. Since then a devastating armed conflict is ongoing being one of the biggest humanitarian crisis ever since. This paper assesses why the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia opted for a military intervention as foreign policy response to the developments in Yemen. The Saudi Kingdom's power structure in which foreign policy decisions are made is analysed, examining the different actors, interests and resources that play a role in the intervention. The analysis is based on the field of Foreign Policy Analysis applying the bureaucratic process model which is then supplemented by the Sociology of Power. Such combination is a new approach and shall generate a comprehensive theoretical framework. In the case of the Saudi military intervention in Yemen, the foreign policy decision to carry out the intervention results to have been taken in a complex power structure, in which the Saudi elites have faced competition with different actors regarding military resources, political influence in Yemen, as well as geopolitical and religious leadership in the region. The case study demonstrates that the Sociology of Power contributes the field of foreign policy analysis and should be applied to further investigations.

Key words: Saudi Arabia, Sociology of Power, Foreign Policy Analysis, Yemen War, military intervention

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List of abbreviations

BPM Bureaucratic Process Model

FPA Foreign Policy Analysis

FP Foreign Policy

IR International Relations

MbA Miteb bin Abdullah

MbN Mohammed bin Nayef

MBS Mohammed bin Salman

MoD Ministry of Defence

MoFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoI Ministry of Interior

MoNG Ministry of the National Guard

SANG Saudi Arabian National Guard

SAMI Saudi Arabian Military Industries

SoP Sociology of Power

UN United Nations

USA United States of America

1 Introduction

In 2014 the Houthi rebels took over Saana the capital of Yemen forcing the former Yemeni president Hadi to step away. Alarmed by the rapid rise of the Houthi rebels and their capacity to seize power in Yemen, the Saudi Kingdom started the military campaign “Decisive Storm” in March 2015 to defeat the Houthi rebels in coalition with the Gulf States and the USA. Since then war is ongoing in Yemen and Saudi Arabia has not been successful yet to strike the Houthi rebels down or to gain control in Yemen. The Yemen crisis turns out to be one of the biggest humanitarian crisis ever since and pressure on the Saudi Kingdom to resolve the conflict is increasing.

The question raised is why the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia decided to intervene militarily in Yemen as foreign policy response to the developments in Yemen. To understand the different actors, interests, objectives and resources that play a role in the intervention, the power structure in which Saudi foreign policy decisions are made will be assessed.

The analysis of the case study will be based on the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) deriving from the discipline of International Relations. In the first part of the paper the bureaucratic process model, a FPA approach, will be applied. The FPA model will then be supplemented by the Sociology of Power (SoP). It will be examined which impact or additional value the application of the SoP can contribute to the study field of FPA.

Applying the SoP on the case of Yemen it is expected to be able to paint a broader picture of the power structures and their impact on Saudi foreign policy. The combination of the FPA model with the SoP will be a new approach in investigation and shall generate a comprehensive theoretical framework which could be used for further case studies.

Different literature, articles from international journals and think tanks as well as newspaper releases and Inside Stories from *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* are revised as references for analysis. Furthermore, official Saudi websites from the Ministries and companies as well as official documents like the Vision2030 and interviews given by the Crown Prince and the Saudi Foreign Minister are used¹. Secondary literature about Saudi Arabia is available to a great amount; the access to information about the Saudi decision-making system however is rather limited. Focus will be on the intervention’s status quo in 2015, further developments in the following years will be examined though to complete the analysis.

¹ References have been revised in English, German and Spanish. Literature in Arab language have not been accessible which might limit analysis.

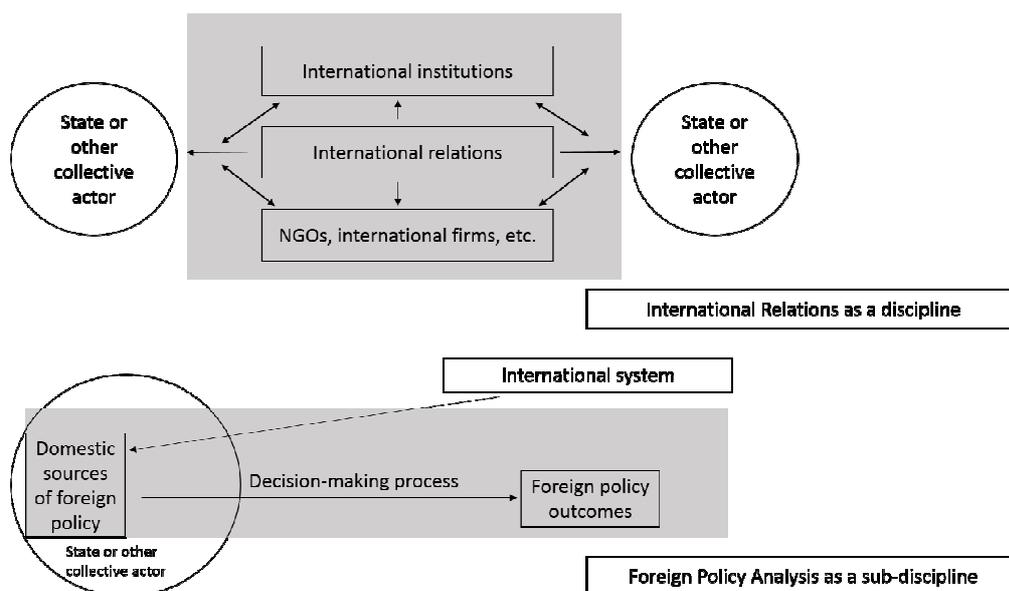
1.1 Theoretical framework

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is the study of the state's management of external relations and activities. (Beach, 2012, p. 3) It helps to understand how political actors of different states relate and behave to each other within the international system. Center of analysis are the role of decision-makers in the decision-making processes, acting individually or in a group, the structure of the decision-making process itself as well as external and domestic conditions affecting foreign policy formulations and their outcomes. (Hudson, 2016, p. 14) (Alden and Aran, 2012, p. 1)

FPA is considered to be a middle-range theory as it allows for multidisciplinary analysis but with a limited scope in analysis. In academia, FPA is anchored in the study of Public Policy within Political Science or in the study of International Relations (IR) as a sub-field of the IR discipline. First approaches of FPA emerged in the 1950's as a response to the dominant realist paradigm in the International Relations discipline. (Alden and Aran, 2012, 3ff) (Hudson, 2016, p. 16)

While IR theories can be seen as a broader approach to the composition of the international system and state behaviour within it, FPA narrows its approach to single state's behaviour and the domestic sources of foreign policy. (Beach, 2012, p. 4) FPA allows to open the state's "black box" by integrating more factors such as historical, cultural, social and psychological. (Hudson, 2014, 9f)

Figure 1: The scope of Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations scholarship



Source: Beach (2012, p. 4)

There are different approaches and models serving as analytical frameworks for FPA; each of them putting a different focus in actors, institutions and influence of psychological and social factors. Most prominent are the Rational-Actor model, focusing on the state as an unitary individual rational actor; the organisational model, focusing on the impact of organisational structures on FP decision-making; and the bureaucratic process model, focusing on the role of state bureaucracies, all introduced by Graham Allison in his book *Essence of Decision- Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* 1999. (Allison and Zelikow, 2008, 2nd ed.) Other important approaches are the two-level game by Putnam that analyses the dynamics of interaction between the domestic and the external level of politics, models that stress the role of identities and culture, the role theory and frame analysis. (Hudson, 2016, p. 14)

Between all these approaches, the Bureaucratic process model will be used for application as it seems most appropriate which will be argued in the following chapter (see chapter 1.2.).

1.1.1 Bureaucratic process model

The Bureaucratic process model (BPM) argues that foreign policy decisions emerge from domestic political struggle and bargaining process between different national decision-making apparatuses. Foreign policy decisions are explained by examining the interaction of individuals in their organizational environment. Principal actors are political leaders at the top of the state apparatus joined by officials sitting atop key bureaucracies² trying to influence the foreign policy decision process to achieve national, organisational and personal goals. The actors are hierarchically positioned and share power, each of them having different perceptions of what must be done (Allison and Zelikow, 2008, p. 255) (Smith et al., 2016, p. 123). Foreign policy decisions are not made by a unitary rational actor but by pulling and hauling between different political leaders and bureaucracies. The decision chosen is a political resultant seen as a compromise of the different official's interest and unequal influence rather than a solution to a problem. (Allison and Zelikow, 2008, 294f) A resultant is normally the lowest common factor between the bargaining groups. The decisions are outcomes upon which the majority of players involved can agree. (Hudson, 2014, p. 103)

"The BPM explains foreign policy in terms of a conglomerate of large, bureaucratic organizations and political actors. " (Alden and Aran, 2012, p. 33) The bureaucracies are relevant to analyse as they acquire influence over Foreign Policy decisions through their position in the

² Bureaucracy defined as „the officials, employees and people who run government departments and offices“ (Cambridge Dictionary)

power sharing structure. Bureaucracies generate outputs that structure the situations in which policy makers take decisions such as the information and alternative strategies they provide and present to the government. The different organisations are in constant competition to achieve their goals and influence in the decision-making process is always measured in relation to the others. (Hudson, 2014, p. 20). Coalitions between the different organisations might be formed to produce the desired action, including relevant “outsiders” such as lobbyists, private businesses or NGO’s as coalition partners. (Allison and Zelikow, 2008, 255ff)

1.1.2 The Sociology of Power³

The Sociology of Power (SoP), developed by Ferran Izquierdo, is a theoretical framework to analyse and compare power dynamics that rule a society. It is a methodology to study the power relations and competition that define political regimes in today’s Arab world, to observe and compare their different strategies in order to secure their power positions within the region.

It is argued that most societies have developed a certain hierarchical model over the decades to organise their political, social and economic relations. “A hierarchical society is a social system composed of several actors who establish relations with one another, according to their capacity to utilize given resources of power”. (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, p. 8) To analyse the power structure of such hierarchical society, it is necessary to identify a) the societies’ main actors, b) their interests and position within the structure, c) the power resources at their disposal and d) the dynamics that rule their relationships.

Main actors are “[...] those individuals with the capacity to make decisions on the use of power resources and [with the capacity] to intervene in power relations. ” (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, p. 11) As it is supposed that society is hierarchical, actors are divided into those who govern (elites) and those who are governed (population) within the structure of power. The division into elites and population is reasoned by their differential objectives, interests and their access to and possession of power resources.

The elites are defined as “individuals with superior hierarchic position within social institutions and whose survival in this position depends on their capacity to compete for power ac-

³ Check for further references: Izquierdo Brichs, F. (2017) Poder global: Una mirada desde la sociología del poder, Barcelona.; Kemou, A. (2007) Nasser's national interest: A "Sociology of Power" analysis, Altafulla, FIMAM.

cumulation". (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, p. 11) Main idea of the SoP is that each actor within the elites competes with the others to accumulate more power, always measured in relation to the other elites. Predominating objective of the elites is to improve their position in the power hierarchy constantly competing against each other in a circular relation. The elites' objectives have to be defined in terms of power. (Feliu and Izquierdo, 2016, p. 206) Elites can be divided into primary and secondary elites. Secondary elites' access to power resources depends on their alliances with primary elites. (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, 14f)

The elites obtain the capacity to negotiate and to make decisions by having access to main power resources. The power resources at disposal for the elites in their competition for differential power are essential in the analysis of SoP and can be of wide variety. (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, p. 9) Factors like the elites' background and the process of obtaining control over relevant power resources have to be considered; such mechanism of resource access can be inheritance, clientelism, conquest or revolution. (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, p. 13)

Common power resources are the state⁴, capital, ideology, coercion and information. "In the Arab world, bar exceptional cases, the fundamental resource is the state and the foremost competition takes place between elites who can rival one another for states' control." (Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou, 2013, p. 14) The other power resources are connected to the primary resource to a significant extent; all the power resources are interconnected, and their importance vary depending on the type of power regime and country.

According to the power resources and actors involved, Feliu and Izquierdo make the differentiation between three types of power regimes, considering the degree to which power is concentrated in a society: a) Power regime with diversified elites and diversified resources b) Power regime with concentrated elites and diversified resources c) Power regime with concentrated elites and concentrated resources. (Feliu and Izquierdo, 2016, 201ff) Referring to the schema of the SoP and its differentiation into three types of power regimes, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would be a power regime with concentrated elites- the Al Saud royal family- and concentrated resources- the state which allows to control the distribution of oil-. A small number of primary elites is competing for power, controlling the main power resources.

⁴ "The state is a power resource, but it is also an organizational structure of social and economic relations, and, above all, a system channeling the concentration and distribution of resource." Izquierdo Brichs and Lampridi-Kemou (2013, p. 23)

The greater the number of elites implied, the tougher the competition will be and the higher the possibility that individual elites will lose their power function and influence. In this case, there will be more opportunities for the population to establish linear relations. The population can be either a resource for the elites, when it is lacking consciousness of its own interests, or can become an independent actor itself, in the moment when the population becomes aware of its own interests and is willing to change its life conditions. (Feliu and Izquierdo, 2016, p. 206) Through social mobilisation claiming for change the population establish linear relations. Once gaining the capacity for collective action the population also gains the capacity to negotiate with the elites. Nevertheless, the establishment of linear relations do not automatically imply the disappearance of circular relations as elites are usually quite resistant against change and reforms, as can be seen in the Middle East region. (Feliu and Izquierdo, 2016, p. 206)

Through the SoP the plurality of actors, who have the capacity to take decisions, their interests and respective power position in the system, the power resources accessible to them and the dynamics that shape their relationships can be studied, painting a comprehensive multidimensional panorama of the power structures.

1.2 Connection between Foreign Policy Analysis and the Sociology of Power

Foreign Policy Analysis approaches, among them the Bureaucratic Process Model (BPM) are often criticised of being limited as their analytical focus mainly lies on official foreign relations, the political structure, state institutions and the government representatives. (Alden and Aran, 2012, p. 9) Centre of FPA are the political official decision-makers as actors. Non-political or non-state actors are given a secondary role in the analysis, examining how they affect the primary official actors in their decision-making. A very strong dual vision of the actors is presented by separating them in either internal or external actors, not considering that some national actors might be of global or transnational character at the same time. (Alden and Aran, 2012, 10f)

Considering the limitations or the state-centric focus of FPA models, it seems to be necessary to approach FP with a new or an additional focus. The field of FPA seems to be especially appropriate for the application of the SoP as a supplement, considering a) that the power structure is broader than just the political system, b) that there is a great diversity of actors

influencing in FP decisions, c) that decisions in different issue areas on domestic and international level are interrelated.

The SoP defines the state as a power structure (and not only as a political system) in which processes of different types, including the Foreign Policy, take place. Analysing the different elites who are competing for power, the SoP is expected to expand the focus on the political structure and official actors made by the FPA models. The SoP recognises that the actors operate simultaneously on the domestic, regional and international level in different issue areas. Being involved in different sectors relevant for foreign policy decisions, the actors must balance and conform their different interests and decisions. The SoP might examine a wider set of interests and power resources than the FPA model, focusing especially on their interrelation significant for decision-making processes. Therefore, the Bureaucratic Process Model of FPA will be supplemented by the SoP to analyse the case study of the Saudi military intervention in Yemen more comprehensively.

Selecting between the different models and approaches of FPA, the BPM seemed to be most appropriate for the application as it focuses on the impact of internal state structure, more specific the bureaucratic structure on Foreign Policy decision-making processes. Assuming that most of the Saudi Arabian elites hold high positions in relevant government apparatuses or bureaucracies, the BPM seems to contribute the most to the power structure's analysis of the Saudi elites. The BPM appears to include aspects of the SoP, such as the different interests and objectives and especially the competition for relative power. It however, emphasises the institutional actors and structure as well as the internal power competition within the different bureaucracies. The BPM therefore might be a good example to demonstrate how the SoP can enrich FPA through focus shifting and multidimensional analysis.

2 Saudi state structure and Saudi elites

Since 1932 the political system of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with the King as the center of authority. (Basic Law of Governance, 1992, Chapter 1, Art. 5) The royal family members are primarily the sons and grandsons of Kingdom's founder King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, drawing broader circles the royal family counts around 5,000 to 7,000 members. (Steinberg, 2014, 29; 81f) As it is stated in Article 10 of the Basic Law of Governance that "the State will aspire to strengthen family ties" (Basic Law of Governance, 1992, Chapter 2, Art. 9), the royal family is present in almost every sector of the state; its members head high positions within ministries, embassies, agencies and enterprises to ensure constancy of the system. (Nonneman, 2005, 324f) (Önder, 1980, p. 228)

The family legitimates its power on a religious base referring to the alliance between their tribe Al-Saud and the preacher Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the religious movement of Wahhabism, in the 18th century.⁵ (Nonneman, 2005, 324f) (Steinberg, 2014, 12f). Through the alliance the Saudi King gained the title 'protector of the holy sites Mecca and Medina' and therefore had religious legitimacy for his rule. Since the Kingdom's foundation the Saudi King governs in collaboration with descendants and followers of the al-Wahhab family and relies on the clerics' support. (Steinberg, 2014, 36; 53) The royal family is copula of the different tribes and clans within Saudi Arabia; through trial alliances loyalty to the King has been guaranteed. The Al Saud family has ensured its power position "through a skillful combination of distribution, penetration, and coercion, with a legitimating dose of ideology" (Okruhlik, 2013, 389f)

Saudi Arabia is an oil-based rentier economy; a system in which the ruling elite receives a "rent" from the state as its income. These rents are generated from the high revenues of mineral resources, in the case of Saudi Arabia from the oil production and export. (Mañé and La Cámara, 2005, p. 1459) Revenues from the oil resources are perceived as state budget for the ruling elite independent from the fiscal policy which offers the royal family an enormous power position. Access and control of these revenues are only reserved to the ruling authorities. (Steinberg, 2014, p.81f) The rentier system explains to an extent why the Saudi regime has not seen any need for reforms or political participation because the population does not

⁵ Wahhabism is claimed to be the purest and most traditional form of Sunni Islam. The Al-Saud, Saudi royal family, were a minor tribe in Najd province in the North of Saudi Arabia. After their alliance with the Wahhabism movement the Al-Saud started conquering neighbour tribes expanding their territory more and more until the foundation of the Saudi Kingdom in 1932. Steinberg (2014, 12f)

contribute to the ruling elite's income. With the oil surpluses the Saudi rulers could establish a welfare system for the Saudi population by providing public services for free, which legitimates the elites' rule. (Sons, 2016, 164ff) Opposition can be kept calm by significant payments and subventions which the population does profit from. (Steinberg, 2014, p.81f) Through this policy of distribution and 'allrounder provider', the Saudi royals could make influential tribes and families dependent on the Al-Saud house. (Sons, 2016, 164ff) These dynamics cause the establishment of a non-productive economy based on the oil rents, which sustains the service and consume sector mainly through the importations of products and foreign investment. This results in a great dependence of the economy and the ruling regime on the oil prices. (Mañé and La Cámara, 2005, p. 1459)

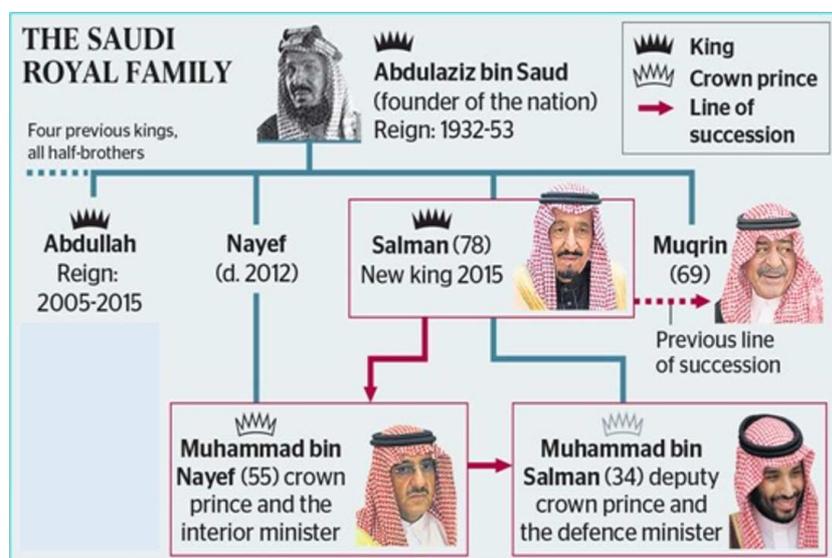
The rentier system is threatened to collapse as oil prices has been low the last years which means a significant deficit in Saudi state revenues. Part of this tendency is due to Saudi proper energy policy, which kept oil prices low to kick out competitors, mainly Iran and the USA, as they could not compete in terms of production costs. Such energy policy could have been a miscalculation of the Saudi elite. (Sons, 2016, 153f) Missing revenues from the oil resources are crucial to stabilise the Kingdom in times of crisis deriving from recent developments in the region like the Arab uprisings, Islamist militias fighting in neighbour states and failed states in the region. Moreover, half of the Saudi population is under 30 and unemployed, facing a quite uncertain future. The Saudi state is incapable of offering them a safe job, as its capacities are already overstretched. (Sons, 2016, 153f)

2.1 King Salman

As Saudi Arabia is a monarchical system ultimate authority and point of reference for the judicial, the executive and regulatory authority of the Saudi state is the King. (Art.44, Basic Law of Governance, 1992) He is Head of the State, Chief Executive, Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief of the military forces. He "oversees the implementation of the Islamic Sharia, the system of government, the state's general policies; and the protection and defense of the country". (Art. 55f, 60, Basic Law of Governance, 1992) The King is lacking the authority of an elected leader by the population and therefore depends on the alliance with the Wahhabi clerics and the abundant oil wealth. Prosperity and religious authority are his two traditional sources of legitimacy. (Okruhlik, 2013, 389f)

After the death of King Abdullah in 2015, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud accessed the throne on 23 January 2015 as legitimate elected successor. (Sons, 2016, 142f) The question of succession has been regulated under the 35 brothers of King Ibn Saud, founder of the Kingdom, after his death in 1953. Ibn Saud himself decreed that the eldest brother alive shall be successor of the deceased King. The last years though, the royal brothers faced the issue that many of them are too old and would fade away and succeed in too short distance. (Steinberg, 2014, pp. 85f) (House, 2016, 2f) King Salman will be the last brother ruling the Kingdom and therefore, passed succession to the grandson- generation by appointing Mohammed al Nayef (MbN) Crown Prince and his son Mohammed al Salman (MBS) Deputy Crown Prince. (Al Jazeera News, 2015)

Figure 2: Succession lines 2015



Source: Finance Twitter (2015)

Being considered as a “transition” King, incapable of ruling because of his high age, he does not shrink from changing and reforming the state system in his personnel neither in his policies. (Sons, 2016, 142f) On June 21, 2017 King Salman again changed the lines of succession by appointing his son MBS as Crown Prince, ousting MbN from his position. (Al Arabiya English, 2017) He could do so by having the approval vote of the Allegiance Commission⁶ which votes on the Crown Prince to secure the transition of governance within the Al-Saud

⁶ The Allegiance Commission was established in 2006 by King Abdullah to secure the transition of governance within the Al-Saud family, The Commission is formed by 35 princes, sons and grandsons of the Kingdom’s founder Saud, who agree on the Crown Prince. The King proposes up to three nominees, which the Commission will choose from. Law of Pledge of Allegiance Commission (2006, Art. 7)

family. (Law of Pledge of Allegiance Commission, 2006, Art. 7) In the case of MBS only three princes out of 35 voted against MBS. (Al Arabiya English, 2017)

2.2 Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS, is the son of King Salman and the “young hope” to bring progress in the Kingdom with his 33 years. Directly after his father’s succession he was pulled on the centre stage being the face of the Saudi Kingdom for the international audience. To Western political leaders he is known as “Mr. Everything” as in very short time he gained significant power in nearly all state affairs. (Hussain, p. 2) He is currently holding the post of Crown Prince, Defence Minister, President of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs and Commander-in-Chief of the forces deployed in Yemen. (Sons, 2016, 144f)

Introducing the Vision 2030, a plan to reform and modernise the Kingdom, he is seen as a progressive leader by the Western states as well as by the Saudi population. “He started on a good footing by focusing on economic reforms and opening some windows of cultural freedom [like the privatisation of ARAMCO or allowing women to drive].” (Hussain, p. 2) The reform plans shall make Saudi economy less dependent on oil and turn back to a moderate Islam.

“This went well with the Saudi [unemployed] youth who saw in the young prince a hope for change [new future perspectives, and a change in generation].” (Hussain, p. 2) MBS understood, that in order to guarantee his father’s rule and make the Saudi state system sustainable, the Kingdom had to go through drastic change adapting to the current global and domestic challenges.

Not only domestically he introduced radical changes but also on external affairs he tries to make rapid changes, withdrawing from the security alliance with the USA under Obama administration and heading the Yemen intervention. (Kinninmont, 2017, p. 211) “The militaristic and aggressive foreign policy with direct involvement in Yemen civil war and open conflict with Qatar⁷ jolted many”. (Hussain, p. 2) Some analysts claim that MBS is too inexperienced and incautious in his way of ruling. Others state that he is the actual ruler of the Kingdom instead of his father. (Sons, 2016, 144f) (Al Jazeera News, 2017)

⁷ In 2017 Saudi Arabia imposed a land, maritime and air blockade against Qatar. The conflict with Qatar will not be further analysed in the paper.

3 Application of the BPM

The Bureaucratic process model (BPM) argues that foreign policy decisions emerge from domestic political struggle and bargaining process between different national decision-making apparatuses. To apply the BPM to the Saudi administration and the specific case study, the establishment of an administration system in the Saudi Kingdom over history and the traditional decision-making process must be considered. It will be illustrated how King Salman changes the traditional system and decision-making process and which impacts these changes have on the foreign policy decision to carry out the military intervention in Yemen in 2015.

3.1 Saudi administration system and the decision-making process

Over decades the governance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia relied on tribal alliances and personal networks with the royal family as centre of the state, which made it less necessary and more difficult to establish a proper and functioning administration apparatus. (Hertog, 2011, 58ff)

King Faisal (1964-1975) is claimed to be the first one, who tried to establish an administration system by creating more and more ministries and state offices, becoming the most important employer in Saudi Arabia. (Sons, 2016, pp. 40–45) King Faisal was interested in putting as much citizens as possible into jobs to avoid public discontent and uprisings. Oil surpluses according to the rentier system enabled him to pay the high number of bureaucrats working for the Kingdom. Nevertheless, Faisal faced the problem of lacking qualified personnel for staffing the offices which made Saudi administration turned out to be quintessence of inefficiency and incompetency. (Hertog, 2011, p. 49)

New established ministries were also a gathering place for members of the royal family, as it was important to maintain political and administrative control by staffing representative state position with family members. Most important ministries like the Ministry of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Defence stayed in the hand of influential princes of the Al-Saud family. As most of the ministers stayed in their rank a lifetime, some of them have created their own “royal household”, dominating the offices to a great extent. Recruitment functioned by the system of kinship, nepotism and tribal relations. (Sons, 2016, pp. 40–45) “Informal structures of authority determined the actual importance of institutions. The bits of bureaucracy that mattered were run by important princes” (Hertog, 2011, p. 49) Procedures within the Ministries were of an entirely personalised nature and not formalised. (Hertog, 2011, p. 50)

The Saudi decision-making process traditionally has been a broad consultation between the King and his brothers and half-brothers who oversee important government positions. Saudi decision-making is categorised as a top-down process with the Al-Saud princes on top formulating the policies. (Hussain, pp. 1–2) (Thompson, p. 22) Most important institution involved in the decision-making process is the Council of Ministers, which assists and advises the King in his executive. The Council of Ministers “is responsible for drafting and overseeing implementation of the internal, external, financial, economic, education and defense policies as well as the general affairs of the State.” (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington D.C., 2018) The King furthermore, is advised by the legal bodies, the Consultative Council and the religious establishment “ulama”. (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington D.C., 2018) The decision-making process used to be quite long-winded as it is based on consultation. (Steinberg, 2014, p. 83) All officials are appointed by the King himself.

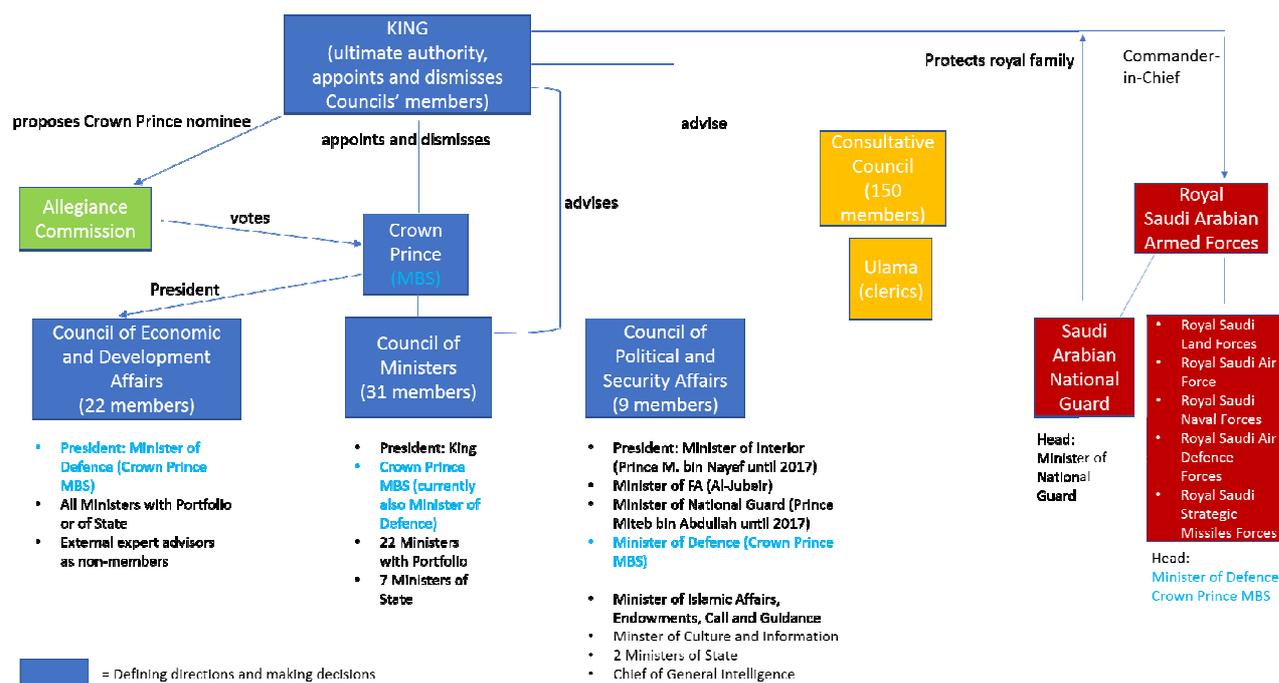
3.2 Changes in the decision-making process under King Salman

Facing new challenges abroad and internally, for example reduced surpluses from oil, high number of unemployed Saudi youth, Arab springs and ongoing armed conflicts in the region, King Salman recognised a need to change state structures to consolidate and secure his rule.

Just after taking over power in January 2015, King Salman restructured the Saudi government institutions and most of its personnel by issuing over thirty royal decrees and ministerial edicts. With the royal decrees he eliminates around 12 governmental Councils. In return, he creates two new Councils which began to play a significant role in decision-making: the Council of Political and Security Affairs and the Council of Economic and Development Affairs.⁸ (SUSRIS- Saudi-US Information Service, 2015) As stated in the Vision 2030, this increases the “effectiveness, efficiency, and the speed of decision-making. This will result in effective governance and better business continuity within each ministry.” (Vision 2030, p. 65)

⁸ Mainly responsible for the implementation of the Vision2030

Figure 3: Saudi political system and decision-making institutions



Source: Own illustration based on (Basic Law of Governance 1992) (Ministry of Defence, 2018) (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington D.C., 2018) (SUSRIS, 2015); does not include all political institutions, selection made by the author for the analysis

The royal decrees also included various changes in ranks and officials within the government, like the members of the Council of Ministers. (Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2015, p. 1) By appointing technocrats to high positions in crucial ministries, such as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, King Salman seems to count on non-royal members as advisors in the decision-making process. Also, his son MBS counts on expert consultancy by including firms like Boston Consulting and McKinsey in his team of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs. (Sons, 2016, 175f) It is necessary to ask whether such appointments are a sign of opening-up and inclusiveness in the decision-making process, as they seem to be contradicting to King Salman's centralisation process. It is questionable to which extent this "new elite" of technocrats within formal institutions really has a chance to influence in the decision-making process dominated by few royal members. (Thompson, p. 22) (Gause III, 2018, p. 2)

Most of the shifts in personnel and state structures turn over an essential amount of power in various domains to King Salman's son MBS. With his royal decrees, King Salman tried to reshape the former Saudi political system, in which power was divided between the different princes holding onto different power positions through numerous Councils into a more compact and centralised power structure. (Karim, 2017, p. 76) He centralised state structures and

the traditional decision-making process by centralising power to a small number of persons being able to make policies, mainly to his son MBS and his nephew Mohammed bin Nayef (MbN). Both head one of the most important ministries, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior. (Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2015, p. 2)

3.3 The foreign policy decision for the military intervention in Yemen

"Numerous questions have been raised about whether the major changes in the structure of the rule and government [by King Salman] will be associated with parallel changes in Saudi foreign policy [and the foreign policy decision-making process]." (Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2015, p. 2) In the case of Yemen such changes in foreign policy strategy could be argued.

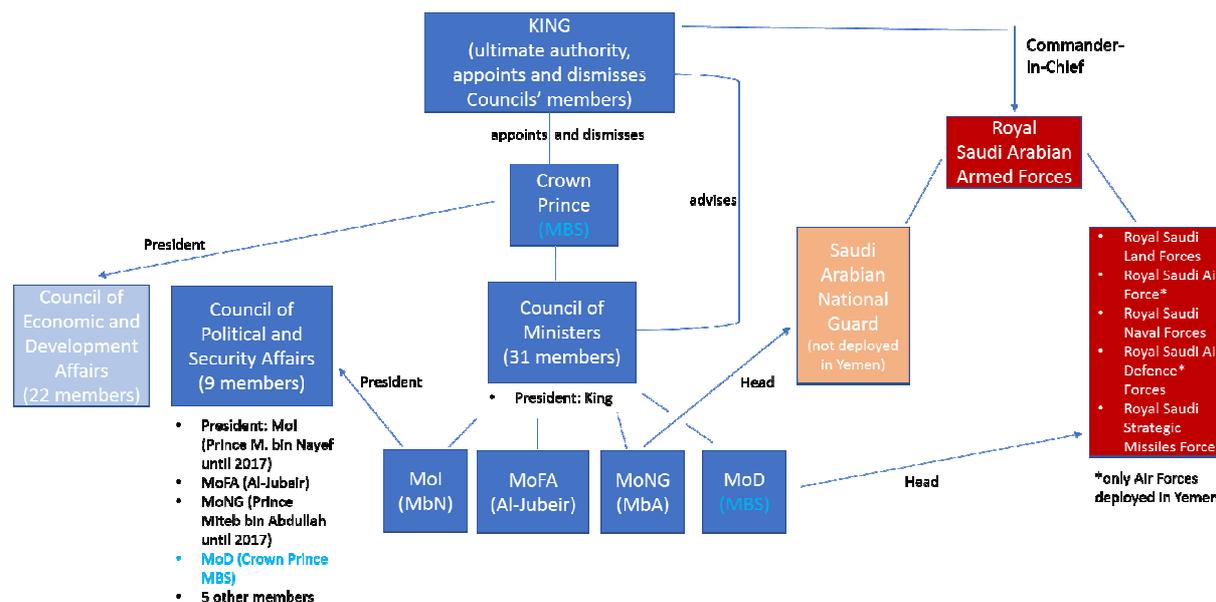
Yemen got under domestic political struggle when the popular revolts of Arab uprisings spread to Yemen in 2011 and former Yemeni president Saleh had to step aside. (Laub, 2016) Main actor in the political struggle is the Houthi movement that took over the Yemeni capital Saana in September 2014, forcing Saleh's successor President al-Hadi to resign and flee the country in 2015. (Ahlulbayt.TV, 2016) Alarmed by the rapid Houthi insurgency the Saudi elites decided that they had to respond regarding foreign affairs. Saudi Arabia started a military campaign "Decisive Storm"⁹ in March 2015 to defeat the Houthi rebels in coalition with the Gulf States¹⁰ and the USA providing military equipment and intelligence services. Since then war is ongoing in Yemen between the different parties.

Analysing the foreign policy decision for military intervention in Yemen in 2015 through the BPM, the following institutions and political players are assumed to have played a major role in the decision-making process:

⁹ The operation was renamed into "Renewal of Hope" after one month of air strikes.

¹⁰ Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, United Arab Emirates. The relation between Saudi elites and each coalition partner will be left out in the analysis.

Figure 4: Institutions involved in the FP decision for military intervention in Yemen, 2015



Source: Own illustration based on (Basic Law of Governance, 1992) (Ministry of Defence, 2018) (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Washington D.C., 2018) (SUSRIS, 2015)

It is argued that mainly MBS has been responsible and influential in the decision process to intervene militarily in Yemen. (Wehrey, 2016) The immense increase in his power and influence over almost all domains of policymaking and governance “has paved the way for Prince Mohammed Bin Salman to pursue an aggressive foreign policy“ (Karim, 2017, p. 78). The prominence of MBS in nearly all relevant official councils and the Ministry of Defence, as illustrated in Figure 4, can suggest that the competition between the different officials and political players that the Bureaucratic Process Model (BPM) describes, is rather limited. Karim however, argues that there is institutional power competition between the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of the National Guard. The last ones are both not competence of MBS. (Karim, 2017, p. 81)

In March 2015 at the time of the decision made to intervene in Yemen, the Saudi National Guard¹¹ (SANG) was headed by Miteb bin Abdullah. The SANG is not direct competency of MBS as it is not subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. However, integration and cooperation with the royal forces is strategic objective. (Ministry of Defence, 2018) Miteb bin Abdul-

¹¹ There are two branches of armed forces in the Kingdom, the Royal Army and the Saudi National Guard (SANG). The SANG has its origin in the tribal force “Ikhwan”, that supported the founder of the Kingdom Abd al Aziz-al Saud in his retake of the Arabian Peninsula. The SANG is the most traditional and conservative element of the Saudi military, and its personnel are mainly members of tribes loyal to the King. The SANG’s mission is to protect the royal family from internal threats. It is not subordinated to the Ministry of Defence but headed by the Minister of National Guard. Saudi Arabian National Guard (2018)

lah might not have been very amused about the external young leadership trying to interfere in his domain. Both, MBS and Miteb bin Abdullah, are members of the Council of Political and Security Affairs, which coordinates most of the security strategy in the case of Yemen. (Neil, 2015) Potential conflict or competition coming from Miteb bin Abdullah might have been faced by MBS, as King Salman dismisses Miteb bin Abdullah in all his positions in 2017. Up to now, MBS and the Saudi King have shrink away from deploying ground forces, which could include the SANG, in Yemen. Main force deployed is the Royal Air Force, which is subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. (Neil, 2015)

The greatest competition though, appears to exist between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior. It can be argued that this institutional competition is mainly due to the personal competition for position and influence in the government between Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Mohammed bin Nayef (MbN), as they were in direct competition for throne succession. In March 2015 when the military operation in Yemen was launched, the Ministry of Interior and the Council of Political and Security Affairs were nearly the only political domains that were not controlled by MBS at that time. Although MbN hold the presidency of the Council of Political and Security Affairs, mainly concerned with the Yemen intervention, according to Karim, bin Nayef did not play any role in the events concerning Yemen. (Karim, 2017, p. 81) Neil supports this idea, stating that MbN “does not seem to have the authority, [...] to direct Saudi external policy, particularly over Yemen.” (Neil, 2015) MbN’s apparent absence in decision-making can be either interpreted as strategy from MBS to leave him out or as a clear separation of domains within the Saudi state, giving evidence of a clear power hierarchy in which each Minister holds absolute power over his domain. The two Ministers might be in accordance on the greatest threats to the Kingdom but might differentiate in their ideas about the strategies that must be taken. (Karim, 2017, p. 81) MbN is believed to have opposed the foreign policy decision of launching a military intervention in Yemen. (Neil, 2015)

MBS tries to use the Defence Ministry portfolio and his oversight of the operations of the Saudi military in Yemen to produce a kind of cult around his personality. (Wehrey, 2016) With the role as Minister of Defence and an expected quick success in Yemen, MBS tries to mark his status within the royal family and the Saudi population. (Heibach, 2017, p. 5) MBS might see his older cousin MbN as the greatest opponent in expanding and consolidating his power as MbN held the most important Ministry when it comes to domestic affairs. Saudi foreign policy is traditionally characterised by its omni-balancing between internal and external events, and sometimes contradicting interests on the different levels. Foreign policy ac-

tions can have great impact on domestic level and vice-versa. (Gause III, 2014, p. 189) (Karim, 2017, 73f) MbN furthermore, chaired the Council of Political and Security Affairs crucial for the Yemen mission. MBS might have felt restricted or interfered by the decisions taken by MbN in his domain of the Minister of Interior or as President of the Council.

It is believed that MBS put pressure on his father to oust MbN from his positions to open the way for him, which is why on the 21st in 2017, King Salman changed again succession line and appoints MBS as Crown Prince, ousting MbN from all of his positions. (ArabNews, 2017) Considering the vote of the Allegiance Commission¹² with 31 out of 35 princes in favour of MBS, there appear to have been no serious opposition for MBS to become Crown Prince. (Al Arabiya English, 2017)

Having eradicate MbN as a rival, MBS launched an anti-corruption campaign in November 2017 in which over 200 influential princes and business men were arrested. (Robertson et al., 2017) With the arresting and personnel changes, MBS takes over control over the entire security sector, which is important to consider for the Yemen intervention. King Salman and MBS appear to be willing to send a clear message: If you are not with us, you are against us. It is also about sending a clear message that “there’s a new sheriff in town” (CBS News, 2018) as MBS assures in an Interview with CBS News. There has been restraint in official statements as a critical reaction to the arrests, which could be a sign for the influential power of MBS. According to Gause the “Al Saud family members do not seem ripe for mobilization against MBS. Though the incentives to challenge the crown prince may be high, the will to challenge him first is extremely low.” (Gause III, 2018, p. 2) Between experts again, this procedure is interpreted as a reduction of competition in institutional power and centralisation of power rather than a seriously taken anti-corruption campaign. (Al Jazeera News, 2017)

Considering the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the role of the foreign minister in the decision-making process in the case of Yemen is quite difficult to analyse due to limited information. Karim states that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a role, especially in communicating and coordinating with the international audience. (Karim, 2017, p. 74) However, considering the media and PR campaigns about the Yemen intervention MBS seems to be the important face on international stage and Adel Al-Jubeir appears to have been less involved in the Yemen concern. (Hussain, p. 2) Al-Jubeir could be an example for the argumentation that King Salman tries to avoid competition within the royal family by cutting princes off from deci-

¹² See chapter 2.1.

sion-making power and important bureaucratic position, replacing them with expert technocrats. (Thompson, p. 23) King Salman might expect less divergence in the process of policy-making and greater loyalty to his goals from non-royal technocrats.

3.4 Interim Conclusions- BPM Analysis

Considering the Bureaucratic Process Model (BPM) applied to the traditional Saudi administration system and decision-making process, it can be argued that the bargaining process between the political leaders and officials sitting atop of bureaucratic institutions mainly takes place between royal family members, as there is a clear tendency of royal family's dominance in the top positions of decision-making institutions. (Sons, 2016, pp. 40–45) "The dominance of the ruling family [...] means that the decision-making process does not follow neatly constructed rational-bureaucratic lines". (Gause III, 2014, 200f) As state offices and Ministries seem to have been rather personalised to royal princes than functioning bureaucracies with formal procedures, the main players involved in the decision-making might follow primarily their personal interest than the organisational ones. (Hertog, 2011, p. 50) (Steinberg, 2014, 82f) These arguments are confirmed by the analysis of the military intervention in Yemen.

There seem to have existed competition between different elites of the royal family and the different ministries, which can be reasoned by the institutional and personnel changes made by King Salman before and throughout the ongoing intervention in Yemen. This competition however, seems to be mainly due to personal rivalry rather than institutional one between the individuals sitting on top of the ministries and Councils, such as in the case of MBS and MbN. It can be suggested that King Salman tries to diminish existing competition between the players involved in the decision-making process. By changing most officials of the previous King's administration, Salman eliminates former decision-making dynamics, "[which] points to a considerable degree of centralisation and a significant shift in the decision-making process itself" (Karim, 2017, p. 78) By cutting off previous officials from power and replacing them by 'his personnel', including some technocrats like Al-Jubeir, less divergence of interests and goals might be given in the decision-making process, which contradicts the BPM.

Different ministries and Councils appear to be involved in the foreign policy decision-making process but opposing to the argument of the BPM, they are mainly lead by one person, MBS. The idea of the BPM that foreign policy decisions are political resultants of compromise and bargaining process between the different officials atop of the different bureaucracies cannot be seen very clear in the case of the decision to intervene in Yemen, because of the centralisa-

tion of power to MBS, dominating most of the involved institutions. Potential contrary opinion or opposing interests to the intervention have been eliminated by ousting certain personnel from their power position within the ministries, which can be seen in the replacement of MbN, the greatest rival to MBS.

King Salman and his son appear to have formed a functioning coalition, that understood to reduce competition and the possibilities for other domestic political players to influence and bargain in the decision-making process. It seems like that they have managed to consolidate their power sufficiently on domestic level to decide alone on foreign policy concerns. The tendency in Saudi decision-making process goes away from bureaucratisation, drifting away from the arguments of the BPM about foreign policy decision-making.

4 Application of the Sociology of Power

With the Sociology of Power, it is expected to include more actors in the analysis of power structures and the elites' competition, not only considering the political regime as it was done with the BPM. The political system forms part of a broader power regime whose hierarchy does not necessarily coincide with the hierarchy of the official political system. Referring to the three types of power regime, Saudi Arabia is a system with concentrated elites- the royal family- and concentrated resources- mainly the state. As analysed before King Salman and MBS control all aspects within the state system which allocates them a major power resource- the state. MBS tries to use his domain of the Ministry of Defence as a resource to gain popular support and strengthen his power position. On institutional level King Salman and MBS seem to have reduced the competition for power, but it might be important to include sectors outside of the political state system and the bureaucratic institutions when analysing the foreign policy decision to carry out the Yemen intervention which will be intended through the SoP.

4.1 Saudi- US competition regarding the military sector

The Saudi Kingdom is the third largest military spender in the world, after the USA and China. It is estimated that Saudi Arabia spends 10- 11% of its GDP each year on military equipment. (SIPRI, 2018, p. 14); in 2015, when the Yemen intervention was started, military expenditures reached a peak with 13,5% of Saudi GDP. Within these expenditures only 2% go to currently seven domestic Saudi companies. (Vision 2030, p. 48) The Kingdom is the 2nd largest importer of military equipment in the world, with the USA as major supplier. (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2017, p. 15)

With the creation of Vision 2030, mainly driven by MBS, a programme for fostering the domestic military sector has been included. By 2030, 50% of the military equipment spending shall be localized to domestic firms. (SAMI, 2018) To facilitate the implementation of these objectives, the state-owned national defence industry company “Saudi Arabian Military Industries” (SAMI) was founded in May 2017. (Vision 2030, p. 48)

The launching of the military intervention in Yemen does not quite go along with MBS and King Salman’s interest of fostering the local military industry, as the involvement of Saudi military means a burden for the state household. It is estimated that the Yemen war costs around \$200 million every day on the coalition’s Gulf regimes. (Perlo-Freeman, 2018) Such a big amount of expenditures due to the involvement in the war in combination with low oil prices slows down the implementation of the plans to be among the top military industries in the world by 2030 and creates a deficit in Saudi state budget. (Cordesman, 2018, p. 8) Many experts argue that the Saudi elites, especially MBS and King Salman have made a miscalculation, believing to achieve a military success in Yemen within a few months. (Heibach, 2017, p. 5) The Saudis struggled to strike the Houthis down because of the lack of ground forces’ deployment, the difficult mountain terrain nearby the border which favours the guerrilla strategies of the Houthis. (Neubauer, 2013) Both did not expect that using their power resource of coercion in Yemen would threaten other interests or resources on domestic level as they expected a prompt military success. As Cordesman states “the Kingdom has been spending far too large a portion of its economy on security priorities that have yielded uncertain results. This spending on security is large enough to compete with Saudi Arabia's ability to fund its 2030 plan to reform and modernize its economy and social structure [which puts domestic stability into risk]. ” (Cordesman, 2018, p. 2)

Looking at the military sector through the Sociology of Power’s prism, there are different interests and resources in competition. With his economic and social reforms included in the

Vision2030, MBS has gained a lot of support by the Saudi population. The public support is one of his most important resources in the power competition. He must act carefully to not put this resource into risk through the military intervention and high military expenditures which might impede the realisation of his reform plans. King Salman and MBS have to match their interests of domestic stability on the one hand and the demonstration of power prestige and regional strong leadership abroad.

As the USA is the major arms supplier to the Kingdom, American firms have a big economic interest in the military intervention in Yemen. Even though president Obama publicly opposed the armed conflicts in the Middle East region, several arms deliveries in billion amounts were authorised to the Saudis during his administration. (Perlo-Freeman, 2018) Only by the end of 2016, Obama decided to freeze planned arms sales to the Saudis after having received massive public criticism at home as well as internationally that US arms would be fueling the Yemeni war. (Cooper, 2016) Under the Trump administration this resolution was revoked and in May 2017 on a visit to the Saudi Kingdom, president Trump promised a military package deal of \$110bn. (David, 2017) Drawing the picture a bit wider including the other Arab countries involved in the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war, the USA result to be the main arms exporter in nearly all of them. (Perlo-Freeman, 2018)

The arms supply by the USA demonstrate a clear interest from US side in the Yemen intervention. The question raised is how Saudi elites benefit, considering that nearly all their military resources come from the exterior which benefits external elites, the USA. It is therefore interesting to examine how Saudi elites are involved in the US military sector, e.g. through foreign financial investment or company alliances. Significant US firms hold Joint Ventures with Saudi enterprises such as Northrop Grumman with Vinnell Arabia, highly connected to the military training and equipment of the SANG. (Vinnell Arabia, 2018) In March 2018, the SAMI agreed on a Joint Venture with Boeing which shall support the Saudi goals of the Vision 2030. (Boeing, 2018) Important question to assess in this context is why the Saudi elites have not developed their own military industry so far but rather preferred to rely on the USA.¹³

Although the USA continuously delivered military equipment to the Saudi Kingdom, their relationship has got strained and the Saudis felt left behind by their ally in the last years, especially during Obama's administration. These tensions began with the Iraq invasion in 2001

¹³ A further analysis of the connection between the Saudi financial sector and the US military sector might give a more detailed insight. Such analysis could not have been conducted within the scope of the paper and will be left for further investigation.

under president Bush. The Iraq war unstabled the region creating a power vacuum, which opened the way for Iran to take over greater influence in the region. (Kinninmont, 2017, p. 211) Saudi Arabia's rivalry with Iran is argued to be the main argument for the strained relation with the USA. Approaches by Obama to the Iranian Republic, especially considering the negotiations of a nuclear deal with Iran, has been a sign of US betrayal for the Saudi elites. When Obama favoured the overthrow of Mubarak (which has been an important partner for Saudi rulers) in Egypt due to the Arab Spring in 2011, Saudi royals again felt that the USA were not defending Saudi interests anymore nor did they guarantee their security as they supported the democratic uprisings. Saudi elites had the impression that they could not count anymore on the support of the USA. (Sons, 2016, pp. 100–104)

Several experts therefore argue that in the case of Yemen, King Salman and MBS intended to send a clear sign to the USA that they would launch a military operation with or without their long-time ally joining the coalition. They appear to have decided that Saudi interests come first and that they are willing and able to defend them, not tolerating US 'silence' and 'idleness' in the region. (Khashoggi, 2015; Kinninmont, 2017, p. 211) It is claimed that one of the main Saudi interest behind the intervention is to show power prestige; to demonstrate that King Salman and MBS are decisive and merciless rulers independently from US interests. (Darwich, 2015, p. 4) (Heibach, 2017, p. 5)

Referring to the SoP, it is questionable though, to which extent such intention by King Salman and MBS to strengthen their power position has been successful. The Saudi elites depend highly on the alliance with the governmental as well as the corporate-military US elites in terms of security. The provision of Intelligence and logistic service by the USA has been essential for the Saudi Kingdom to continue the Yemen war. (Heibach, 2017, p. 8) (Perlo-Freeman, 2018) The Saudi elites still seem to be forced to obtain external power resources to be competitive which could put their power position into risk in the long-term perspective.

4.2 Saudi-Yemeni competition regarding political influence

Yemen's history is based on a traditional tribal system, with different religious groups. Throughout history Yemen has been marked by internal struggles. Saudi elites count a long history of influence in Yemen alleging a hegemonic role regarding their smaller neighbour. (Gause III, 2014, p. 187) Over decades the Saudi have established and maintained important lines of influence in terms of financial and infrastructural aid to the Yemeni government and political ties to Yemeni tribes and personalities.¹⁴ (Gause III, 2014, 192f)

Saudi elites furthermore, managed to connect Yemeni economy closely to the Kingdom. During the oil boom in the 1970s and 80s a high number of Yemenis moved to Saudi Arabia for labour reasons. From their salary they sent remittances to family members who remained in Yemen. This mechanism which is practised until today made the Yemeni economy highly dependent on Saudi Arabia, relying on the expatriate workers. (Sons, 2016, pp. 115–120)

Also, in terms of security affairs Yemen matters to the Saudi elites as Yemen shares a long border with Saudi Arabia, mainly going through highlands area. Most of the Saudi-Yemeni border line is not clearly defined nor officially agreed on by the Yemeni and Saudi government. Both make border control extremely difficult. Saudi elites are highly concerned about the security threats to the Kingdom that arise from the border like smuggling, illegal border crossing by members of Al-Qaeda and other rebel groups. (Fattah, 2015) (Neubauer, 2013) Looking at the Saudi sphere of influence in the region, Yemen is considered to be a Saudi backyard or puffer state for the Saudi elites, which has to be protected from external influence, namely from Saudi greatest rival the Iran or Islamist militia like Al-Qaeda or ISIS. (Sons, 2016, pp. 115–120)

The unification in 1990 of the Northern and South Yemen to the Republic of Yemen in 1990 meant creating a state that could compete with Saudi Arabia in terms of population and territory. (Darwich, 2015, p. 3) Even though Saudi Arabia supported Yemeni president Saleh to achieve unification, main objective by the Saudi elites over history has been to keep the Yemen state weak and controlled in political and economic aspects through the different mechanisms described. The Saudi elites tried to keep the different Yemeni elites busy with resolving internal political struggles. (Darwich, 2015, p. 3; Gause III, 2014, 192f) The Saudi Kingdom and Yemen are closely connected as Saudi Foreign Minister al-Jubeir officially stated on a

¹⁴ The Saudi Kingdom intervened, including militarily, on several important domestic occasions throughout Yemeni history, such as in 1962 during the civil war in Northern Yemen and later during the unification phase in 1990.

conference hold by Chatman House: “When Yemen suffers, we suffer. When Yemen prospers, we prosper.” (HE Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, 2016)

With the Arab Spring uprisings spreading to Yemen and with them the resignation of former Yemeni president Saleh, the Saudi elites lost a strategic partner and control grip in the region. Stability and the continuity of Yemeni government have been threatened. (Heibach, 2017, p. 5) Saleh handed over power to his deputy al-Hadi as interim president backed by the Saudis, who should stabilise the political situation. The Houthis however, continued their rebellion. Starting “in the late 1980s as a religious and cultural revivalist movement among practitioners of Zaydi Shi’ism¹⁵ in Northern Yemen” (Laub, 2016) the Houthis perceive their Zaydi tradition under attack from the Yemeni government. Politically and economically marginalised they want to take part in shaping the political system of Yemen so that Yemen would become an independent sovereign state detached from the former corrupt power elites and the influence of Saudi Arabia and the USA. (Ahlulbayt.TV, 2016) When the Houthi rebels forced president al-Hadi to flee the country by 2015, Saudi elites feared that a “new elite” would take over power in Yemen, losing their power position within Yemen and on the Arabian Peninsula. (Sons, 2016, pp. 115–120)

Referring to the SoP, it can be argued that the Houthis managed to establish linear power relations through their social mobilisation against the Yemeni elites of Saleh. Once having achieved the capacity for collective action the Houthis were able to negotiate with the elites. (Feliu and Izquierdo, 2016, p. 206) Seeing the Houthis trying to change the traditional power circle of competing elites, the Saudis had to react to maintain their position within the elites, as described in the SoP.

With the intervention, which turned Yemen into a devastating humanitarian crisis, Saudi Arabia got under harsh criticism and the international community called for peace talks. King Salman however, has no interest at current status to find a political solution to the conflict, as he does not want the Houthis to receive governmental power. (Darwich, 2015, p. 3) To avoid that the Houthis enter the power competition, Saudi Arabia had to deny them power resources like governmental or institutional control, which would allow them to compete or which could threaten the Saudi power position in the region. In order to do so, the Saudi elites (mainly King Salman and MBS as analysed in chapter 3) decided to launch the military intervention against the Houthis rebellion. It is claimed that the Saudis started the intervention to further

¹⁵ “Zaidi Shi’ism is one of three main branches of the Shiite movement, together with Twelver Shi’ism and the Isma’ili branch.” Rahimi (2010, p. 179)

imbalance the country, deepening the fragmentation of tribes and religious groups reaching for power. As throughout history, also in the current conflict, Saudi elites fear an independent strong Yemeni state which could become a serious competitor to Saudi Arabia. (Neubauer, 2013) It is furthermore hold that the Saudis believed to be able to shape the Yemen political environment according to their interests and to re-establish their influence after a military success by striking the Houthis rebels down. Saudi Arabia states as official aim of the mission “Decisive Storm” to reestablish the “legitimate” government of former president al-Hadi (HE Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, 2016), which is questionable though.

4.3 Saudi- Iranian competition regarding geopolitical and religious leadership

Iran is perceived as a huge rival regarding geopolitical- regional and religious leadership by the Saudi elites. Both are trying to widen their influence in the Middle East region by dominating smaller fragile states like Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. As analysed the Yemen state is of important interest to the Saudis which is why they fear Iranian encroachment and control in Yemen. (Sons, 2016, pp. 104–114)

Both, the Saudi and Iranian elites consider themselves as the protectors of the respectively Sunni and Shiite community. The Saudi elites use this sectarian discrepancy in their discourse to legitimise the military intervention in Yemen. (Darwich, 2015, p. 3) The Kingdom’s official objective of the mission is to safeguard the Sunni brothers who are endangered by the Shiite invasion, the Houthis. (HE Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, 2016) Claiming that Iran backs up the Houthis with military equipment and logistic support the Saudi elites make Iran main responsible actor for the developments in Yemen. Islamic solidarity as a justification to promote Saudi interests in the region has always been a common principle of Saudi FP. (Darwich, 2015, p. 3)

The power resource of ideology has always been a resource of defence for the Saudi elites, especially against Iranian attacks. Such anti- Iranian propaganda and FP justification based on sectarian arguments have been supported by the religious establishment “ulama”. (Soler i Lecha and Zaccara, 2013, p. 165) The alliance between the Al-Saud family and the Wahhabism clerics has been perceived as an alliance between primary elites; the Saudi clerics helped the Saudi rulers out in several critical events throughout history by supporting their policy decisions. The ulama can be believed to have supported the decision for the military interven-

tion as the clerics use to provide legitimacy to the Saudi elites and their decisions to receive power and prestige in return. (Permuy, 2016, p. 32, 55) It can be argued though, that this exchange got imbalanced and Saudi clerics have passed to being secondary elites. The Saudi ruling elite managed to enforce and implement decisions not depending on the clerics' support anymore, such as for instance MBS' ambition to modernise and reform the country's economy and society with the implementation of Vision 2030. (Permuy, 2016, p. 8) (Kinninmont, 2017, p. 211)

Saudi elites are deliberately overestimating Iran's involvement in Yemen by propagating that the Houthis are Iran's surrogate for their own legitimation at home. Though the claim that Iran is backing the Houthis is popular, it is questionable how the rebels really fight for Iran's interests. (McGregor, 2010, p. 182) The Houthi movement is "symptom of the historical regional division in the Yemeni state as well as [policies of Shiite marginalisation by the Yemeni government]" (Zweiri, 2016, p. 16); the Houthis follow their own agenda with the aim to achieve political participation in Yemen.

Competition for power between the Iranian and the Saudi elites in terms of political and religious supremacy in the region can be proved but reducing the fighting in Yemen to a proxy war between the two players would leave aside other important factors and would not examine the conflict in its whole complexity. (House, 2016, 17f) (Zweiri, 2016, p. 16) The Houthi movement favours Iran's interests in a sense but the Iranian elites do not appear to have any interest in entering the power competition in Yemen directly, e.g. through military involvement like the Saudis. Both elites have shrink away from a direct military confrontation so far. (Zweiri, 2016, 4f) Yemen is more essential to the Saudis than to the Iran considering the close connection between the Saudi and Yemeni state. The Saudi elites have activated several power resources such as coercion and ideology to defend their sphere of influence in Yemen. (Juneau, 2016, p. 659) Iran on the other hand, could be seen as a third-party actor which benefits from the developments in Yemen. The Saudi elites' incapacity of striking the Houthis down and their high expenditures for the intervention weaken them at domestic as well as regional level, which advantages the Iranian elites in their power position. Saudi elites furthermore, have lost image on international stage being accused of having caused a humanitarian crisis with the intervention, which strengthen the Iranian elites especially in their perception by Western powers. A weak struggling Saudi Kingdom is of Iranian interests; the Iranian elites improve their power status in the region even without putting much effort into it. (Juneau, 2016, p. 660) (Darwich, 2015, p. 3)

5 Conclusion

In March 2015 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign against the Houthi rebels who have seized power in Yemen. Since then, the Kingdom is involved in a devastating conflict in Yemen and solution still seems far off. This paper assessed why the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia opted for a military intervention as foreign policy response to the developments in Yemen.

This question has been investigated through the application of the bureaucratic process model (BPM), a Foreign Policy Analysis approach, in combination with the Sociology of Power. The Sociology of Power is expected to contribute an added value to the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), as it permits analysis beyond the BPM's focus.

The analysis with the BPM concludes that the Saudi Kingdom counts on a bureaucratic system with different institutions involved in the decision-making process. Due to King Salman's changes in the state structure and official personnel though, the tendency in the decision-making process goes away from bureaucratisation. As King Salman turns over the lead of nearly all relevant ministries and councils to his son MBS, the competition for power on institutional level within the Kingdom has been reduced. Therefore, the BPM is not sufficient to conduct a comprehensive analysis.

Expanding the analysis' scope of political state system and the bureaucratic institutions by the SoP, the main argument is that the Saudi elites use the intervention as a foreign policy strategy to accumulate power and secure their power position in the competition with the other elites. The application of the SoP allows to identify a) the main actors involved in the power competition, b) the actors' interests and position within the power structure, c) the power resources at their disposal and d) the interrelations between the actors, interests and power resources playing a role in the intervention. The foreign policy decision to carry out the Yemen intervention results to have been taken in a broader power structure, in which the Saudi elites faced competition with different actors concerning military resources, political influence in Yemen, as well as geopolitical and religious leadership in the region.

By the BPM, King Salman and MBS have been identified as the sole decision-makers within the Kingdom. On domestic level King Salman's and MBS' interest has been to consolidate and centralise power in terms of state control by dominating all relevant institutions within the decision-making process. With the military intervention in Yemen they intend to show decisiveness, power prestige and strong leadership at home as well as abroad. The most important

power resource available to the Saudi elites is the state; controlling the institutions, the state budget and the population according to the rentier system is essential to maintain their status as elites in the power competition.

Under the administration of Obama, the Saudis felt that they could not rely on the alliance with the USA anymore and had to react themselves. The Saudi elites try to become independent by developing their own military industry and involvement in the US military sector through Joint Ventures. Nevertheless, in the case of the Yemen intervention the Saudis depend highly on the US support.

The Yemen is of utmost importance to the Saudi elites in terms of security and Saudi sphere of influence; Yemen counts as a puffer state against Iranian encroachment in the region. The Saudi elites must guarantee their power position in Yemen, denying other actors like the Houthis to access power resources to receive political power. The Houthis have managed to establish linear power relations by collective action; their call for political participation threatens the Saudis' position in Yemen.

As the Iran is Saudi's greatest rival regarding regional and religious leadership, the Saudis fear Iranian incursion in Yemen through the Houthis as Iranian surrogate. The Saudis' official aim of the intervention is to protect the Sunni community from Shiite repression by the Houthis and the Iran. The Saudis use this power resource of ideology to legitimise the intervention at domestic level and hereby exaggerate Iran's involvement in Yemen. The Houthi movement favours Iranian interests; the Iranian elites though do not seem to be interested in entering the power competition in Yemen directly. They strengthen their power position through Saudi elites' incapacity of striking the Houthis down and subsequently, high expenditures for the intervention which weaken the Saudis at domestic as well as regional and international level.

The Sociology of Power supplements the analysis of the Bureaucratic Process Model by:

a) broadening the power structure. The SoP shifts the focus away from the political system and includes other sectors like the military sector for example. The US military firms benefit as external elites from the intervention by providing major military equipment to the Saudi elites. Although the Saudis perceived the USA as an unreliable partner in various occasions during the last years, they seem to have no chance than to count on the support by the USA in the Yemen intervention.

b) including a greater variety of actors. The SoP gives the actors's role the power structure a different emphasis, as the focus does not lie on official representatives as primary actors. In the SoP analysis the Houthi rebels become an autonomous actor of primary role who jeopardise the Saudi elites' power position in Yemen. This changes the importance of Iran's role in the power competition. The SoP concludes that Iran is a third-party actor which benefits from the developments in Yemen.

c) examining the interrelations and interplay between the wide set of actors, interests and resources in different issue areas on domestic, regional and international level. The SoP depicts the interrelation and competition between different power resources and interests of King Salman and MBS in the case of Yemen. Using coercion abroad puts their domestic interests and resources into risk such as the support by the population and the implementation of the Vision2030. King Salman and MBS have to bring together their interests of domestic stability and implementing reform plans on the one hand, with the demonstration of power prestige and strong regional leadership abroad on the other hand to achieve their goals in Yemen. The Saudi dependence on external resources in terms of military equipment furthermore, weakens the Saudi elites' competitiveness.

The analysis with the SoP illustrates that competition between different actors, interests and resources and their interrelations have led to the decision for military intervention in Yemen. The case study demonstrates that the application of the SoP on the field of FPA is reasonable and contributes the analysis to a significant amount. Applying the SoP enabled to generate a comprehensive, multidimensional and complex analysis to understand the actors, interests and resources behind the foreign policy decision for intervention in Yemen. The SoP permits to paint a broader picture of the power structure, in which the Saudi elites decided to launch a military intervention in Yemen. The new created theoretical framework has proven of value in the case study's analysis and should be applied to future investigations in the foreign policy field.

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