

Ally or Enemy?

A Comprehensive Analysis of Media Coverage on the Yemen-Saudi Arabian Conflict

BY

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## *1. Introduction*

Geographically bordering one another, Yemen and Saudi Arabia have witnessed several transitions of leadership, intermittently accompanied with conflict. In 2011, Yemen's former President, Ali Abdallah Saleh, resigned after several protests in the country opposing his leadership. His deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, was presumed to take over the presidential position, however, protests and fighting never ceased after Saleh's resignation. As a result of the unsuccessful transition between the two leaders, a Yemeni group called the "Houthis" took command of the country. Backed by the Irani government, the Houthi group assumed control of the capital of Yemen—Sana'a—in 2014, resulting in a civil war between the Houthis and opposing forces who supported Saleh and Hadi. In March of 2015, bordering country, Saudi Arabia, began to bomb Yemen in opposition of the Houthis and Iran. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran are particularly important in this civil war, because the two countries have been competitors for political dominance in the Middle East for decades. Additionally, Saudi Arabia is allied with several "western" countries, notably being the leading ally in the Middle East to the United States government. In the case of war in Yemen, the US continues to fund the Saudi Arabian government with weapons and resources that assist in the persisted bombing of Yemen and its people. As war progresses into 2020, the United Nations has declared the Yemeni situation to be the worst humanitarian crises in the past 100 years on the grounds that millions of Yemeni people are starving and dying as a result of the war. Respectively, the ways in which the global community has navigated the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Yemen is worth some attention. With global relief organizations all around the world, the neglect of the Yemeni is unfathomable. So, why is the situation not changing?

This thesis will evaluate news media representation of Arabs in “ally” nations versus “enemy” nations with regard to the current conflict between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. I will examine the divergence between reporting from Western and Arab news media outlets. My case studies will be CNN and Al Jazeera Media Network, and their coverage of the Yemen-Saudi Arabian conflict. Both outlets are influential in the media world; however, CNN has greater power with their circulation and their geographical location in the United States; therefore, the network has hegemony over narrative formation. I argue that CNN’s promise of “objectivity” while western critique of “bias” against Al Jazeera is not applicable to the Saudi Arabian-Yemeni conflict because of CNN’s allegiances to state power in relation to reporting on foreign policy and war. The media, in general, has the ability to affect public perception which can ultimately influence the government’s choice whether or not to send aid to a certain war/conflict, which side they should be supporting, geo-politics of the region or the consistency of power itself in the countries involved. Furthermore, the media also chooses what to cover and not to cover, which in turn, helps shape opinion, influencing who holds national power. This has relevance to the importance of “power” itself and the lengths to which media gives power. While doing this, I must also analyze the bias of “sources” quoted or referenced in these articles and how these individuals impact the way the conflict is discussed on the two media networks. News media also has a profound influence over agenda setting; because of this, it is pertinent to ask who benefits from this conflict and how. It is possible that if the United States were to withhold support from Saudi Arabia, this decision could directly affect the US economy through inflation of oil prices. Furthermore, if the authors of the articles in these news outlets receive their information from government sources, does the information skew more to one side? How does

this alignment effect Arab representation in American media? And lastly, in what ways does an American news outlet narrate the conflict versus a Middle Eastern news outlet?

## 2. *Methods*

### 2.1 THE DATA

The methodology that I use to conduct my research will be through the analysis of news sources using critical discourse analysis. The data consists of the online version of news texts that will be drawn from CNN's digital platform, an American news outlet, and Al Jazeera Media Network, a Qatar-based online news outlet. Both organizations run on the 24-hour news cycle and will be analyzed in English. CNN is first and foremost a cable news organization but disseminates its information online as well; it also broadcasts to over 212 countries and territories. Al Jazeera was originally launched as an Arabic news TV channel but has since spread to also being an online platform and is currently (as of 2020) published in both Arabic and English. The evidence studied will include headlines and the rhetorical material of the article body. The importance of examining headlines is because they are written by editors and sub editors, rather than authors of the story, underlying the ideological views of the media network. The headline is important in expressing the main idea of each individual article and influences the narrative of the story before the reader views the full text. I will evaluate text articles from the online version of the news outlets of CNN and Al Jazeera from June 2019 to December 2019 qualitatively. I will use the 'search' of each platform and use the keywords [Yemen] and [Yemen and Saudi Arabia], which allows me to narrow down to all articles that intersect with both countries. On the CNN website, I will only filter the date and look at articles under [EVERYTHING] filter as well as cross referencing throughout [ALL CNN] tab. On the Al Jazeera website, I will filter under [LATEST] crossing with the "filter by" [ALL]. In this

research, I will analyze the types of sources that the articles are choosing and if there is a pattern to the identity of the people being sourced. Lastly, I will be cross-examining the rhetoric used in the articles with the western discourse around orientalism and consider the ways in which these private news networks have allegiances to state power when it comes to reporting on foreign wars.

## 2.2 THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The data will be studied by using critical discourse analysis (CDA) through evaluating how power and inequality are shaped in language used in the articles. The other methodological approach used will be political economy which is important in understanding the relationship between the government and the media production of the following publications. “CDA focuses on the role of discourse in producing and reproducing social reality, in enforcing and transforming social identities and relationships, and therefore it studies how discourse contributes to social continuity and social change. In order to uncover the way discourse operates in society, CDA proceeds to a systematic textual analysis, since texts constitute the medium through which discourse is enacted (Kress, 1989). This analysis is completed by the examination of the processes of text production and consumption, as well as by the study of how such processes are dictated by social, political and institutional conditions.<sup>1</sup> The data of this thesis is evaluated at a micro-level as a result of the study being performed in individual articles and their common theme rather than every single text from June-December 2019, regarding all mentions of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

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<sup>1</sup> Anastasia G. Stamou. “The Representation of Non-Protesters in a Student and Teacher Protest: A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reporting in a Greek Newspaper. *Discourse & Society*, vol. 12, no. 5 (2001): 653–680. *JSTOR*, Accessed 5 Apr. 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/42888392](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42888392).

### 3. *Historical Background of the Study*

Twentieth and twenty-first century conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia dates back to the Saudi-Yemeni war of 1934. Although their relationship has changed over time, historically Saudi Arabia has always assumed hegemonic power. In the book *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis explain the ancient relationship between these two countries, stating “mythologies of most tribes in Saudi Arabia emphasize descent from Qahtan, an epical ancestor whose homeland was nowhere but Yemen. The same place had always been a source of conjuring images of chivalry, authenticity, and Arab ancestry...yet, from the eighteenth century on, Yemen had also represented a frontier barrier to Saudi religious, political, and military expansion.<sup>2</sup> With this emphasis on the geographical borders, the social and cultural disparities between the two countries furthered their regional tensions. In understanding how the current conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia began in 2015, one must look back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century where several problems began to arise. In 1962, a socialist government, the People’s Republic of Yemen (PDRY), was elected in Aden, Yemen, that provoked a revolution which crossed regional lines in the Middle East. The PDRY’s government developed a combination of both leftist and nationalist discourse that threatened the Saudi Arabian government who began to see Yemen as a security threat. According to scholars Al-Rasheed and Vitalis, since then, the Saudi government has attempted to create Yemeni submission: “throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Saudi rulers poured huge sums of money into Yemen in an attempt to lure tribal sheikhs and revolutionary leaders to accept their hegemony. In the early 1960s, the Kingdom welcomed

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<sup>2</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis, eds. *Counter-Narratives : History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen* (London,UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). ProQuest Ebook Central.

the deposed Imams of North Yemen and supported Yemeni royalists against Nasserite revolutionaries. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabian leaders continued to involve themselves in Yemeni domestic politics”.<sup>3</sup>As a result of the economic resources that Saudi Arabia held over the Yemeni government, they presupposed control over Yemen’s political future. The political and social issues that encompassed the Saudi-Yemen mid-20<sup>th</sup> century relationship are the foundations for the 21<sup>st</sup> century conflicts.

#### 4. *Literature Review - Orientalism, the Configuration of “the West” and American Media*

When considering the conceptualization representation of the Middle East in western media and its connection with American politics, the intersection of Orientalism and the ideology of “the West” must be examined. The late 15<sup>th</sup> century formed the abstraction of “Orientalism” paralleled with western portrayals of Islam through European colonization of countries in the Middle East, Eastern and Northern African (MENA) and Southeast Asia. Integral to the cross-section of these ideals is the language used as both a tool of description and political weapon. Correspondingly, what role does the perception of “Orient” play in contributing towards the modern interpretation of the Middle East? How has US Mainstream media manipulated the representation of Middle Eastern countries? This review highlights upon the historical implications of Orientalism and how its legacy has been proliferated through the outlooks of “the West” and lastly evaluating how western discourse assists in shaping the dominant ideology that has been reinforced through American media.

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Rasheed and Vitalis, eds. *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, 3-4.

#### 4.1 ORIENTALISM

The idea of the Orient continues to manifest through political and social tropes using language and imagery as a tool to further its ideology. One historian who pioneered the justification of Orientalism in the West is well-known scholar Bernard Lewis. Lewis assisted in shaping *western* views of the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia, making a claim that “orients” should not be the only ones who are able to study Orientalism just as “Greeks should not be the only ones who could study classical studies”<sup>4</sup>Lewis believes that Orientalism is studied just as any other anthropological sect. In his article *The Question of Orientalism*, Lewis explains that historically Orientalism has been studied in two ways: through the school of painting and as a branch of scholarship. Lewis explains that the term dates back to the expansion of scholarship that occurred from the Renaissance in Western Europe. “There were Hellenists who studied Greek, Latinists who studied Latin, Hebraists who studied Hebrew; the first two groups were sometimes called classicists, the third Orientalists. In due course they turned their attention to other languages.”<sup>5</sup> Lewis expounds that these scholars were merely concerned with the study, recovery, publication and interpretation of texts that later evolved into other serious matters including the study of philosophy, theology, literature and history of the region. Lewis concedes in the rest of his article that many scholars such as Edward Said have polluted the term and study of Orientalism by associating it with something in which it is not.<sup>6</sup>

With Edward Said being one of the pioneers that shifted the narrative of Orientalism, it is important to discuss his book, *Orientalism*. Said explains that if “the Orientals,” themselves, are not controlling their own narrative, then the study of Orientalism has punished the people to not

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Question of Orientalism*.”*The New York Times Review of Books*, 24 June 1982, pp. 1-9.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, *The Question of Orientalism*.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, *The Question of Orientalism*.



be free subjects of their own thoughts and actions.<sup>7</sup> Said argues that when discussing the “Orient”, particularly from a western scholarly stance, we must consider that we are people who are furthering the idea itself. He emphasizes that the Orient is not simply the identification that we place upon one singular group of people; but rather an aesthetical, economic, political and scholarly existence that has become wrapped into the idea that the world is cut into two halves: the Orient and the Occident.<sup>8</sup> The imagery of the Orient is collectively shaped by creating a wall dividing what is “yours” and embracing what is “ours”. The three large hegemonic powers of the proposed “West”, Britain, France and the United States created the polarized belief that the Orient exists exclusively within “their” own world, which assists in formulating a divide that becomes believed by a larger mass. Additionally, Said insists on not limiting oneself to the scholarship of orientalist studies in efforts to understand “the orient” because of its control by European culture. He states that the strength of European culture has roots in its ability to offset itself from associations with the Orient; inevitably creating a hierarchical belief that European culture is more sophisticated. Furthermore, when considering the historical arc of Orientalism, the shift from the Anglo-French narrative to American involvement is essential to examine. Said argues that there is a quantitative and qualitative distinction among the Franco-British to American image of the Orient being that the European powers formed a cultural enterprise with the Orient from the whole of India and the Levant, to what Said calls the biblical lands, spice trade and colonial armies. The domination of the Orientalist and Orient narrative was controlled by France and Britain from the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the shift in worldly hegemonic powers and since then has been controlled by American powers, with the same lens that the Europeans once used.

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Wadie Said, *Orientalism*. (United States: Pantheon Books, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Edward Wadie Said, *Orientalism*

Tugrul Keskin develops Said's theory of Orientalism by discussing it through a colonized and imperial viewpoint. He expresses that after the Second World War, the formation of the Western hegemonic powers created control over Middle Eastern countries through education. Partnership with local educational systems allowed Western powers to further their ideological objectives. In providing funds that assist in home-based research, we can recognize this aspect of Orientalism cross-functioning with neo-colonialism. This was not exclusive to the Middle East but had a global effect, particularly over countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In propelling the educational systems in fields such as the social, financial, historical and anthropological, the hegemonic "West" further their exploitation in several countries.<sup>9</sup> Keskin refers to this new form of imperialism as neo-Orientalism and professes that the historical power that was said to have left the region has not done so at all, but rather morphed into a different disguise.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, Andrew Wilcox emphasizes the impact of Orientalism on our imaginings towards the modern-day Middle East. However, in his framework, he adds how religion plays into the Said-Orientalist conceptualizations. His analysis questions whether the methods used by missionaries to study the Middle East parallel or, to go even further, *influence* the orientalist figure that has been drawn out by western scholars. What's more, where does their place lie when considering them as "agents" in colonization and imperialism as a whole?<sup>11</sup> The term Orientalism, in and of itself, is rather vague and in practice has no substantive application as a

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<sup>9</sup> Turgal, KeskinM, ed. "Chapter 1 ." *Middle East Studies after September 11: Neo-Orientalism, American Hegemony and Academia* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Keskin, ed. "Chapter 1 ." *Middle East Studies after September 11: Neo-Orientalism, American Hegemony and Academia*, 8

<sup>11</sup> Wilcox, Andrew. *Orientalism and Imperialism: From Nineteenth-Century Missionary Imaginings to the Contemporary Middle East* (London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 10. E-book Central.

broad usage to define a large region that comprises of a bountiful amount of cultures, practices, people and beliefs.

#### 4.2 THE CONFIGURATION OF “THE WEST”

The construction of the Orient does not exist unless it lies upon the backs of [what is considered by global hegemonic powers to be ] the standard—the west. When first evaluating the West, in its modern assessment, common knowledge insinuates that the West is associated with countries within the regions of Australia, Europe, and North America. Obviously not all of these countries are geographically located in the global West, however they share similar ideologies. It has become a given to *move* the West where the dominant hegemonic powers of the world reside. By controlling the narrative, these countries control the discourse around the West. However, after the 1800s, the West became closely associated with colonial and imperialist powers who began to control the narrative of who was deemed the “other”.

Scholar William H. McNeil describes the importance of the identity behind the person discussing the West and how that predicates the connotative meaning of “the West”. Unlike the construction of the “Orient”, which belongs to geographically connecting regions, (MENA and Southeast Asia), the conceptions of “the West” transcend geographic boundaries and may or may not include those in the geographical West.<sup>12</sup> Although Ancient Rome and Greece are typically respected as the progenitors of “Western” thought, political discourse rarely consists of South-European countries because of their economic positions in the modern-day global society. McNeil emphasizes that quicker global expansion by the French and British empires versus the German and Italian empires of the 19<sup>th</sup> century facilitated the establishment of the current

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<sup>12</sup> William H. McNeill. “What We Mean by the West.” *Orbis* 41, no. 4 (1997): 513–524., doi:10.1016/s0030-4387(97)90002-8.

hegemonic powers. In reference to power today, the discourse associated with “the West” has sometimes been known to consider not only geographically Western democratic countries, but also “non-western” nations that rose to economic and political power with their institutions and technologies, and to some extent values such as Japan.

In Mahmood Mamdani’s article and book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism*, Mamdani explores the ways in which the West has divided countries in two cultural scopes: modern and premodern. He explains that the former, “modern” is the *creator* of culture while the latter is a *prisoner* to culture. This ideology “presumes that culture stands for creativity, for what being human is all about, in one part of the world, that called “modern,” but that in the other part, labeled “premodern,” culture stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity whose rules are inscribed in early found texts founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artifacts.”<sup>13</sup> Mamdani demonstrates that the issue with dichotomizing cultural explanations of political outcomes is that it both avoids history and issues as well as thinking of individuals as if their identities are shaped by an *unchanging* culture to which they are born<sup>14</sup>. This presumed identity that many western nations used to disassociate itself with other countries around the world was propagated throughout the Cold War and onward. In the post-Cold War era, the United States had taken its place as one of the dominating powers of the world. Charles A. Kupchan, discusses how the idea of the West is fragmented and disorientated without the commonality of war by its side. The Cold War, although extensive, gave the West a sort of false unity, as they all claimed to be fighting towards

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<sup>13</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism." *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 767. JSTOR.

<sup>14</sup> Mahmood, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim.

the retainment of democracy. Kupchan argues that without this perceived unified goal, the West is currently in an identity crisis<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4.3 AMERICAN MEDIA

The proliferation of the Orient and the West is largely attributed to the ways in which the news media has portrayed both ideological tropes. American news media has historically contributed Arab countries with threatening language that drives a narrative wrapped in fear and xenophobia. This fear is a large part of the political sentiment toward the Middle East and Arab world that has filtered into popular public opinion. It is important to evaluate the influence of the media because in “liberal democracies” such as the United States, the ways in which people shape discourse of others around the world is partially by their consumption of media.

This very concern of the proliferation of Islam in western media is discussed in *Covering Islam* by Edward Said. His purpose for the book was to further his original discussion of Orientalism in the educational discourse and see how it is propagated through mainstream western media. He develops his argument by explaining that the usage of the word “Islam” has been used as a form of attack, therefore associating the religion with heinous acts or threats provoking more hostility with anyone or anything associated with it. He argues that “Islam” itself is a small part of the Arab world and that by looping it in with every political, social or economic act, these western tropes limit the complexities between the dozens of societies, languages, and traditions that comprise it, as well as the billions of people themselves.<sup>16</sup> An essential theme of his book is the evaluation of how western media is so “one-sided” to their

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<sup>15</sup> Kupchan, Charles A. "Reviving the West."

<sup>16</sup> Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*. (New York: Random House, 1997), XVI.

depiction of the Arab world which has also been upheld in scholarship by Orientalists of not only the United States but also Britain, France and Israel.

With a similar sentiment towards the unfair and inaccurate coverage of “Islam”, the article “*Political Islam and the Media*” by Pervaiz Nazir, examines how violence is associated with the Arab world through the media. Nazir claims that there tends to be an association with the Arab and Muslim world with radicalism because of violent activities by militants, oftentimes called fundamentalists. Even more so, when there is not violence, Islam is still seen as a threat to Western traditions and foundations because of the assessment that there is no division between religion and state. Nazir debates that with this belief, the media has an uneven focus on the coverage of events in the Muslim world, largely fixating on religious violence, which in turns, promotes the perception of Islam being a major threat to the Western world.<sup>17</sup> He also references this is not just a problem that plagues the inaccurate reporting of the media, but also has a major influence in the dynamic of national and international politics, foreign policy and human rights around the world. One major example that Nazir uses to demonstrate the priorities of Western media is through what he calls “selectivity” of threats. He notes that Western media gives great interest in threats made to literary writers and cartoonists then they do to threats against other human beings. He explains that there have been roughly 36,000 riots against Muslims in India from 1948-2005 with not much attention from western media who intensely reported on the death threats made by Muslims against the Danish cartoonist who depicted the Muslim prophet, Mohammad. This selective reporting reinforces stereotypes of the Arab world along with helping to shape euro-centric orientalist identifications.

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<sup>17</sup> Nazir, Pervaiz. "Political Islam and the Media." *Policy Perspectives* 4, no. 2 (2007): 27. Accessed May 3, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/42909172](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42909172).

Likewise, in his book, *The Fear of Islam*, Todd H. Green argues that media has the greatest power in conveying the narrative of the “knowledge” of Islam. He claims that the most crucial aspect to understanding the production of narrative is the way in which the media uses “framing” to shape stories. Journalists report on factual events that happen every day, however, their shaping of stories is largely formed by biases and ideologies of the publication or individual journalist themselves.<sup>18</sup> Even more so, because American media is for-profit, they are more inclined to create sensationalized stories in order to attract consumers but also have the power in “framing” the discourse around the topic. In relation to the ways in which the Arab is portrayed, Green specifically discusses how “Terrorism” has been closely associated with any Muslim-involved stories, as a result of the attack on 9/11. He explains that years after the attacks, American media has been quick to associate any terrorist attack with an Islamic identity, almost to the point of obsession and moreover has limited the religion to only associations that promote violence and hatred of the West (Green, 237).<sup>19</sup> One of the major issues with this linking is that it is only applied to those with an Arab identity. This can be seen with the media coverage of domestic terrorists in the United States. The identity of school or mass shooters in the last 10 years have largely been white men; and when news of their terrorism is reported, no one states whether they are Christian or Jewish. Furthermore, when these domestic terrorists are non-Muslim white individuals, media provide an excuse for such behavior by looking towards the individual’s mental health first and foremost. This obvious double standard is linked with xenophobic and racist public sentiment that has been transcended from Eurocentric orientalist scholarship and disseminated through the mainstream news.

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<sup>18</sup> Todd H. Green. *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers: 2015), 234. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt12878h3](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt12878h3).

<sup>19</sup> Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*, 237.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The ideology of the Orient has become deeply ingrained in Western discourse and has transitioned throughout the decades. The Orient and the Occident are dichotomic in nature but cannot exist without the other. Looking through either lens, the viewer has to engage with the historically political and social contexts of both. Occidentalists feel the push to defend their scholarship as it is being deconstructed by modern-day historians because of its hegemonic influence by European and American pre-supposed beliefs. Moreover, the shift in Anglo-French domination to Said's oppositional outlook on Euro-Orientalism has formed a major overhaul in Middle Eastern/Asiatic studies. Although there has been a push to change the narrative that has been formed in educational practices, the impact that it has made on mainstream western media is almost irreversible.

#### 5. *The Cold War and The US Relationship to the Middle East*

“When it comes to the Middle East, we all know the United States stands for cheap oil and not free speech”. This statement written in Mahmood Mamdani's piece, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political perspective on Culture and Terrorism*, is an ideological critique resting upon the relationship that the United States has with the Middle East. Looking back at the historical implications that have led to this statement, American propaganda surrounding the Cold War was largely associated with the US stating that they are “fighting for freedom” (including free flow of information, i.e. media) versus the Communist Soviets. When looking at how “ally” nations are covered versus “enemy” nations in American media, events of the Cold War are important, specifically in regard to the ways in which *terror* has been equated with some countries. With the occurrence of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini (later 1<sup>st</sup> Supreme Leader of Iran), marked the United States as “the Great Satan” while proclaiming that any Arab nations who were associated with the US as “American Islam”. Instead of addressing the issues between



the two countries, the Reagan Administration created a two-pronged strategy that would isolate Iran, including, uniting “millions of Muslims worldwide around a holy war...[and] turning a doctrinal difference inside Islam between minority Shia and majority Sunni into a political divide.”<sup>20</sup> One part of the plan went into effect by recruiting Muslim radical groups around the world to fight with the Afghan mujahideen (guerilla fighters). Correspondingly, the United States tapped into militia groups and drug trades as a means of funding the war. Organizations such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban were products of the United States impact in the Cold War. As a result, “the Cold War created a political schism in Islam. In contrast to radical Islamist social movements like the prelections FIS in Algeria, or the earlier revolutionaries in Iran, the Cold War has given the United States a state driven conservative version of political Islam in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan”<sup>21</sup>. This destabilization amongst Arab countries, crusade against Iran, and global war with the Soviet Union gave way to build an alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The US-Saudi Arabian relationship is deeply entrenched in their formed partnership during the 1940s. “Saudi Arabia strongly backed the United States against the former Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. Both states supported each other during their respective confrontations with Nasser, in supporting Afghan opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and in dealing with crises in Iraq and Yemen. They backed Iraq against Iran when Iran threatened to defeat Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, and then fought as allies against Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait.”<sup>22</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century context, “on the surface, the United

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<sup>20</sup> Mahmood, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, 769-770

<sup>21</sup> Mahmood, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, 769-770

<sup>22</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H. Report. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2016. doi:10.2307/resrep23388.

States and Saudi Arabia *appear* to have a symbiotic relationship...the U.S.-Saudi relationship is based on the exchange of oil and manufactured goods and defense and political cooperation.”<sup>23</sup> This has to do with the fact that the United States provides Saudi Arabia with the majority of their arm weapons as well as training for their military. “The [Saudi] Kingdom now has U.S. military advisory missions for its regular armed forces, its National Guard, and the counterterrorism and internal security forces in the Saudi Ministry of the Interior. U.S. government estimates indicate that Saudi Arabia placed \$86 billion worth of new arms orders during 2007-2014, and \$60.2 billion of that was with the United States”<sup>24</sup>. With these factors taken into consideration, it is also important to evaluate the places where there is strain in their alliance. Socially, tensions formed between the United States and Saudi Arabia regarding their diversified views on the Arab-Israeli conflict specifically with Saudi Arabia backing Palestine while the United States backed Israel. These tensions raise questions about the character of the US-Saudi Arabian relationship relating “to the challenges and choices confronting each side, considerations that came into play as the relationship developed, the impact of external events, and their objectives above all”<sup>25</sup>. This convoluted relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia transcends into political and economic relations, as well as, social ones where the media is greatly influenced.

#### 6. *Cable News Network (CNN)*

The Cable News Network commonly known as CNN, is essential to the discussion of American power over global discourse. Their legacy as a network not only transcends boundaries but is also encompassed in their reality of being the first cable network in the world to provide

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<sup>23</sup> Tripathi, Deepak. *Imperial Designs: War, Humiliation & the Making of History*. University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H. Report. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS),

<sup>25</sup> Tripathi, Deepak. *Imperial Designs: War, Humiliation & the Making of History*.

news coverage on the 24-hour news cycle. CNN's slogan as of 2014 reads, "This is CNN the most trusted name in news Facts" which is an example of not only the way they view and define themselves, but their reputation in the minds of the American people and abroad. Scholars have evaluated just how impactful CNN has been on news reporting worldwide. This impact has become known as the 'CNN effect' which is "the belief that CNN 'has become *part* of the events it covers' and that with its seeming omnipresence CNN 'has changed the way the world reacts to crisis'. In this view, CNN's ability to focus on the audience's attention can increase public pressure on political leaders, **virtually forcing them to act.**"<sup>26</sup> What Herman and Peterson are revealing is the authoritative capacity of CNN on not only social politics but policy as well. In evaluating CNN's coverage from June 2019 to December 2019 of the conflict, I focused on two main aspects: the sourcing and rhetoric used in the articles.

#### 6.1 CNN SOURCING

In my initial research of CNN's media coverage regarding the conflict, one central commonality between all the sources used was their relationship to the American government. The contrast between the way sources are used in a June 2019 and July 2019 article with similar events, is assessed. An attack on the Saudi Arabian airport—Abha International Airport—on June 12, 2019, that injured 26 civilians was covered by CNN correspondents, Nada Altaher and Bianca Britton. The only source quoted was Saudi Arabian Colonel Turk al-Malki who stated this in response to the attack by the Houthi's: "In light of these terrorist and immoral transgressions by the Houthis, the coalition will take strict measures urgently and carefully to deter them," al-Malki said. "This includes protecting civilians and civilian assets. The terrorist

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<sup>26</sup> Edward S. Herman and David Peterson. "CNN: Selling Nato's War Globally." In *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis*, ed. Edward S. Herman and Phillip Hammond, (London; Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000) 111-122. doi:10.2307/j.ctt18fs3sb.14.

elements responsible for planning and carrying out this attack will be held accountable.”<sup>27</sup>

Contrastingly, in July of 2019, CNN provided coverage over a bombing that killed 14 Yemeni civilians and injured 26. Entitled “Four children killed in attack on Yemen market” the article quotes Mohammad Abdul Salam, a spokesperson for the Houthi group while countering his statement with two quotes from spokespeople from the Saudi-backed coalition, Colonel Turki al-Malki and Moammar al-Eryani—Information Minister to the Saleh-Hadi government. They state that “a Houthi-run hospital report, released by spokesman Mohammed Abdul Salam, held the Saudi-led coalition responsible for the incident and said it also wounded 26, including 14 children. In response, Col. Turki al-Malki told CNN that: “The targeting of Al-Thabet market by the terrorist, Iran-backed Houthi militia is a deliberate attack against innocent civilians”. The Saudi-backed Yemeni government's information minister, Moammar al-Eryani, also blamed the explosion on the Houthis in a tweet Monday and said that the rebels used Katyusha rockets.”<sup>28</sup> Although the article is on the subject of Yemeni deaths, the authors used two officials associated with Saudi Arabia who were responsible for said deaths. Comparatively, in the June article, not only did the article source Col al-Malki but it also used a statement that associated the Houthis with *terrorism* (this will be discussed in the “CNN Rhetoric” section). In giving the Saudi-affiliated officials a platform to explain why civilians died, CNN is allowing for the justification of death itself. Furthermore, in using these officials to counter the statement of the Houthi-aligned spokesman, CNN is discrediting the Houthi official and the cause itself

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<sup>27</sup> Bianca Britton and Nada Altaher. “Missile Hits Arrivals Hall of Saudi Arabia Airport, Injuring 26, Official Says.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 12 June 2019, [www.cnn.com/2019/06/12/middleeast/saudi-airport-houthi-missile-intl/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/06/12/middleeast/saudi-airport-houthi-missile-intl/index.html)

<sup>28</sup> Sharif Paget, Ghazi Balkiz, and Tara John. “Four Children Killed in Attack on Yemen Market.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, July 30, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/30/middleeast/yemen-market-explosion-saada-intl/index.html>.

specifically because they did not give this same platform to the Houthis in the June bombing of the airport.

Likewise, in July 2019, the United Arab Emirates partially backed out of the war in which prior to, they supported the Saudi Arabian government as an opposition to the Yemeni Houthis. The article “UAE partially withdrawing from Yemen, says official ” does not provide the full scope of impact of the decision because it fails to add the Yemeni voice. Writer, Beck Anderson, begins the article by quoting a senior official part of the UAE government. The Emirati official said “The UAE is a major coalition partner in the Saudi-led military campaign to quash Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. It has intervened in the country's war since March 2015). Emirati and Saudi forces have sought to prop up the United Nations-recognized government of Abdu Rabbu Mansour al-Hadi after Houthi fighters took over the Yemeni capital of Sanaa in 2014.”<sup>29</sup> In beginning the article with this statement, the author set a precedent that the source they used is validated because they are in opposition of a group that are “against government institutions” as well as “rebellious”. The only other source that Anderson quotes in this article is from Reuters, which is another western media organization, based in London, to whom state allegiance is also a major participant in the conflict itself. By neglecting to also utilize a Yemeni source, CNN is omitting the perspective of the Yemeni Houthi officials who could potentially provide an alternative narrative to the withdrawal of the UAE. Furthermore, with a Yemeni source, they could provide insight on the ways in which the UAE contributed to the humanitarian crisis, which is imperative to the accountability of war crimes. Furthermore, On August 22, 2019, in an article entitled, “Cracks are appearing in the Mideast's most important alliance. That's bad news for Trump” by Tim Lister, the topic of the slow dissolution between Saudi Arabia and

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<sup>29</sup> Becky Anderson. “UAE Partially Withdrawing from Yemen, Says Official.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 8 July 2019, [www.cnn.com/2019/07/08/middleeast/uae-partial-withdrawal-yemen-intl/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/07/08/middleeast/uae-partial-withdrawal-yemen-intl/index.html).

the UAE is analysed. Lister quotes a scholar, “Michael Knights at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy spent time embedded with UAE forces in Yemen and says: "Only the UAE had the military potency and local allied forces to credibly threaten defeat for the Houthis.”<sup>30</sup> The significance of this source is not explicit to the reader. The issue with quoting from Michael Knights is based in the values that are upheld by the organization in which he works. Washington Institute for Near East Policy is notable for being a pro-Israeli think tank, advocating for the advancement of the Israeli state within the United States. Being the only Jewish state in a Muslim dominated region, Israel is regarded as a major oppositional force to much that goes on in the Middle East as well as being in constant conflict with Arab nation-backed Palestine. By quoting Knights, Lister is allowing the pro-Israeli bias to be an aspect and eliminates both the voices of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Tom Lister wrote another article on August 31, 2019 in regard to the relationship between Yemen and the UAE which focuses largely on giving a platform to the Yemeni officials who are associated with the oust government under former President Hadi. Lister writes “Yemeni Information Minister Moammar al Eryani tweeted that the airstrikes showed "the UAE's lack of acceptance of the [Yemeni] govt efforts to restore its institutions" and the future of relations between Yemen and the UAE was now at stake.”<sup>31</sup> Not only is this title biased but depending on which side one is associated with, it is also untrue. Depending on which side you are backing in the war, the dismantling of the Saleh/Hadi administration by the Houthis means that no one in their government is in control anymore. If someone who backs the Houthi coalition read this, they could argue the validity of the supposed “Yemeni Information Minister”. In giving Moammar al Eryani such a title, CNN is essentially

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Lister. Cracks Are Appearing in the Mideast's Most Important Alliance. That's Bad News for Trump.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 22 Aug. 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Tim Lister. “Yemen Fighting Brings Saudi-Led Coalition to Brink of Collapse.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 31 Aug. 2019.

asserting to their audience that there is a “wrong” and “right” side to be on, regarding the conflict as well as implying that the oppositional forces—the Houthis—are “rebels” fighting against their “government” who has the *right* to be in control. Directly after this, Lister quotes sources from global aid associations, *Save the Children* and *Medecins Sans Frontieres* to explain the humanitarian crises that are occurring in Yemen. He never mentions that the bombings by Saudi Arabian forces are a large reason towards the degradation of Yemeni lives as well as not mentioning that the United States is directly funding this assault. In providing some information while excluding others, he is creating this dichotomy that Yemen is a land of starving people but that should not be helped if it is going to contribute towards the Houthi campaign. Furthermore, Lister, yet again, quotes Michael Knights from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

The CNN coverage in September of 2019 was saturated with information regarding the bombing of the largest Saudi Arabian oil facility and how US weaponry became property of various Yemeni groups. However, most of the coverage concerned the Saudi Arabian oil facility that was bombed on September 14. Sources ranged from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Retired Colonel Cedric Leighton, Retired US General Mark Hertling, and White House counselor Kellyanne Conway. CNN even sourced a quote that Kellyanne Conway said on Fox News, an American media conglomerate who is regularly critiqued for twisting news to fit towards a conservative American narrative and who are typically in conflict views with CNN themselves. Additionally, sources such as Ian Bremmer from the Eurasia Group, Vice President Mike Pence, President Trump, Saudi-led coalition spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Turki al-Malk, US Energy Secretary Rick Perr, Jason Bordoff, founding director of the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Addulaziz bin Salman, CNN National Security Analyst Peter Bergen and White House Deputy Press Secretary Judd Deere

were all quoted throughout the September news coverage. Out of the 20+ Saudi-backed/American experts and officials that were sourced in September, only four sources who align with the Yemeni Houthi group were quoted. They took the form of the Yemen armed forces spokesman (who was not given a name), Hezbollah's leader—Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree. This inequality of sources that represent either side of the conflict creates a disproportion in the information that is being disseminated. With CNN priding themselves on being a trustworthy news outlet, the question is, why are they choosing to align with one facet through their inequality of sources.

When further dissecting sources used to propagate a biased narrative of the Saudi Arabian-Yemeni conflict, October and November coverage are influential towards the rhetoric assessment of CNN's coverage and therefore will be discussed under *rhetoric*. In the coverage during December 2019, there was a great emphasis on Yemen's association with Iran, who is a known enemy of the United States. Sequentially, in an article entitled, "US unveils new sanctions on Iran", written on December 11, 2019, CNN writers, Gaouette, Hansler and Atwood quote Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin in making a defense against Iran who is known for backing the Yemen Houthi coalition. Mnuchin states "'The Iranian regime uses its aviation and shipping industries to supply its regional terrorist and militant groups with weapons, directly contributing to the devastating humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen. Aviation and shipping industries should be vigilant and not allow their industries to be exploited by terrorists.'"<sup>32</sup> In using a quote by someone in the president's administration, who is actively supporting Saudi Arabia, CNN is force feeding their audience with this narrative that underlines the Yemen

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<sup>32</sup> Nicole Gaouette, et al. "US Unveils New Sanctions on Iran." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 11 Dec. 2019.



Houthis as a vigilante group. Furthermore, by indirectly calling the group *terrorists*, the writers have already shaped the narrative of the article in regard to Yemen. Later in the article, the authors quote another government organization, The Treasury Department, who go further in making a rhetorical case against the Houthis. CNN co-authors state that “last month, the US government seized weapons smuggled on a small boat destined for Yemen. The Treasury Department said Wednesday's action against this “lethal aid network” is yet another example of the US government cutting off all avenues for the delivery of weapons to Houthi rebels”<sup>33</sup> The Treasury Department is an organization that inherently backs the rhetoric distributed by the American government and therefore have potential to lean in defense of US-backed, Saudi Arabia.

## 6.2 CNN RHETORIC

The sources used by CNN writers is one component to the larger issue of biased western reporting. The second entity to the CNN representation of “ally” versus “enemy” nation is *rhetoric*. Rhetoric is a very complex tool in manipulating the narrative of a story and ultimately in convincing the reader of what is true or not. In a news article written on May 31, 2019, Nic Robertson, CNN International Diplomatic Editor, wrote an analysis on what he entitled “Saudi Arabia united the Arab world against Iran. That means conflict could be one step closer”. In his analysis, Robertson begins with the quote “King Salman of Saudi Arabia has pulled off in Mecca what many had thought unlikely – getting 20 or so disparate Arab nations to unite in a common position against Iran.”<sup>34</sup> When considering Said’s arguments of orientalism and the Occidental lens, there are countless problems with this opening sentence. Not only does Robertson limit the

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<sup>33</sup> Gaouette et al. “US Unveils New Sanctions on Iran.”

<sup>34</sup> Nic Robertson. “Saudi Arabia United the Arab World against Iran. That Means Conflict Could Be One Step Closer.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 31 May 2019.

entire Middle East to this collective entity—*disparate Arab Nations*—assuming that they all face the same issues, but he also places Saudi Arabia at the helm of leadership, furthermore, presuming that Saudi Arabia is bringing harmony to all Arab nations. This is not only misleading; it is false. Saudi Arabia has largely contributed to several of the chaos, bombings and war that occurs in the Middle East as a consequence to its infatuation with regional dominance. Moreover, Robertson goes further in concluding the analysis with the statement “What we saw in Mecca was a mark being set, that the status quo with Iran will no longer be tolerated by Saudi and its allies. What happens next is in Iran’s court. Talks are an option, but terrorism, insofar as it is perceived as such by Tehran’s neighbors, is not” (Robertson). This usage of words such as *no longer be tolerated*, and *terrorism* shapes a narrative of Saudi Arabia as peacekeepers while Iran (who backs the Houthi coalition) as terrorists—and there is nothing more odious to American society than the word “terrorists”. This theme of terrorism streams into news coverage regarding Yemen. As mentioned under “CNN Sourcing”, Nada Altaher and Bianca Britton wrote an article on the missile that hit Saudi Arabia airport in June 2019. In the middle of the article, Altaher and Britton, describe what led to the missile strike. They state “the war in Yemen began in early 2015 when Houthi rebels—a minority Shia group from the north of the country—drove out the internationally-recognized government and forced its president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to flee. The crisis quickly escalated into a multi-sided war, with neighboring Saudi Arabia leading a coalition of Gulf states against the Houthi rebels. The coalition is advised and supported by the US, among other nations.”<sup>35</sup> Altaher and Britton’s phrase of an *internationally recognized government* and *forcing its president to flee* is essential in establishing the bias in this article. They are not simply reporting on the missile strike but

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<sup>35</sup> Bianca Britton and Nada Altaher. “Missile Hits Arrivals Hall of Saudi Arabia Airport, Injuring 26, Official Says.”

rather demonizing the Houthi group's war actions against the Saudi Arabian government. They are remiss in summing the current humanitarian crises that is occurring, and directly correlated with the relentless bombing from the Saudi Arabian government upon the Yemeni people. Additionally, CNN's wording infers that several of the Arab countries are against the Houthi coalition when in reality, the opposing forces, other than Saudi Arabia, were the United Arab Emirates who withdrew from the war in 2019. This type of framing in news coverage is misleading. It directs the news consumer to a predetermined narrative that supports the Saudi Arabian government forming this ideology of "ally" versus "enemy" and furthermore conflicting this idea that CNN has of itself being an completely "objective" news source.

On July 24, 2019, CNN promoted the association of Saudi Arabia as being an ally state by dichotomizing its characterization with Yemen. According to reports in an article entitled "Trump vetoes 3 bills prohibiting arms sales to Saudi Arabia", Zachary Cohen and Betsy Klein quote that "apart from negatively affecting our bilateral relationships with Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy, the joint resolution would hamper the ability of the United States to sustain and shape critical security cooperation activities," Trump said in one of the messages. He called each resolution "ill-conceived" and said it failed to address root causes of conflict in Yemen. (Cohen and Klein). The usage of this specific quotes that reinforces the ally ship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, leads the reader to associate the countries of the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy with Saudi Arabia. Likewise, language in the August coverage of 2019, witnessed word usage such as "separatists", "civil war", "coup", "lethal aid" and "regime" and furthermore saw the repetitional words of "rebels" and "terrorists" to describe the Houthi coalition. An article written on August 21, 2019, in relation to a United States drone that went down over Yemen, Barbara Starr and Zachary Cohen, two writers who had previously

written about the conflict use a quote that provides suggestive language in pushing towards a certain underlining narrative. They quote “we are aware of reports of an attack by Iranian-backed Houthi forces on a US drone. The President has been briefed and we continue to investigate the matter,” National Security Council spokesman Garrett Marquis said in a statement. “This attack is only possible because of Iran's lethal aid to the Houthis and serves as yet another example of the regime's relentless effort to escalate conflict and threaten regional stability,” he added.”<sup>36</sup> Not only does this word “lethal” pack a hidden message but in looking at word association with lethal, one finds words such as *dangerous*, *destructive* and *poisonous*. None of which has positive connotations. The usage of this quote by the National Security Council to highlight the political association between Iran and the Houthi’s, CNN allowing their reader to assume that the Houthi movement is a dangerous group that will, if given the chance, attack against anyone, potentially even the United States, particularly because of their association with Iran.

CNN’s coverage in September consisted of news that exclusively focused on the attack of Saudi-oil facility and its relationship to Iran and the United States; there was very limited focus on Yemen itself. The articles consisted of headlines including the following: “Yemen’s Houthi rebels claim a ‘large-scale’ drone attack on Saudi oil facilities”, “Coordinated strikes knock out half of Saudi oil capacity, more than 5 million barrels a day”, “White House declines to rule out Trump-Iran meeting and US military response after drone attacks on Saudi oil field”, “Attacks have disrupted 5% of the world’s oil production. Here’s what you need to know”, and “Trump: US ‘locked and loaded depending on verification’ of attack on Saudi oil field”. The language in many of these articles were used to shift the responsibility of the attacks from the Houthis to Iran. In the article “Trump: US ‘locked and loaded depending on verification’ of attack on Saudi

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Starr and Zachary Cohen. “US Blames Iran after Drone Is Downed in Yemen.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 21 Aug. 2019, [www.cnn.com/2019/08/21/politics/us-drone-yemen/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/08/21/politics/us-drone-yemen/index.html).

oil field” written by Paul LeBlanc, Kylie Atwood, Jeremy Diamond and Sarah Westwood use language producing a combative tone. It states “President Donald Trump on Sunday evening tweeted that the US has "reason to believe that we know" who is responsible for an attack on a Saudi Arabian oil field and the country is "locked and loaded depending on verification" following the crippling strike.<sup>37</sup> *Locked and loaded* is where the depth of this statement lies. It insinuates that there will be a defensive response to the actions of whomever was responsible for the Saudi-oil strike. The “locked and loaded” phrase is an English colloquialism that refers to a gun being ready to fire and using it in reference to the US response towards this event frames the attack as one against the United States as well. Furthermore, it reinforces the idea of Saudi Arabia as an ally and “rightful” party in the war in Yemen.

Accompanying this narrative is CNN’s depiction of the Yemen Houthis throughout October and November news. An article entitled “American weapons ended up in the wrong hands in Yemen. Now they’re being turned on the US-backed government” by Nima Elbagir, Mohamaed Abo El Gheit, Florence Davey-Attlee, and Salma Abdelaziz, bias is taking form. In simply looking at the headline, using language such as *wrong hands* and *US-backed government*, this article is not just stating that Yemeni forces have weapons that were created in the US but even more so, feeding the public a narrative that the coalition who is in possession of these weapons are “bad” or “wrong”. Additionally, the orientalist lens is being perpetuated in the opening paragraph stating “American-made weaponry has fallen into the hands of rival militia groups in Yemen, some of whom have turned their arms against each other in a bitter and worsening conflict, a new CNN investigation has found.”<sup>38</sup> This is another example of how the

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<sup>37</sup> Paul LeBlanc, et al. “Trump: US 'Locked and Loaded Depending on Verification' after Attack on Saudi Oil Field.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 16 Sept. 2019,

<sup>38</sup> Elbagir, Nima, Mohamed Abo El Gheit, Florence Davey-Attlee, and Salma Abdelaziz. “American Weapons Ended up in the Wrong Hands in Yemen. Now They're Being Turned on the US-Backed Government.” *CNN*. Cable

“barbaric” narrative is used to describe the Yemeni Houthis. Rhetoric of *turned their arms against each other* frames the story as if these two opposing forces are the *only* reason why the conflict is becoming worse in Yemen. In November news articles, language liked this is continued with statements such as “the crisis quickly escalated into a multi-sided war, with neighboring Saudi Arabia leading a coalition of Gulf states against the Houthi rebels. The coalition is advised and supported by the US, among other nations”<sup>39</sup> and “Saudi military spokesman Al-Maliki called the seizure of the ship Sunday a "terrorist operation" that posed a threat to the freedom of international navigation and world trade”<sup>40</sup>*Gulf states against the Houthi rebels, advised and supported by the US, posed a threat to the freedom of international navigation... are all rhetoric that bolsters a narrative formed by the US government which is disseminated by CNN. In December, there was no news regarding Yemen and Saudi Arabia because focus shifted toward the Saudi Arabian shooting in Pensacola, Florida and Iran-US relations. Conclusively, the commonality amongst many of the articles that referenced the conflict was to shine a spotlight on Saudi Arabia and draw a connection towards the Saudi-American relationship. By accentuating the government of Saudi Arabia’s proximity to that of the US’ , CNN is giving a platform to Saudi Arabian voice rather than to Yemen.*

Before discussing the way Al Jazeera Media Network used sourcing and language, we must deconstruct this idea of “rebels” and referring to the Houthis as such. Steven A. Zych of the publication *Open Democracy* wrote about how the media is misconstruing the Yemen-Saudi

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News Network, October 20, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/18/world/american-weapons-yemen-war-intl/index.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Ruba Alhenawi. “Yemen's Houthi Rebels Seize Saudi Ship in Red Sea.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 19 Nov. 2019, [www.cnn.com/2019/11/19/middleeast/houthi-rebels-seize-saudi-vessel-intl-hnk/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/11/19/middleeast/houthi-rebels-seize-saudi-vessel-intl-hnk/index.html).

<sup>40</sup> Ruba Alhenawi. “Yemen's Houthi Rebels Seize Saudi Ship in Red Sea.”

Arabian war. He notes that the Houthis are not a new movement in the way the media is reporting.

“The Houthis fought and won or survived six rounds of conflict with the Yemeni military between 2004 and 2010. But the group was first founded more than three decades ago as essentially an ethno-religious pride organization dedicated to ensuring that Zaydi youth in northern Yemen didn’t overlook – as had Sunni-crafted textbooks – the more than 1,000 years that Hashemite Zaydi imams ruled much of contemporary Yemen. This movement, known then as *Shabab al-Mumin* (Believing Youth), eventually turned political and, starting in 2004, involved anti-government protests against the government in Sana’a for its collaboration with the United States, Israel’s most powerful foreign backer. It was a government crackdown on these demonstrations that ultimately led to violence and the strengthening of a militant wing, known as Ansarullah, around the Houthis<sup>41</sup>

This is very important when discussing this idea of “rebel” that so many of the articles used to describe the Houthis. The associations that come with the word “rebel” are almost always negatively connotated and we must notice that it is never truly a word used to describe the modern-day United States therefore it uses this orientalist lens that contributes to the alignment of Yemen with an “enemy” nation.

#### 7. *Al Jazeera Media Network*

The influence that Al Jazeera Media Network has over the dissemination of news transmitting globally regarding the Middle East is extensive. Created in November of 1996, in Doha, Qatar, Al Jazeera’s central purpose was to take the power of narrative out of Western hands in regard to Middle Eastern news and the Arab world in its entirety. Al Jazeera is notably

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<sup>41</sup> Steven A. Zych. “Crisis in Yemen: What the Media Is Getting Wrong.” *OpenDemocracy*, OpenDemocracy, 28 Jan. 2015, [www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/crisis-in-yemen-what-media-is-getting-wrong/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/crisis-in-yemen-what-media-is-getting-wrong/).

funded by the Qatari state, which some critique any state's monetary influence on media conglomerates, however Al Jazeera has been praised for providing a voice to diverse views to those who were prior to, being silenced. Although owned by the Qatari government, Al Jazeera has said that they have "editorial independence" from government control as a result of their funding being largely produced through loans and grants. Al Jazeera gained major global notoriety as a consequence of their role in the media reporting of the September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks in New York City. After the attacks on the September 11<sup>th</sup>, Al Jazeera became known as the only media network who published the video created by Osama Bin Laden. In Mohamand Zayani's book, *Al Jazeera Phenomenon*, he states that:

"not only has the network left a permanent mark on broad casting in the Arab world, but it is also developing the potential to influence Arab public opinion and Arab politics. At the same time, Al Jazeera is highly controversial. Both inside and outside the Arab world, the network's coverage has been regarded with skepticism. In official Arab circles, Al Jazeera has acquired a maverick image and even prompted diplomatic crises. Since it catapulted to international prominence during the war in Afghanistan, the network has sparked a much publicized controversy, garnered much loathing and attracted considerable criticism. Away from the enthusiasm of those who champion it and the bitterness of those who criticize it, Al Jazeera remains not only a phenomenon that is worthy of exploration, but also one which begs for a better understanding."<sup>42</sup>

With its growing global presence, Al Jazeera is prominent in looking at the difference between American and Middle Eastern media coverage of the Yemen-Saudi Arabian conflict whilst seeing how they diverge in their media representation of both countries.

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<sup>42</sup> Mohammad Zayani *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon*, (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), pp. 1-2.



## 7.1 AL JAZEERA SOURCING

With their aforementioned notoriety, the sourcing used in Al Jazeera articles is imperative in framing the narrative around the conflict. June 2019 witnessed the major events of the bombing of the Saudi Arabian Abha Airport and the US arms sells of weapons to Saudi Arabia. On June 12, 2019, an article entitled “Houthi rebels fire missile at Saudi Arabia’s Abha airport: TV” sources the *Pro-Houthi TV* in a bi-line and first paragraph stating “Yemen’s Houthi movement carried out an attack on Abha Airport in Saudi Arabia with a cruise missile, the group’s Almasirah TV reported early on Wednesday.”<sup>43</sup> The only other source they use in this article is the Official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) who “stated that Saudi air defense forces on Monday intercepted two drones that targeted Khamis Mushait in the kingdom's south and caused no damage or casualties’.”<sup>44</sup> This article sourced media agencies from both oppositions giving the reader information from either side which is divergent to the CNN’s coverage of the same event. Moreover, on the same day, June 12, 2019, there was an Al Jazeera report regarding the \$8 Billion-dollar US arms sale to Saudi Arabia. In the article entitled “Trump official grilled over \$8bn ‘emergency’ arms sale to Saudis” by William Roberts, sources several United States representatives. According to Representative Eliot Engel who is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, “There is no emergency. It’s phony. It’s made up. And it’s an abuse of the law,”<sup>45</sup> while Roberts also chose to source Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Democratic Representative Andy Levin and Democrat Ilhan Omar who were all immensely opposed to the presidential arms sales. In regard to the United States decision, Roberts used

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<sup>43</sup> Al Jazeera. “Houthi Rebels Fire Missile at Saudi Arabia's Abha Airport: TV.” Yemen News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, June 12, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/houthi-rebels-fire-missile-saudi-arabia-abha-airport-tv-190612041139763.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Al Jazeera. “Houthi Rebels Fire Missile at Saudi Arabia's Abha Airport: TV.” Yemen News

<sup>45</sup> William Roberts. “Trump Official Grilled over \$8bn 'Emergency' Arms Sale to Saudis.” *USA News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 12 June 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/trump-official-grilled-8bn-emergency-arms-sale-saudis-190612202018562.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/trump-official-grilled-8bn-emergency-arms-sale-saudis-190612202018562.html).

major political figures of Washington D.C. in shaping a narrative that is *against* the arm sales. In using these specific figures, the reader is getting a primary source account of the actions of Washington D.C., however what was excluded from the conversation was the Saudi Arabian viewpoint in how this would benefit them. Furthermore, United States sources who were in support of the arms sales were also left out of the discussion.

Contrastingly to CNN's focus on the UAE partial-backing out of the Yemen and Saudi Arabian war, in July 2019, Al Jazeera's covers a variety of issues ranging from death sentences in Yemen, Yemeni protests on fuel shortages, the Saudi-UAE withholding of funds to Yemenis and air raids on Yemen's capital while still illuminating the US arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Amongst all these articles the following were some of the sources: UN envoy Martin Griffith, a senior Emirati official—Anwar Gargash, Mwatana (Yemeni Human Rights Organization) chairperson Radhya al-Mutawal, Al Jomhuri hospital manager—Saleh Qorban, UN Emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock, Saudi's UN Ambassador Abdallah al-Mouallimi, Al Masirah TV, US Senator Mitch McConnell and Britain's Ambassador to the world body—Karen Pierce. The diversity of content and sources used to recount the events of the war, is significant in giving an equal media platform to both warring parties. On July 16, 2019, in an article entitled "Civilians pay human cost of Yemen's war, rights group says", the human rights group—Mwatana's chairperson, Radhya al-Mutawal, was quoted stating "that since each party to the conflict is supported by its allies, they feel that they will never be held accountable for their violations in Yemen, now known as the "worst humanitarian crisis in the world."<sup>46</sup> The significance to Mwatana being the main source of this article is that they are not supporting either opposition. The quote from al-Mutawal as well as the motif of the article is to critique that

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<sup>46</sup> Al Jazeera News. "Civilians Pay Human Cost of Yemen's War, Rights Group Says."

the Saudi Arabian/Hadi forces and the Houthis are both responsible for the catastrophic starvation, death and displacements of thousands of Yemeni people.

The rise of the Yemeni separatist movement in Aden and coverage of the Saudi Arabian oil attacks were the primary stories of August and September 2019. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, the article “Yemen: Dozens killed in Houthi attack on Aden military parade” uses the following sources: a tweet from Doctors Without Borders, Yemen’s Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed’s tweet, Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University--Mahjoob Zweiri, the British news agency Reuters, Al Masirah TV and two of their own “on the ground” reporters Hashem Ahelbarra and Mohammad Altattab. These sources come from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives on the conflict. However, importance lies in the platform that each source was given in the article. When providing a longer quote to one source, the author is giving greater *weight* or validation to their statement. Henceforth, their ideologies are given greater precedence over another’s. In this article the Al-Masirah TV was the first source material however, long direct quotes were from both Al Jazeera reporters and the Doctors without Borders tweet providing a greater platform for the humanitarian organization. The article also mentions that “There was no immediate comment from the Yemeni government or the coalition” (Al Jazeera). In failing to do so, the narrative of the oppositional force to both the separatist groups and the Hadi government is being left out of this article. Sequentially, articles in August had utilized the following sources: a Houthi spokesperson—Mohammad Ali al-Houthi, a World Food Programme (WFP) spokesperson--Herve Verhoosel, Yahya Saria—Houthi military spokesperson, Yemen's Interior Minister Ahmed al-Mayssari, UN Martin Griffiths, Anwar Gargash--the UAE' state minister for foreign affairs, Ahmed Maher—a Yemeni journalist based in Aden, and UAE's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Although these sources provide a wide variety of

opinions, there is a lack of Saudi Arabian presence amongst them. However, with the transition into September, several articles focused on the Saudi Arabian reaction to the drone strikes. The Saudi Press Agency, US Secretary of State Saudi Mike Pompeo, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Erwin van Veen--a senior research fellow at Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit in the Netherlands, Colonel Turki al-Maki, US Saudi Arabian Ambassador—John Abizaid, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousav, and the CEO of Saudi Aramco (the Saudi oil facility that was bombed)--Amin Nasser. In an article published on the day the attacks occurred, the Saudi Press Agency were cited as well as the British publication Reuters. The Saudi Press Agency is an organization of the Saudi government, henceforth their bias lies within the official report produced by the Saudi Arabian officials. However, another news agency was sourced which had been used in many other articles on Al Jazeera—Reuters. Reuters is a global news organization and well regarded for its accurate and objective reporting. In the article entitled “Houthi drone attacks on 2 Saudi Aramco oil facilities spark fires”, Al Jazeera states that “two sources close to the matter told Reuters news agency that 5 million barrels a day of crude production had been impacted – close to the half of the kingdom’s output or 5 percent of global oil supply,”<sup>47</sup> Although Reuters is highly regarded for their news, some would say they are “left leaning” and therefore provide bias towards whichever ideological viewpoints fit more towards a liberal framework. Furthermore, in quoting Reuters, Al Jazeera is reinforcing the trope that CNN had in using a “western” publication to shape the story.

October coverage provided emphasis upon the livelihoods of Yemeni people and the humanitarian crisis that has plagued the country since the beginning of the war. Respectively, several philanthropic organizations were used as sources in a push to explain what is happening

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<sup>47</sup> Al Jazeera. “Houthi Drone Attacks on 2 Saudi Aramco Oil Facilities Spark Fires.” *News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 14 Sept. 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/drones-hit-saudi-aramco-facilities-fires-190914051900472.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/drones-hit-saudi-aramco-facilities-fires-190914051900472.html)

in Yemen. On October 23, 2019, an article entitled “UN sounds alarm over children’s plight in war-torn Yemen” reporter Mia Swart sources the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and their representative in Yemen, Sara Beysolow, specifically to explain how the crisis has impacted the healthcare, safety and livelihood of children and mothers in Yemen. UNICEF is a branch of the United Nations and works in efforts “to save children’s lives, to defend their rights and to help them fulfill their potential, from early childhood through adolescence.”<sup>48</sup> Although UNICEF is a highly regarded global organization, the problem with using them as a source is their link to the United States. Being an organization that is a part of the United Nations umbrella means they are also *funded* largely by the UN itself. The United Nations is an organization that receives about 1/5 of its budget from the United States who in turn—is backing Saudi Arabia in the war. This intertwining relationship means that although UNICEF is doing “what they can” to help the Yemeni children, the country that has a large part to do with their funding is also providing the weapons that are killing said children. Moreover, in using them as a source that is portrayed as helping the starving people of Yemen, the reader is being fed a narrative that detaches the organization from a country, the United States, that is indirectly and directly responsible for parts of this humanitarian crisis. Similarly, spokespeople from other humanitarian organizations were sourced such as the following: Robert Mardini—head of The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation at the UN, the European Commission’s humanitarian aid operation (ECHO), and International Organization for Migration (IOM). The similarity amongst these sources is their alignment with “western” countries who have been complicit in propagating the war.

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<sup>48</sup> “What we Do.” *UNICEF*, 2020, [www.unicef.org/what-we-do](http://www.unicef.org/what-we-do).

Sequentially in November and December, many articles revolved around the potentiality of peace coming as a result of agreements made between the associated parties of the war specifically noting the withdrawal of UAE troops from Aden, Yemen which was previously being controlled by Southern Transitional Council (STC) a UAE-separatist group. Sources used during November ranged from analysts and experts such as Said Thabet—a Doha-based analyst on Yemen and Gamal Gasim—a Yemeni American professor of politics at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. Many of the articles used influential political players in the war: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad, Gama Amer—a negotiator for the Houthis, and Abu Bakr al-Qirbi—a former Yemeni foreign minister, Salman al-Ansari—a Saudi commentator who heads the pro-Saudi lobbying organization known as the Saudi American Public Relations Affairs Committee, President Hadi’s advisor—Abdel-Aziz Jabari, as well as Colonel Turki al-Malki. The wide range of officials that were sourced across the November articles shaped a holistic narrative in using speakers from each coalition involved with the war. However, what was missing from many of the articles was sources from western countries who have unmistakably played a huge role in the conflict and furthermore their attitude towards these peace accords.

## 7.2 AL JAZEERA RHETORIC

Al Jazeera uses their sources to demonstrate a narrative that periodically demonstrates their bias in the matter of the Saudi Arabian-Yemen conflict. On June 4, 2019, in an article by Naseh Shaker & Micah Danney, entitled “As Yemenis prepare for Eid, even celebration is a struggle”, Shaker and Danney report on how one of the most important religious celebration for Muslims globally—Eid al-Fitr—is disrupted by the presence of poverty as a result of war. The article discusses a Yemeni couple, Fawaz and Asma’a Fara, who explain how they cannot afford clothes for their six children for the religious celebration. Shaker and Danney state that “this is

the first year he [Fawaz] cannot buy new outfits for each to wear on Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Fara had earned a good living as a security guard at a park in central Saudi Arabia for the past nine years. He was sending enough money back to Asma'a in Yemen to support the whole family, and she could afford to splurge on expensive clothes for the children to wear on Eid.”<sup>49</sup> In making the story personal, these Al Jazeera reports are putting a humanizing aspect to the war which can allow for the potential empathy by the reader.

Furthermore, the phrases such as *good living as a security guard* and *sending enough money back to support the family*, attempt to demonstrate that the people of Yemen are similar to many around the world; they are simply trying to take care of their families as most people would do. By showcasing a story that follows the real life of a family who is affected by the war, they are appealing to the sentimentality and humanitarianism of the reader. Sequentially, an article written the next day, on June 5, 2019, entitled “US senators seek to block Trump arms sales to Saudi Arabia” by William Roberts, there is a heavy focus on US senators who use rhetoric that leans towards an ideology of the de-escalation of the conflict. Roberts states that “a bipartisan group of seven influential United States senators said on Wednesday they intend to force congressional votes on 22 resolutions that would block President Donald Trump's recently-announced sales of US weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).”<sup>50</sup> The usage of this as an opening text to outline the article, Al Jazeera is establishing that the statements by the Senators that are quoted in the article should be held at a high regard since they are *influential US senators*, as described in the first sentence. Therefore the quoting of US

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<sup>49</sup> Naseh Shaker and Michah Danney. “As Yemenis Prepare for Eid, Even Celebration Is a Struggle.” *News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 4 June 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/yemenis-prepare-eid-celebration-struggle-190603085206353.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/yemenis-prepare-eid-celebration-struggle-190603085206353.html).

<sup>50</sup> William Roberts. “US Senators Seek to Block Trump Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia.” *Trump News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 5 June 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/senators-seek-block-trump-arms-sales-saudi-arabia-190605154958283.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/senators-seek-block-trump-arms-sales-saudi-arabia-190605154958283.html).

Senator Todd Young who stated that “in light of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, we have an obligation to ensure the adequate guardrails are in place and that weapons transfers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates do not exacerbate the conflict,” Young said, adding alleged threats from Iran “do not justify” the Trump administration sidestepping Congress.”<sup>51</sup> Language such as *obligation* and *do not exacerbate the conflict*, establishes a narrative that negatively view the conflict in Yemen and furthermore, frames Saudi Arabia and UAE as the antagonist. Likewise, this Saudi-UAE alliance is discussed in July.

The emphasis on the Saudi Arabian and UAE responsibility of the war in Yemen was largely exhibited through the rhetoric produced in Al Jazeera articles of July 2019. In an article on July 8, 2019, titled “Yemen: UAE to reduce troop presence after consulting with Riyadh” quote an unnamed UAE military official who states that the withdrawal of troops is “very much to do with moving from what I would call a military-first strategy to a peace-first strategy... ”We are not worried about a vacuum in Yemen, because we have trained a total of 90,000 Yemeni forces,” he said. “This is one of our major successes in Yemen.”<sup>52</sup> The usage of this quote leads the reader to believe that the UAE has a more passive relationship to the war because they “trained a total of 90,000 Yemeni forces”. However, there is not a distinction between who were these Yemeni forces, specifically nothing that the UAE backed a separatist movement that was neither allied with the Hadi government nor the Houthis. This misclassification shapes the role of the UAE lacking the same accountability that is typically thrust upon the Saudis. On the other hand, Al Jazeera news does combat this narrative shaped by the UAE military official by using a quote from Saeed Thabit stating that “The UAE announcement appears to be disingenuous and does reflect a sincere desire to end the war in Yemen, partly because it was leaked in an

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<sup>51</sup> William Roberts. “US Senators Seek to Block Trump Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia.”

<sup>52</sup> Al Jazeera. “Yemen: UAE to Reduce Troop Presence after Consulting with Riyadh.”



anonymous fashion without an official announcement.”<sup>53</sup> Thabit further states that, “the UAE troops still have a substantial presence in Yemen, and this development was made more to antagonise the Saudis who are facing more military pressure from the Houthis at their borders with Yemen.”<sup>54</sup> The language of *disingenuous*, *a sincere desire* and *made more to antagonise the Saudi*, is very important to examine when deciphering the bias shaped in this article and throughout Al Jazeera news articles. There is a sense of “holding the UAE accountable” for their impact upon the war, but it is more passive than language used to describe the United States, the Houthis or Saudi Arabia.

Contrastively, the space that the Houthis occupy in Al Jazeera news coverage is imperative to analyze. Admittedly, Al Jazeera has referred to the Houthis as “rebels” (similar to that of CNN), yet where Al Jazeera differs from American media, is in providing them with a platform to disseminate their news; furthermore, a sense of *fairness* is shown towards the Houthi cause that is not presented at all in CNN’s news. On August 9, 2019, an article titled “Houthis say Saudi-UAE-led coalition killed leader’s brother”, Al Jazeera news quote Houthi-run Ministry of Interior who states that “the treacherous hands affiliated with the US-Israeli aggression and its tools assassinated Ibrahim Badreddin al-Houthi.”<sup>55</sup> Not only does the language of *treacherous hands* and *US-Israeli aggression* give an assumption that the people referenced are enemies to the Houthis, it also names those who the Houthis believe are responsible for the death. By targeting the United States and Israel as being the perpetrators of this death, a larger picture is being formed of “western” and “western-allied” interference in the Middle East. Even if Al Jazeera does not directly support any of the countries who are involved in the Saudi Arabian-

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<sup>53</sup> Al Jazeera. “Yemen: UAE to Reduce Troop Presence after Consulting with Riyadh.”

<sup>54</sup> Al Jazeera. “Yemen: UAE to Reduce Troop Presence after Consulting with Riyadh.”

<sup>55</sup> Al Jazeera. “Houthis Say Saudi-UAE-Led Coalition Killed Leader’s Brother.”

Yemeni war, this language is certainly pushing a larger narrative of the condemnation of “western” (specifically American) intervention.

The beginning of the September of 2019 of headlines concentrated on the aggressiveness of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. The following headlines were amongst the beginning of September 2019 news: “Houthis: Saudi-led coalition bombs Yemen prison, kills dozens”, “UN calls for accountability in Saudi-led attack on Yemen prison”, “US ‘in talks with Houthis’ in bid to end Yemen war: Official”, “Joint call by Saudi Arabia, UAE to end fighting in Southern Yemen”, “Saudi Arabia accused of recruiting Sudanese children, mercenaries”, and “Yemen’s war: Internally displaced people make plea for aid”. The trend amidst these articles of a *Saudi lack of accountability* present Saudi Arabia as the instigator and antagonist in the war. In using rhetoric such as *calls for accountability*, *accused*, *bomb...kills dozens*, and *internally displaced people make plea for aid*, Al Jazeera is using negatively connotated words in association with Saudi Arabia, which in turn has the potential to shape an unfavorable impression upon the reader. In addition to these headlines, one can see a shift in the content of the articles when an attack on Saudi-oil facility, Aramco, occurred on September 14, 2019. The first article published on September 14<sup>th</sup>, by Al Jazeera took the shape of a “timeline” which is often used on Al Jazeera, in efforts to describe what events led up to the major news story being written. In this timeline, the rhetoric used to characterize the actions prior to the attack on the Aramco, seem to frame the Houthi bombing as “justifiable”. The article entitled “Timeline: Houthis’ drone and missile attacks on Saudi targets”, state:

“For more than four years, Yemen has been ravaged by a war between the Houthi rebels and the internationally-recognised government backed by a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The conflict has killed tens of

thousands of people, thrust millions to the brink of famine and spawned the world's most devastating humanitarian crisis. With logistical support from the United States, the Saudi-UAE-led coalition has carried out more than 18,000 raids on Houthi-held areas in an attempt to reverse their gains. Human rights groups have criticised the alliance for targeting civilians at hospitals, schools and markets, while also condemning Western countries for providing it with arms”<sup>56</sup>

In beginning with an explanation of all the horrific human rights violations inflicted by the Saudi-UAE-US alliance, the author is creating a predetermined bias for the rest of the article. The language of *conflict has killed tens of thousands, spawned the world's most devastating humanitarian crisis, human rights groups have criticized*” and then referencing the Saudi-UAE-US alliance as **responsible**, constitutes bias before the article even explains the attack itself. This was not a timeline, but rather a means in *rationalizing* the decision behind the Houthi attack on Aramco.

While CNN’s coverage in October 2019 focused on the United States weaponry, Al Jazeera news gave emphasis to both the humanitarian crisis and the Aden deal with Yemen’s former government and separatists. In an article entitled “UAE withdraws troops from Yemen’s southern port city of Aden”<sup>57</sup> and “Yemen gov’t, separatists expected to announce Aden deal”, there was a language shift comparative to earlier months. Rhetoric of “Yemen’s internationally recognised government”, “restructuring of armed forces under Saudi supervision”, “Riyadh has said it views the truce offer "positively"” and “the UAE would continue fighting "terrorist organisations" in other southern Yemeni provinces” have a slightly similar tone to that of CNN

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<sup>56</sup> Al Jazeera. “Timeline: Houthis' Drone and Missile Attacks on Saudi Targets.” News.

<sup>57</sup>Al Jazeera. “UAE Withdraws Troops from Yemen's Southern Port City of Aden.” News.  
Al Jazeera. “Yemen Gov't, Separatists Expected to Announce Aden Deal.” News.

with referencing the Hadi coalition as *internationally backed government* and the indirect comment of *terrorist organization*—referring to the Houthi coalition. By naming them a terrorist’s organization, a devaluation of them as an entity to the war is being formed as well as deviating the reason why they are fighting to simply that of terror. Where Al Jazeera differed from CNN, is in these two articles the Houthi’s were never referred to as *rebels* which is a term always used by American media conglomerates including CNN. Sequentially, in November and December, the word *peace* was a trend throughout the articles. The following articles were some of the headlines: “Will Yemen's southern peace deal really help end the war?”, “Peace deal announced between Yemeni government, separatists”, “Saudi, Yemen's Houthis hold 'indirect talks' in Oman to end war”, “Houthi rebels will have role in Yemen's future, says UAE”, “Saudi-led coalition air attacks in Yemen down 80 percent: UN”, “Houthi prisoners freed by Saudi Arabia return to Yemen: Red Cross” and “Yemen's war: Signs conflict could wind down in 2020: UN”. Language such as “resolution”, “agreement”, “talks began”, “de-escalation of hostilities”, “solution” and “negotiation” were used throughout the articles in regard to be nearing the end of war. These articles put an emphasis on the fact that the nations involved were forming these resolutions and having discussions on the way it would play out. In framing the articles in this way, Al Jazeera is creating a narrative that **combats** the orientalist’s trope, where there is an insistence that the Middle East needs the help of “the west” in order to establish order.

#### 8. Conclusion

When considering the ways that media interacts with the Arab world, specifically the Middle East, American mainstream media is oftentimes guilty for not only desensitizing the conflict through their homogenizing language, but also in shaping the conflict through an orientalist lens.

A extensive issue with this Euro-American orientalist lens and “othering” in the media, is framing a news story that shapes a narrative in which one nation are the “good guys” or allies while another is “the enemy”. Henceforth, the reader becomes detached to the people that are being directly affected by the conflict if they see those individuals as the enemy, in this case that being Yemen as they are affiliated with the Houthis. In the CNN coverage, of the Yemen-Saudi Arabian conflict, there are not many lines drawn that distinguished the Yemeni people from the Houthis which creates a grouping of the entire country into this negative scope. Edward Said states that “what we expect from the serious study of Western societies, with its complex theories, enormously variegated analyses of social structures, histories, cultural formations and sophisticated languages of investigation, we should also expect from the study and discussion of Islamic societies in the West”<sup>58</sup> Not only should this ideology be applied through academia, but should also be enforced in the manner in which American media reports about events and policy in the Arab world.

I am writing this thesis in effort to explain that CNN’s claim of being a completely objective news outlet does not always hold in the reporting of foreign war or policy. The allegiances that American private news outlets have with the US government has influence over the ways in which bias is represented through American mainstream news. Contrastingly, although there has been criticism against Al Jazeera about its affiliation with the Qatari state and sensationalized news; Al Jazeera’s ability to produce news that allowed for a fairly objective platform for rivaling sides in the Yemen-Saudi Arabian conflict, promoted this idea of objectivity that was not shown in CNN’s new coverage. In justifying this claim both sourcing and language were evaluated. Sourcing from CNN consisted largely of experts and officials from the Trump

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<sup>58</sup> Edward W. Said. *Covering Islam*, XVI.

administration—Vice President Mike Pence and President Trump himself (known for being pro-Saudi), Saudi Arabian government officials, as well as periodically sourcing from experts who are affiliated with universities or organizations that backed the Israeli state such as Michael Knights at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Aside from the Saudi Arabian officials (predominantly being Saudi Arabian spokesperson, Col. Turki al-Malki), none of these sources are directly involved in the conflict. Furthermore, under ten percent of the experts covered were actually individuals apart of or backing the Houthi coalition. On the contrary, although there were articles that pleaded for accountability of the Saudi Arabian government who are bombing the Yemeni people, Al Jazeera, nonetheless, provided a platform where both the Saudi Arabian (Al Arabiya TV) and Yemeni Houthi news channels (Almasirah TV) were sourced. Another largely used source throughout the Al Jazeera articles was the UN Security Council or UN reports in general to back the argument of the humanitarian crises that is occurring on Yemeni soil, which ultimately became a voice for the Yemeni people in the articles. This voice was almost but silenced in CNN media coverage. Even more so, if Al Jazeera does not outright support the Houthi's, they allow for a platform where their ideas can be disseminated which was not witnessed throughout CNN's articles.

Sequentially, rhetoric is used as a tool of bias throughout both media conglomerates. One central commonality amongst the coverage made by CNN and Al Jazeera is their dichotomy between *rebel* and *government*. Before explaining this analysis, I must recognize that this term of “rebel” was used significantly less in Al Jazeera media coverage and was oftentimes replaced with the word “coalition”. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia is largely noted as *the Saudi Arabian government* or *the Saudi Arabian kingdom* while the Yemeni Houthi group are noted as *rebels*. The projection of this language that is forced upon a reader is insinuating that there is less

legitimacy to the Houthi coalition and cause in general. In using the term *government*, the articles are insisting upon this idea of *establishment* being a reason for the validity of the Saudi Arabian cause. The United States is based on the foundations of freedom and democracy which is threaded throughout media, education and American society itself. When a reader comes across *Yemeni Houthi Rebels*, there is a possibility for them to assume that the Houthis are against these American core values. Furthermore, both outlets found major divergence in the following. CNN used language as a means of furthering the narrative of the Houthis as a vigilante group or “enemy” whilst Saudi Arabia, although critiqued, were framed as “justified” in this war because of their political and economic partnership with the United States government. In using the phrases of “Saudi government” versus “Houthi rebel”, CNN leads its viewers to believe that the Houthis are a barbaric group that should be defeated while Saudi Arabia is an *organized and civil* government who is attempting to gain control over a devastated country. Rhetoric such as *disparate Arab Nations, terrorism, dangerous, destructive, poisonous and lethal* were all terms applied to both the Houthis and Iran. In Al Jazeera news, bias was largely shaped in the critique of the United States’ impact upon the war. Al Jazeera condemned the ways in which Saudi Arabia uses American resources and cooperation to further the carnage brought upon the Yemeni people. Phrases and terms like *obligation, do not exacerbate the conflict, spawned the world’s most devastating humanitarian crisis, human rights groups have criticized, US-Israeli aggression* and *Saudi lack of accountability* were a theme throughout the articles which insinuated who Al Jazeera as a media organization believed held major responsibility for much of the war. Conclusively, the language used in many Al Jazeera articles attempt in not only shaping a narrative that is different but deconstructs the orientalist lens that is used in CNN.

Objectivity does not lie in the eye of the beholder; this is not simply a CNN problem but an American mainstream news issue in which media conglomerates are claiming that they promote unbiased news reporting. Language and sourcing are deeply entrenched in the shaping of narrative and is being manipulated to advance political alignment and ideology of news organizations. In the case of media, it is not an issue that Saudi Arabia is an ally to the United States government. The problem lies with CNN promising to provide objective, factual reporting when in reality, they neglect reporting on the point of views of others with whom are not associated with the United States government. One must hold media responsible for the global power they hold, their dissemination of news and the ways in which it effects global public discourse, sentiment around a conflict or war and ultimately policy which has the potential to save thousands of lives.



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