

The face behind the clusters

A discursive analysis of the Saudi Arabian foreign policy actions from an identity and role conception perspective

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyze whether the aggressive foreign policy actions recently taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be understood and explained through political identity theory and role conception theory from a social constructivist theory perspective. This will be done through a discursive analysis method according to Laclau and Mouffe, aiming to identify a discourse of the identity of the state which creates a role conception based on the identified discourse of the state's identity. This study will examine whether the decision makers perception of the state's role influences him to act according to this role in his foreign policy. The cases of examination are Saudi Arabian foreign policy actions taken in Bahrein in 2011 and in Yemen in 2015. The study concludes that the actions indeed can be understood through identity theory and role conception theory, however the role of the state may change as the interests and goals of the decision maker change.

Keywords: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, political identity theory, role conception theory, discursive analysis, foreign policy, Bahrein, Yemen

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1 Introduction

In the beginning of January 2016 Human Rights Watch reported that Saudi led coalition groups had repeatedly airdropped cluster bombs in residential areas in Yemen. Steve Goose, arms director at Human Rights Watch states that the use of cluster ammunition in crowded areas suggest the aim was to intentionally harm civilians which is considered a war crime (HRW 2016).

The Saudi Arabian aggressive involvement in Yemen is considered questionable by many, as was their involvement in the Arab spring uprising in Bahrein in 2011 (Holmes 2014). The situation in Yemen and Bahrein were both Shi'ite uprisings against a Sunni government, Saudi Arabia being the Sunni ally "protecting" their Sunni neighbors. However, what makes the situation more concerning is that these aggressive foreign policy actions occur parallel to an aggressive and provocative rhetoric towards the arch enemy of Arab states, the Shi'ite republic of Iran. As the cluster bombs dropped over civilian Yemenis, Saudi Arabia announced the execution of 47 people, among them the Shi'it proclaimer sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr. This provocation spiraled the relation between Saudi Arabia and Iran to the worse, resulting in the cutting of diplomatic ties with Iran (Malsin 2016).

Iran's power and influence in the region is growing fast, Iranian officials have been heard boasting about having control over four capitals apart from their own. These would be Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sanaa (Nakhoul 2015). On the other hand the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is losing authorization and power. In a short but intensive history of constantly growing as a superpower and hegemony in the region, the growth has stopped and is now leaning towards a decrease (Patey 2015). As the Iranian empire is growing, the polarized situation in the region is becoming more and more tens (Malsin 2016).

This study aims to examine whether the aggressive foreign policy actions recently taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be explained by a political identity theory and role conception, created by the decision maker's perception of Saudi Arabian identity.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to understand whether Saudi Arabian decision makers are influenced by a role conception based on their perception on a Saud Arabian

identity. Furthermore, whether this role can explain the aggressive foreign policy actions taken by the decision makers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recently. My research question is as follows:

Does the perception of a Saudi Arabian identity create a role conception that influences the decision makers to act according to this role in their foreign policy?

This issue is relevant both interdisciplinary as well as extra disciplinary, due to the fact that the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding in the context of science as well as in the context in the society outside of academia, which is equally important (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 8-19). By reaching a deeper understanding to why Saudi Arabia is acting more aggressively, it should be easier to counter these actions which will improve the situation for those who live in the exposed areas. The study is based on a theoretical framework of identity theory and role conceptions theory from a social constructivist theory perspective. By combining these theories and placing them in the context of Saudi Arabia the theory placed in a new context which contributes to the interdisciplinary context.

1.2 Limitations

The situation inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is worrying and unstable (Lacey 2010: xvii). This could constitute an influencing variable that could be a reason for the creation of a strong enemy picture to inspire a better cohesion and unity in order to discipline the population, as explained by identity theory. However, the domestic situation is suitable for a separate study and the study will therefore be limited to foreign policy and the decision maker's perception of identity and role. The domestic situation will however still be taken to account however not as a potential variable to explain foreign policy actions but as part of an explanation of the Saudi Arabian identity as a whole.

The future of the Saudi Arabian oil reserves is uncertain and is about to irreversibly change. (Pierce 2012) This situation constitute another variable which could be the source of pressure and stress that could affect the decision making process. Due to lack of time and space this variable will not be taken into consideration.

As this is a case study, the Iranian perspective will not be taken into consideration. The study will be limited to the foreign policy actions taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Bahrein in 2011 and in Yemen in 2015.

2 Theory

In order to understand Saudi Arabian foreign policy actions this study will combine two theories. These are political identity theory and role conception theory from a social constructivist theory perspective. I will therefore first define social constructivist theory as a background, and then dive deeper into the two theories that will constitute my theoretical framework.

2.1 Earlier research

The social constructivist theory is fairly new and didn't attract attention until after the cold war. Two pioneers in social constructivist theory are Nicolaus Onuf and Alexander Wendt who introduced norms as an influencing factor in international relations, and stated that the international anarchy cannot be taken for granted (Eriksson 2009:94). Earlier research on identity theory in Saudi Arabia mainly focus on women and minorities inside the state such as Shi'ites groups (Matthiesen 2015). Concerning role conception theory there is also a limited amount of earlier research, most of which concerns role conceptions in the EU and states in Europe. K. J Holsti wrote *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy* in 1970. This study is however mainly based on Lisbeth Aggestam's doctoral dissertation, *A European foreign policy?: Role conceptions and the politics of identity in Britain, France and Germany*. To my knowledge, none of the earlier researchers in role conception theory has based their study on Saudi Arabia nor any of its neighboring countries. My thesis is therefore cumulative and is aiming to contribute to the field of science by filling this gap.

2.2 Social constructivist theory

Social constructivist theory falls into the philosophical position of realistic ontology. This implies that the theory identify a difference between physical and social values (Eriksson 2009:91). A constructivist believes that physical values exist regardless if there is a person there to see it, whereas social values are socially constructed and only exist through the eyes of the observer. Social values are constructed by the use of language (Bergström & Boréus 2012:28).

Concerning international relations social constructivism is a state centered theory which admits to the traditional security theory idea about anarchy in the international arena. Even though social constructivist agree that the anarchy exists, they also argue that the anarchy becomes what we make of it. This implies that if we all were to agree that we have a supranational organization that has the power of acting as an international police, then that is also a reality (Eriksson 2009:94).

According to social constructivist theory all socially constructed values are created through the language. By expressing a reality, the reality is constructed in that moment. By using a persuasive rhetoric's realities can be created and accepted by those who listen. Identity is one of the values created through the language and is thus changeable and can be created and recreated as interests change. Identity is thus a social construction, and an imagined community created through a common denominator such as language, religion or ethnicity. By talking about "us and the others" a feeling of belonging to a group is created (Eriksson 2009:99).

2.3 Political identity theory

As mentioned above, identity is a corner-stone in the theory of social constructivism. It is admitted to be a strong force that speaks to the social human of belonging to a group or community. Identity has to do with who you are or consider yourself to be, in categories of ethnicity, language, religion or regional background. Even though a person often falls into more than one category we decide for ourselves what category is most important for us, and what is to constitute that person's identity (Joireman 2003:2).

Ethnicity is often referred to as *the politics of belonging*, and is an essential part of political identity. When ethnic groups are discontent in the political system, and become politicized, the group evolves from an ethnic group to a nationalist group (Joireman 2003:2, 12). Ethnic traits such as cultural forms, values and practices are usable symbols in identification of members of a group, and therefore a resource to gain political power (Brass 1991:15). According to primordialism theory, ethnic identity is unchangeable and established at birth. This is the complete opposite of social constructivism which states that identity is constructed in the meeting of "the other" and that people can choose their ethnicity based on personal preferences and is changeable as interests and goals change. Social constructivists share this with instrumentalist who also argue that ethnicity is not consistent over time. However this theory does not explain the origins of ethnicity but focuses on the goals of the group, and is using ethnicity as an instrument to mobilize people, as revealed in the name. Social constructivism

does not share the same focus on goals, and instrumentalism is therefore a fitting complementary theory (Joireman 2003:21, 35, 54-56, 68).

Even though nations are considered to be imagined communities, the fear and hatred of “the other” can be the root of great passion that legitimizes peoples will to live and die for their nation as well as murder in the name of their nation (Anderson 2006:141). Using nationalism as an instrument to mobilize people in order to achieve political goals has proven to be greatly beneficial (Joireman 2003:47).

According to social constructivism, identity is formed by a combination of ascribed traits and social inputs. Ascribed traits can constitute appearance, place of birth and language, whilst social inputs can be any of ancestral myths, subjective beliefs, political power of the group, economics, religion or again, language. As our environment, goals and interest change over time, so does our ethnical identity (Joireman 2003:55-56).

2.4 Role conceptions

Role conception theory is a sub-disciplinary theory to foreign policy analysis, which focuses on the relation between the interaction between states and the political process within the state. The aim of the theory is to explain how identity and role conceptions in foreign policy reflects this relation (Aggestam 2004:10).

Role conception is about the decision maker’s perception of the identity of their nation. The nation’s identity determines what kind of actions would be suitable for that state, what commitments are appropriate and what decisions are apt for the decision maker to make. The identity creates a role for the state, and the decision maker then acts according on the role which is created through his or her perception of the identity (Aggestam 2004:10-11). The roles refer to a pattern of what is believed to be expected and appropriate behavior. Expectations are created by the institutionalization of social structures that anticipate specific interactions. However, roles can also be contextually determined. The role-taking is part of a socialization in interactive negotiations process, where the individual actor is faced with expectations and must actively choose what role to play in the context he or she is in, thus the process is not mechanical (Elgström & Smith 2004:5).

The role conception is based on the history and culture of the nation as well as the nation’s socialization process and societal characteristics (Holsti in Aggestam 2006:13). Aggestam also points out that material values are equally important to the actor’s perception (Aggestam 2006:22). The decision making actor is placed in a context of institutions that confront him or her with expectations of a certain role behavior. The actor will also be placed in a context of interacting with other

actors, and can here find space to experiment with how to perform the role in order to satisfy the intention of the state. The role performance of the actor will decide the course of foreign policy (Aggestam 2006:25-26).

Holsti also argues that role conceptions cannot dictate every aspect of foreign policy behavior. If one were to apply this theory in order to analyze political behavior one must expect to find decisions made inconsistent with the role conception (Holsti 1970:298).

3 Method

This thesis constitutes a case study which according to Robert K. Yin is the method of most advantage if the study is based on a contemporary set of events which is the case in this study. Another reason to do a case study is if the researcher has no or little control over the events taking place, which is also true for this study (Yin 2009:13).

The contemporary set of events are the course of actions taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2011 and 2015 which is the puzzle in center of the study. This study aims to analyze what could legitimize such aggressive actions and what enables dictions makers act in this way.

The study aims to explain a micromechanical issue on an individual level and is therefore a qualitative study which constitutes a meeting between empirical fact and soft data which can occur through qualitative analysis of texts (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 10-11, 67).

3.1 Discursive analysis

By qualitatively analyzing text it is important to stay consistent to a method of analysis in order for the study to be intersubjective (Teorell & Svensson 2007:281). This study will proceed with a discursive analysis which indicates that the text is read from a point of view (Bergström & Boréus 2012:355). There are several orientations within discursive analysis. This study will use the tradition presented by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe since it is cohesive with my theory and has a similar philosophical background, as it takes physical and social values to account. The discursive theory is linked to linguistics and focuses on the importance of the language, not just as a tool to describe but also to shape the reality. A discourse is created as words and “signs” are expressed in a context together (Bergström & Boréus 2012:364-365).

More explicitly, discursive analysis according to Laclau and Mouffe focus on the theoretical domain of conflict and struggle over identity. The theory can be used to study different strategies of signification, by studying agents who create a presence of an identity of a practice (Walton & Boon 2014:353). These agents can be words that are also referred to as “signs”. The signs make up a web of words, who carry different signification to the discourse. The discourse is organized around the most central words called “nodal points”, whereas the words that can

change their meaning and signification are known as “significant floaters”. As the words change and differ in relevance, the discourse can never be fixed. The words solely gain relevance to the discourse in relation to each other (Winter-Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999:36-41).

Every chapter in this study will be concluded with an evaluation on what keywords are most significant and constitute the nodal points. These form the web of words that will constitute the center of the discourse of the Saudi identity and the base of a role conception.

3.2 Operationalization

This thesis aims to identify the discourse of a Saudi Arabian identity as perceived by the decision maker in order to identify a role conception that he might act according to in his foreign policy. The study will therefore examine the nodal points, as explained above, of the history, the culture, the socialization process, and the societal characteristics of the state, which are the main sources of role conceptions according to Aggestam. In order to create a deep but comprehensive theoretical framework, special focus will be made on Joireman’s definition of socially ascribed ethnical traits according to identity from a social constructivist theory perspective. These are ancestral myths, subjective beliefs, political power of the group, economics, religion and language. Ascribed traits such as appearance and place of birth will not be focused on, in order to narrow the study. The study will examine who is making the decisions and see whether there are any external elements that could enable him to act in certain ways. The results of these components will conclude the discourse of a role conception of the state. Once the role conception is identified the study will analyze whether the foreign policy actions recently taken by Saudi Arabia in Bahrein and Yemen can be understood through the concluded the role conception.

3.3 Material

This study will consist of both primary and secondary sources, consisting of scientific articles as well as books, news articles and radio interviews. The reason for this is to receive a comprehensive picture of the issue and for the study to reach a high validity. Two main sources are books written by Robert Lacey and Karen Elliott House. Lacey is a historian who lived in Saudi Arabia in the 1970, where he among others interviewed King Khaled. (Lacey 2010: xvii) House is a former teacher at Harvard University’s institute of Politics and has also spent a lot of time in the Kingdom, however her interviews concern the contemporary

situation. (House 2012) The contemporary events taking place naturally need contemporary sources, and special attention will be directed towards time relevance.

In order to reach a high reliability on the study, it is essential to be critical towards partial material such as information received in news articles and through radio interviews. This information should be complemented with other sources, due to the fact that the journalist could be biased or present false information. It is also important to remember that details could be left out by mistake, and situations can be misinterpreted when portraying the situation from inside conflict torn regions. A high intersubjectivity and a critical approach is therefore essential (Öberg & Sollenberg 2011:45–70). Further consideration on the material will be done according to the so called critical criteria as describes by Teorell and Svensson. This referrers to three criterion based on authenticity, concurrency, and partiality of the claimed sender of the material. This will be carefully considered to ensure a critical view and good validity of the study. (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 105-106)

Due to the fact that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a closed country, a lot of the information found on the occurrences inside the House of Sa'ud are rumors. (Patey 2015) This study will however clearly state what information is confirmed and what is based on rumors, however some generalizations must be made as detailed information does not always exist. No analysis will be made solely on rumors, however they will be taken into account.

4 Foreign policy action

4.1 Bahrein

In the year 2011 the people in many Middle Eastern countries were tiring of oppression and the lack of democracy. The Arab Spring cannot have bypassed anyone, as it had effects in most countries in the region including Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrein. Smaller protests were also made in Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Sudan, and in Saudi Arabia (Globalis 2015).

In January 2011, the Arab Spring had not yet reached Bahrein as the uprisings started in neighboring countries. The Sunni Monarch Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa, tried to please his subjects by handing them large sums of money, however the Shi'a Muslim majority in Bahrein were not persuaded and the violent demonstrations started in the middle of February. During a few weeks, the demonstrators took control over large areas in the city. The Shi'a party in the government abandoned their places in support for the demonstrators who aimed their critique towards the monarchy and the political leadership (Zeidler-Blomberg & Salih 2016).

4.1.1 Saudi Arabian action

The Bahreini government tried to blame the uprising on Iranian conspiracy, however no evidence has been presented to support this accusation. In the middle of March, a month after the demonstrators had occupied the Pearl roundabout which is the Bahreini equivalent to the Tahir Square in Egypt, soldiers from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates arrived at the shores of Bahrein (Holmes 2014).

As the Sunni leadership in Bahrein introduced new war laws to prohibit the violent demonstrations that seemed unstoppable, one thousand five hundred soldiers with heavy weaponry and tanks rolled in over Bahrein and the opposition, literally crushing the demonstration (Zeidler-Blomberg & Salih 2016).

The opposition leaders were seized and imprisoned, and a human rights organization claimed that more than forty people were killed by the military and police. A United Nations report proved in November that same year that excessive violence had been used illegally on the demonstrators, including torture (Zeidler-Blomberg & Salih 2016).

Since 2011, the demonstrations have recurred and repeatedly been quieted down by the Saudi and Emirati soldiers who are still based in the country to police the population (Holmes 2014). Bahrein has recently entered an alliance led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has entered Yemen to push back the Huthi rebels and reassert the Sunni president Abd al-Rahman Mansur al-Hadi. Bahreini soldiers have been killed in this ongoing conflict (Zeidler-Blomberg & Salih 2016).

4.2 Yemen

Yemen was also affected by the Arab spring in 2011. In January sixteen thousand demonstrators gathered in the streets crying for democracy and justice. The demonstrations soon escalated into violence and turmoil, as the president Ali Abdullah Saleh refused to resign (Globalis 2016). Civil war broke out and in November Saleh was replaced with another Sunni ruler, Abd al-Rahman Mansur al-Hadi (Malsin 2016).

The Houthis, Shi'ite rebels founded in the tribes in the norther Yemen, fought many wars against the Saleh administration and were still not satisfied with the regime change. Economically and morally endorsed by Iran, the Houthis expanded their control over Yemen. In 2014 they overran Sanaa and forced Hadi out of the country. Hadi fled to his Sunni ally, Saudi Arabia (Malsin 2016).

4.2.1 Saudi Arabian action

As Yemen slowly developed into a satellite state controlled by Iran many analysts speculated on what Saudi Arabia's action would be. Karen Elliott House wrote in February 2015 that Saudi Arabia without doubt would engage in the conflict in Yemen (House 2015). One month later the Kingdom launched the military campaign, resulting in over six thousand deaths after less than a year (Malsin 2016).

In January 2016 the residents in Sana'a reported the Saudi led warplanes had caused the heaviest bombings to date (Malsin 2016) and Human Rights Watch reported that same month that the Saudi led coalition had repeatedly airdropped

cluster bombs in residential areas suggesting the aim was to intentionally harm civilians, which is considered a war crime (HRW 2016).

The international actors in Yemen has led to an escalation of the conflict, which has now spiraled from a civil war to an international conflict. Jared Malsin claims that it no longer matters if the Yemenis were to make peace, the peace is no longer theirs to make. The soldiers fighting in the counties have other nationalities and their country has become a battleground for a proxy war fought between Iran and the coalition led by Saudi Arabia (Malsin 2016). Yet the conflict is only escalating, by 15th of May 2016 the conflict has claimed nearly seven thousand victims (Al Jazeera 2016).

5 Saudi Arabian Identity and role conception

5.1 The history

The first unification of what today is known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, occurred in 1744. An agreement was signed between Mohammad ibn Sa'ud, the ruler of the small town of ad-Dir'iyya, today the outskirts of Riyadh, and the founder of the extremist and purist branch of Islam, Wahhabism, Mohammad ibn al-Wahhab. The agreement included political support for the ideology that ibn al-Wahhab was proclaiming and in return ibn Sa'ud received legitimacy to conquer more territory in the name of the religion. The expansion of the Saudi State was described as *Jihad* and included the banishment of all non-Wahhabi Muslims whom they called *takfiri*. Together the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance conquered the central part of Arabia- the Najd, the eastern part of the peninsula, the Persian shore and even the Hijaz where the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are situated (Steinberg 2005:14).

By conquering the Hijaz in 1818, the new found Saudi state also made an attack on the Ottoman Empire and insulted pilgrims by preventing them from performing the *hajj*, the pilgrimage. The Ottoman Empire was forced to fight back and the fast growing Saudi power was crushed even faster. It would take the Saudis a century to rebuild this state (Steinberg 2005:15).

In 1824 the Saudi state began its growing anew, but in 1891 the control of the state fell into the hands of the Rasheed family and the Sa'ud family were chased out of Riyadh and into the desert within the desert, "the empty quarter" (Lacey 2010:333). At the time, the future King, Abdul Aziz, was fifteen years old. Later on he would talk about his time in the desert among the Murrah people, as the time when he acquired the skills that he used to conquer the Kingdom. The family stayed in the desert for two years, before they moved on towards Kuwait where they lived in exile and dreamt about reconquering Riyadh. According to the stories, the still young Abdul Aziz left Kuwait in 1901 together with a small army of forty men. They rode back into the desert gathering supporters and waited for the opportune moment to make the attack. Exactly what happened after this will forever remain a mystery it seems, for the many myths tell different stories. Even Abdul Aziz changed the story each time he told it. What is clear is that the city of

Riyadh was recaptured in January 1902 and that this date marks the beginning of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Lacey 1981: 29, 41-47, 52).

Many wars were still to follow, and the Kingdom was entirely united first in 1932, when the Kingdom was proclaimed. The year after, 1933, the nearly bankrupt Kingdom made a great discovery. Underneath the sand and dirt the King discovered “black gold”. The oil would not only amount to immense wealth for the Kingdom and a complete new style of life for the inhabitants of the country, but also a powerful strategic role in the international arena as powerful countries, such as the United States, soon came to be dependent on the recourse (Lacey 1981: 220-221).

5.1.1 Ancestral Myths

Storytelling and the passing on of ancestral myths is an important part of the Saudi Arabian culture (Lacey 1981:47). According to Robert Lacey, a historian and a Saudi connoisseur, one of the stories all Saudi children know off by heart is the story about the battle of the troublesome and rebellious Ajman tribe. According to the myth King Abdul Aziz was wounded on the battle field, which was seen as a bad omen to the companions, and they started to lose hope of victory. Abdul Aziz and his men went back to the Bedouin village where they were resting, he asked the emir of the village to marry his fairest daughter, in the case that she was a virgin of course, that very night. The emir agreed and sheep and camels were slaughtered for a feast. Abdul Aziz went to his bride and proved himself very potent in spite of his injury. This proof of manly strength gave the army power and inspiration so take on the Ajman tribe the next day and they won the battle (Lacey 1981:31-32).

Lacey later describes another myth where Abdul Aziz is also portrayed as an unconquerable hero. In most stories the King is described as courageous, powerful beyond imagination, the leader of the few against the many, righteous and fair. The stories portray an almost godlike leader, and the protector of his people (Lacey 1981:47). According to identity theory, myths of a powerful leader contributes to tying the people together to make them proud and inspire them to stay loyal (Joireman 2003:41-42).

5.1.2 Nodal Points

The central words and phrases on which the discourse of the Saudi Arabian history is based are according to this study; *Wahhabism and righteousness, power to conquer territory, Bedouin culture, oil, and the courageous and strong leader who is an unconquerable hero*. These words and phrases constitute first corner in the discourse on the Saudi Arabian identity.

5.2 The culture

The Saudi Arabian culture as it was before oil was discovered in 1933, is portrayed as a very simple desert life. The ancestors of the royal family are the Bedouin people who lived in black goat hair tents in the desert, they had little water, ate rare meat and drank camel's milk. They would hunt with hawks in the desert and track camel traces. They could learn from the depth of the hoof prints where it came from and where it was headed, apparently they could even tell what color and what sex the camel might be. They would perform the ceremonial war dance with swords, the *ardha*, (Lacey 1981:229) and they would raid other Bedouin villages. This was not considered a crime as long as it was done according to the very serious etiquettes of the *ghazzu*, the raid. The Bedouin were a polite and proud people (Lacey 2010:24-29).

Today the life of the common Saudi inhabitant has changed tremendously. As the money have flooded in to the country the simple life in the goat hair tents has been exchanged for a more luxurious and westernized culture. Even though between two to four million of the native Saudis live in severe poverty, the elite is indulging in abundant luxury (Sullivan 2013).

The society has changed, however many cultural traits are still deeply imbedded in the culture and the Saudis take great pride in their heritage. All Saudi Kings have at some point been captured posing on pictures performing the *ardha*, (Lacey 2010: image) and Saudi men are still encouraged to take more than one wife, although modern Saudi men usually only take one (Lacey 1981:33).

5.2.1 Subjective beliefs

Honor is of great importance in the Bedouin culture as it is in common life in Saudi Arabia today. A life without honor is a life in shame, and according to the Saudi Arabian mindset a life in shame is like living in death and need not be endured (House 2012:63). Traditionally a woman is expected to fight off her man at her wedding night to defend her modesty and afterwards a blanket stained with blood is to be presented and passed around among the wedding guests to prove that she was indeed a virgin (Lacey 1981:31—32). According to a Saudi women's rights organization, *honor killings* occur daily in the Kingdom, and they most commonly affect women who socialize with men who are not their relatives or husbands. In Saudi Arabia, religious police are contributing to the enforcement of this legislation as well as other religious rules, such as dress code, prayer attendance and prohibiting the consummation of alcohol (THE MEDIA LINE NEWS AGENCY 2009). In the time when Arabia was governed by tribes, the emir of the tribe was responsible for maintaining order, and the tribe was expected to be obedient. Today the legal power has been centralized by the king, whereas issues of honor are mostly left to the family to deal with. A man who kills his wife

or daughter is simply trying to preserve the honor of the family, and this determination should not be underestimated (House 2012:63).

Intolerance of sins and dissidence seems to be a trend from the very beginning of the Saudi empire and is perhaps also a cultural trait. A parallel can be drawn to a statement made by the Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide on the 14th of April 2016 in the context of international negotiation and mediation. He said: “There is nothing so dangerous as a humiliated person or a humiliated state.” (Kai Eide 2016). The father in charge of a family where someone is not behaving according to the religious and honorable laws, could be estimated to experience a feeling of humility.

5.2.2 Religion

As mentioned earlier, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was constructed on the pillars of Wahhabism which is a strictly interpreted, purist branch within Hanbali Sunni Islam (House 2012:34). The descendants of ibn Al-Wahhab are known as the Al Ash-Shaikh, who is still a powerful and influential family in the Kingdom (Steinberg 2005:13).

The majority in Saudi Arabia are Sunni Muslims, in fact, the country consist of about twenty million citizens of which two to three million are Shi’a. Most of them live on the east cost of the peninsula known as the Persian shore. They have been harshly discriminated throughout all ages which has driven them to join opposition movements who still fight for their survival (Matthisen 2015). Most notably so in the mid-1970s when a Shi’ite revolutionary group, the *Islamist Revolutionary Organization, IRO*, began to hand out pamphlets with complaints in the village of Qateef. When the Wahhabi national guardsmen arrived to put an end to the disturbances, they found posters of Ayatolla Khomeini and a group of Shi’ite Muslims thumping their chest crying for “Islamic revolution”. A witness remembers blood suddenly being everywhere and describes how he saw the head of the man beside him being cracked open. The IRO was completely demolished (Lacey 2010:43-45). There are also other religious minorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who experience discrimination, such as Sufi Muslims in Jeddah or Ismaili Muslims from the impoverished south (House 2012:68).

The difference between Sunni and Shi’a is whether or not they recognize the prophet’s nephew Ali, to be the rightful heir to Islam or not. The Sunni majority claim that the religion should not be the property of a family. The rightful successor is instead the first caliph Abu Bakr, followed by Omar and later Othman. Ali is however recognized by Sunni Muslims to be the fourth caliph, whereas the Shi’a Muslims claim he is the only rightful successor of the faith. When Ali finally became caliph, he was worshiped as a hero by the people, proving to be an inspiring spiritual leader as well as a hero on the battle field. Already groups within Islam were claiming that the *umma*, was moving away from the true faith and that Ali was claiming to be an authority like God. In the

name of the true religion, they assassinated Ali with a poisoned sword making Ali the first martyr of Shi'a Islam (Lacey 2010:41-42). The division goes back nearly one thousand four hundred years, making the conflict almost as old of that between Arabs and Persians (House 2015). This goes back to at least the year of 636 A.D. and the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah, when the Arab victory over the Persian army marked the beginning of Arab and Islamic rule in Persia (Encyclopedia Britannica 2015).

There have later been greater separations between Sunni and Shi'a. The Shi'a became a persecuted religious minority, and especially ibn Al-Wahhab had little tolerance for the Shi'a and persecuted them systematically. Even today stories live on about the Shi'a people who have forked tails underneath their robes, and that their allegiance lie with *the Persians* (Lacey 2010:40, 43).

However, even though the country has a history of intolerance, and a religious leadership that still preaches intolerance, the founder, and historical hero of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz, is described as a tolerant man. As the Americans arrived to drill for oil in the beginning of the 1930s he defended them in front of the suspicious religious leadership reading from the Qur'an, surah 109: "Say to those that reject your faith, I worship not what you worship, nor will you worship what I worship... You have your religion and I have mine." (Lacey 2010:69). This statement was made in the context of Christian guests helping him at his request. Not in the context of rebellious minority groups presumably, from his point of view, pledging their allegiance to the enemy.

5.2.3 Language

In Saudi Arabia the official language is Arabic (Landguiden 2015). Arabic is also the holy language on which the Qur'an is written.

The Iranians, whose ancestors are the Persians do not speak Arabic, but Persian languages, the most widespread being Farsi (Lewis et al. 2016). The inhabitants of Saudi Arabia who speak the holy language as their mother tongue, could find this as yet another proof of their righteousness.

5.2.4 Nodal points

The nodal points in the chapter of culture are the following words and phrases: *pride and politeness, luxury, honor, the importance of keeping up a façade, intolerance, Sunni Islam, a holy language, and again righteousness*. That the enemy is portrayed as the Shi'ite Muslims and the Persians, is also a key pillar in this discourse.

5.3 The socialization process

The term socialization process, is the process of adjusting to a social context (Encyclopedia Britannica 2016). This study interprets this as the act of moving from an agricultural or hunter gatherer society, to a modern society where human security and human rights prevail. The chapter will analyze how this process was made and to what extent it was successful.

King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz, reigned the Kingdom from 1964 to 1975 when he was assassinated, is highly recognized as the King who modernized the country. In his years on the throne he managed to end slavery, create schools for women and stand up to the United States in the oil embargo of 1973 (House 2012: 212-213).

Although Saudi Arabia has indeed come a long way in terms of modernization, human rights violations are still common. Human rights watch summaries the current situation in the Kingdom by stating that during 2014 the country convicted and imprisoned political dissidents and human rights activists on the basis of their peaceful activities. The discrimination of religious minorities as well as women continues, and new anti-terrorism laws can be used to criminalize any form of criticism against the authority and classify it as acts of terrorism. There are also no laws that can protect the nine million foreign workers who live and work in Saudi Arabia under terrible conditions (HRW 2015). The foreign workers constitute a third of the Saudi Arabian population which is about twenty-nine million in total (Landguiden 2015).

Torture and death penalties the rest of the world has abandoned with relief is practiced open on the streets in Saudi Arabia (Lacey 2010: xvii). The criminal justice system is based according to the Islamic sharia law, where crimes include murder, drug offenses, armed robbery as well as non-violent crimes such as sorcery (HRW 2015) and adultery (Death Penalty Worldwide 2016). The penalties include backlashes, up to one hundred (HRW 2015), as well as beheading by sword, stoning to death, and death by shooting. At especially severe criminal offences, the head has been sown back on to the body in order to expose the body to public indignity, such as crucifixion (Death Penalty Worldwide 2016).

In 2008 the King Abdulla participated in the National Dialogue in Abha in the purpose to discuss the situation and rights of women. The King claimed to be working hard to deliver more rights to women, even though women are still not allowed to go outside alone or make any significant decisions without a manly companion (Lacey 2010:image). This resulting in many Saudi women staying indoors. In December of 2015 the women of Saudi Arabia were allowed to vote and stand as candidates for the first time (BBC 2015). William Patey excuses the slow modernization process with the existing pact between the ruling family and

the religious establishment, which becomes a constraint on how fast Saudi Arabia can modernize. However this pact is also a force for stability (Patey 2015).

5.3.1 Economics

The Saudi Arabian economy is centered around the oil and gas industry which has made the country an industrial welfare state with many economic benefits for the inhabitants, in just a couple of decades (Landguiden 2015). The total Gross domestic product based on the purchasing power-parity per capita in 2015 was 56 253, 43 making the Kingdom the 11th richest country in the world (Pasquali 2016).

One in every four oil barrels in the world come from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The economy is fixed on the oil, leaving little diversity for the economy beyond this sphere. While the royal family and businessmen continue to live on the riches of the oil, the rest of the population are left to compete over the limited remainder of jobs (House 2012:158). This resulting in the situation already mentioned above, where between two to four million of the native Saudis live in severe poverty while the elite ignore and abandon them (Sullivan 2013). What makes the situation more severe is the imported labor, also mentioned above. One third of the population is imported labor, and two out of three holding any job at all is a foreigner (House 2012:157). The greater middleclass which consist of around forty percent of the population, live on less than three thousand Saudi riyal a month. That corresponds to about eight hundred and fifty US dollars (House 2012:159).

Saudi Arabia being the 11th richest country in the world one can wonder where all the money is ending up. At the top of the societal pyramid, corruption is as common as it is public. Bandar bin Sultan, Airforce commander, former Washington ambassador and son of the former minister of defense prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, was asked the question on whether the kingdom was corrupt. His answer was “Yes. So what? (Lacey 2010:107-108). The topic that was discussed that brought fourth this question was the very modern Airbus jet, legally the property of Saudi Air Force, however used privately by Bandar and his family and friends. He had also let paint the airbus blue and silver- the colors of the Dallas Cowboys, Bandar’s favorite sports team. It is apparently an often occurring phenomenon that the Saudi royals have difficulties differing between what is their private property and what is the property of the state (Lacey 2010:38, 76, 107).

Much has however been done to satisfy the people. In 2011, the Arab spring had placed the region in chaos and turbulence. King Abdulla allocated one hundred and thirty billion US dollars to create more jobs and raise salaries. This resulted in an economic growth of ten percent. When later King Salman ascended the throne in 2015, he handed out salary bonuses to all Saudis employed by the state (Almashabi et al 2015). Karen Elliott House claims however that this act from a “nervous regime” only bought time and did nothing sustaining to alter the causes

of the unemployment, poverty and declining standards of the Saudi middle class (House 2012:159-160).

5.3.2 Nodal points

The discourse on the Saudi identity in the context of the socialization process is centered on the nodal points which are the following words and phrases; *brutality and ruthlessness, human rights violations, male domination, uneven economic situation, corruption, and conservatism.*

5.4 The societal characteristics

Rachel Bronson tries to explain the relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as an exchange. The United States receive oil at a steady pace for a reasonable price and in return Saudi Arabia receives security. However, this simplistic explanations becomes problematic as it does not explain why the relationship deteriorated in the course of September eleven (Bronson 2005:372).

The ties between the two countries were more than just business. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has from the very beginning had a special relationship with the United States. In the beginning of the 1900s, US medical missionaries in Bahrein treated the Saudi army as they waged war on the rebellious tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. Later, King Abdul Aziz summoned the American physician Dr Louis Dame to stay in his palace in Riyadh and treat himself and his family for a week. When neighboring countries began to discover oil, King Abdul Aziz invited the American company *Socal*, later *Chevron*, to drill for oil in his country. Even though he did find it hard to let infidel westerners pry around in his country, he later defending his guest from suspicious conservatives who did not approve of the western influence (Lacey 2010:68-70). It was clear that King Abdul Aziz had sentimental ties to the United Stated.

The Israel-Palestinian issue and the oil-embargo in 1973 has placed great strain on the relationship, still two US missions remained in the Kingdom training the Saudi air force and National Guard during the actual embargo. The profits made during the anti-US embargo was used to finance US-activates in Africa, namely the *Safari Club*. (Lacey 2010:72). During the years of Ronald Reagan's presidency in 1981-1989, Saudi Arabia financed many of Reagan's "moral and material assistance" to what he referred to as *Freedom Fighters*, fighting against communism in Afghanistan, Angola and in Nicaragua. Overall Saudi Arabia provided more "material assistance" than that of the United States (Lacey 2010:76-77).

As the US enemy shifted from “the evil empire” to now constituting “the axis of evil”, referring to all international terrorism and placing the Wahhabi organization Al-Qaeda at the head of the spear, it is no longer clear where the Kingdom’s allegiance lie. The issue of Saudi Arabian money ending up in Osama bin Laden’s fundraising for religious warfare, was first raised in 1999 when vice president Al Gore brought it up with the crown prince Abdullah, who would later become King. However it was not until George W. Bush’s administration assumed office that it was made completely clear that the Kingdom no longer shared the same political goals as the United States. A meeting was set where the US-Saudi relationship was to be discussed and mended, the date of the meeting was set to the 13th of September 2001. However the meeting never took place. Two days prior to the meeting the hijacked planes smashed into world trade center and the pentagon (Bronson 2005: 388). Fifteen out of the nineteen hijackers proved to have Saudi citizenship (Lacey 2010:225).

5.4.1 Political power

Throughout the history the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has proven itself a skillful political power, both military and diplomatically. The oil embargo of 1973 being a famous example of this as Henry Kissinger threatened to stop consuming Saudi oil if the embargo did not stop. The rumors say King Faisal answered frankly “In that case, we shall go back to our tents and live on camel’s milk. But what will you do, Mr. Kissinger, without any gas for your cars?” (Lacey 2010:37)

The military victories include many important historical wars, but also wars fought in modern time. In the conflict between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia allied together with Iraq against the Persian enemy Iran, and in 1990 the kingdom took part in operation Desert Storm, pushing back their former ally Iraq from Kuwait (Lacey 2010:105, 127-129). During the 1990s, Saudi influence began shaping more conflicts as evidence was pointing to a transnational Saudi system that became insinuated in most Muslim countries, such as in Bosnia, Chechnia and Afghanistan (Bronson 2005:388).

Today the Kingdom is unusually independent in its foreign policy. It is clear that they no longer trusts their former protector, the United States, to defend their interests in the region (House 2015). William Patey claims the country has a strength and resilience that is greater than many realize (Patey 2015). This can also be demonstrated by the fact that Saudi Arabia is the world’s second largest importer of weapons from 2010-2014, according to Sipri (Sipri 2015).

5.4.2 Nodal Points

The nodal points in the context of the societal characteristics of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are following words and phrases: *A fast growing hegemony,*

religious warfare, power and independency. These nodal points mark the final corner of the discourse on the role conception.

5.5 The House of Saud and the rule of King Abdullah and King Salman

The course of succession is very different in this monarchy than in many others as the crown is passed on to the King's brother. Six sons out of Abdul Aziz's forty-four, have now succeeded him since 1953, with only one public disagreement. This disagreement concerned who was to be the first successor after Abdul Aziz, King Saud, or his younger brother and successor, King Faisal. As a new King is chosen, the House of Sa'ud make a mutual and apparent democratic decision, traditionally choosing the eldest, however occasionally skipping a step when someone is considered unsuitable (House 2012:209-210,213). This practically makes the monarchy more of an oligarchy as some extent of the power is shared in one privileged group.

As King Abdullah came to power in 2005 he acknowledged the fact that the line of brothers was coming to an end and that there soon would have to be a generation shift. With now almost seven thousand out of Abdul Aziz's grandsons to choose from he founded a council consisting of the eldest remaining sons or grandsons, giving each member an equal vote in selecting a crown prince, when the exiting one becomes king (House 2012:213).

Even though the council is dominated by young and energetic grandsons to the founder, their plurality will most likely not affect the outcome. The voices of the seniority is valued heavier, and the grandsons claim they will follow what the senior members have to say. The inevitable transition is hoped to pass by smoothly, however with thousands of candidates to the thrown this could prove a challenge (House 2012:215-216).

5.5.1 King Abdullah

As King Abdullah became King in 2005 he had already ruled the Kingdom for ten years as King Fahd suffered a stroke in 1995 leaving the crown prince Abdullah in charge. The leadership is designed to be a team, consisting of the King and the crown prince together with the top ministers who make the decisions. However the Kingdom has been without this team for many years, as the crown prince has also taken the role as acting King. As Abdullah became King, he named the former defense minister, Prince Sultan, his crown prince. However after two years Sultan flew to New York to treat his severe cancer, and died in October 2011.

This has left the Kingdom without a team for fifteen years, and without a functioning minister of defense for the last three years. During this time all decisions have been made by the King alone (House 2012:216).

At King Abdullah's death in 2015 the top politicians and heads of state in the world took turn to celebrate the King, praising him as courageous, a proponent for peace and a patient and skillful modernizer (*New Internationalist* 2015).

5.5.2 King Salman

King Salman became the seventh king of the Kingdom in 2015, at the age of 79 (House 2015). Salman served as the governor of Riyadh for forty-eight years, and later as the minister of defense from November 2011 until 2015. He is one of the four remaining Saudiri brothers, sons of Abdul Aziz and Hassa bint Ahmad Saudiri, an ambitious wife who trained her sons to stay together and support each other over their half-brothers. The sons all played key roles in the government for the last fifty years (House 2012:213, 216). King Salman is known to have close ties to the Wahhabi establishment (House 2015).

In spite of the family's ambitions to stay unified it was reported in October 2015, that eight out of the twelve surviving sons of Abdul Aziz, support a move to remove King Salman due to lack of competence (Patey 2015). If these reports are true this would signify the first public quarrel since the disagreement between King Saud and King Faisal.

Another issue which face the royal house is the rumors about the King's severe health issues. The relationship between the crown prince Mohammad bin Nayef and the deputy crown prince Mohammad bin Salman also seems to cause much speculation. Mohammad bin Salman, at the age of 30, is not only deputy crown prince but also minister of defense and King Salman's youngest son (Patey 2015). Mohammad bin Salman is also head of a new committee which oversee economic and development policy, (Almashabi et al. 2015) and is rumored to have much more influence over most political questions than is made official, according to Robert Lacey and Paul Aarts interviewed by *P1 Konflikt*. (P1 Konflikt 2016).

Mohammad bin Salman's influence is both appreciated and denounced. His aggressive and provocative personality is considered both inspirational and inappropriate since he is a young man in a context where age is valued as the verification of wisdom. As speculations are made on how much the deputy crown prince is actually deciding, (P1 Konflikt 2016) it has also detected that the decision-making lines have been shortened and that decisions are taken much more quickly than before (Patey 2015).

It has long been understood that if you want an audience with King Salman you have to go through his son, who is always seen with King. Mohammad's eager engagement in Yemen and his aggressive attitude towards Iran have made analysts wonder whether he might be the most dangerous man in the world (Law 2016).

5.5.3 The decision makers

The decision maker in February 2011 was without doubt King Abdullah himself. The al Sa'ud family's many opinions seems only to be welcomed when it comes to succession.

In the rule of King Salman, the question of who is making the decisions is not as simple to answer. The leadership consists of King Salman, who according to rumors have severe health issues, his crown prince Mohammad bin Nayef who again according to rumors have a bad relationship with the Kings favorite son, who is deputy crown prince and carry many other titles, one being defense minister. Many believe that prince Mohammad bin Salman is making most of the decisions in the country. Due to the fact that most of this information is based on rumors and that it is impossible to know what is really taking place within the palace walls, this study will proceed in regarding the team as making decisions together, however regarding prince Mohammad bin Salman as more influential due to his position as minister of defense.

5.6 Role conception

As Aggestam explains above, the role conception is based on the decision maker's perception of the state's identity. The discourse on the states identity will therefore first be concluded.

The detected nodal points on the discourse of the identity of the state based on the history, the culture, the socialization process and the societal characteristics of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are the following words and phrases; *Wahhabism, righteousness, power to conquer territory, Bedouin culture, oil, the courageous and strong leader who is an unconquerable hero, pride and politeness, luxury, honor, the importance of keeping up a façade, intolerance, Sunni Islam, a holy language, brutality and ruthlessness, male domination, uneven economic situation, corruption, conservatisms, a fast growing hegemony, religious warfare, power and independency.*

These nodal points constitute the central signs in the web of words that together form the discourse of identity. All socially ascribed traits mentioned above

construct both the “us” and “the others”, as all traits have an opposite which contributes to the formation of “the others”. The Shi’ite Muslims and Iran, constitute “the others” in this discourse as they do not fit the discourse of identity above, and are also part of the discourse as the historical enemy. This also make the Saudi Arabian identity stronger since it creates an external threat which causes fear and hatred of the enemy and unifies the “us”.

One can thus conclude the Saudi Arabian role conception to be bellicose and honorable, righteous, conservative, independent, powerful and controlled by the fear of the historical enemy. Role conception theory is a sub-disciplinary theory in foreign policy analysis, the signs constituting the possible controlling parameters of a role performance will be divided into three groups of analysis. The first group constituting *religious warfare, righteousness, intolerance*, the second group consisting of *hegemony, power and independency*. The third group constituting *honor, pride and conservatism*. These three groups will later be analyses separately.

The role conception is constructed by the decision maker who constructs an individual interpretation on the discourse above. The decision makers in the center of this study is King Abdullah, and the present leadership consisting of King Salman, crown prince Mohammad bin Nayef and deputy crown prince Mohammad bin Salman. Mohammad bin Salman is interpreted as the most responsible for contemporary events.

It is important to mention that the discourse of identity can never be fixed as it can be interpreted differently and is changeable over time. *Independency* is an example of this as it is a newcomer to the Saudi Arabian identity, which earlier has been codependent on the United States.

6 Analysis

The actions taken by Saudi Arabia in the cases Bahrein and Yemen can both be defined as disproportionate to the crisis that was occurring and resulted in an escalation of the issue instead of its solvation. This study has divided the identified discourse into separate groups of analysis in order to explain how these foreign policy actions could be legitimized.

6.1 Religious warfare, righteousness, intolerance

The actions can be interpreted as to be legitimized by a religious agenda, as the rebellious groups in both cases were Shi'ite Muslims, who in Yemen had a connection to Iran. The actions are both characterized by the righteousness of Sunni Islam and the intolerance of dissidents. The current leadership is known to have close ties to the Wahhabi establishment, who is known to have little patience for Shi'ite dissidents bordering the Kingdom. The situation in Yemen might have had a different outcome if the former government which was characterized as patient and peace seeking, still would have been in power. This is however not certain, as the countries violent and bellicose past has shaped the country's role in the international arena and could influence the King to act accordingly. The case of Bahrein is a sign of this, as this action also included unnecessarily excessive violence which was aimed at the rebellious Shi'ite dissidents. This points to the fact that the role of the state did influence the decision makers in their foreign policy actions.

6.2 Hegemony, power, independency

The actions could also be understood as a protecting of the state's regional influence and an aim to gain even more influence and respect in the region. The actions can be interpreted to demonstrate power- both inwards and outwards as the state is presently experiencing a great deal of pressure. Harsh critic is aimed at the state for not providing human right for its inhabitants, and at the same time a generation shift is approaching which is predicted to shake the stable leadership. In the case with Yemen the leadership is experiencing even more pressure as reports have demonstrated a very small amount of trust for the leadership. The actions can thus be interpreted as a demonstration of power to show who is really in charge. The aggressive actions could also be interpreted as a demonstration of

independency, to show that the Kingdom does not need to wait for another state to control the situation, but can handle it on their own.

6.3 Honor, pride, conservatism

The struggle for regional influence could be understood through yet another variable which also is in line with the role conception, namely honor. As Iran is boasting about their expanding of regional influence this could cause the Kingdom to feel humiliated, which Kai Eide has taught us is a dangerous phenomenon. The aggressive actions could therefor also be an attempt to protect the Kingdom's pride, a determination not to be underestimated.

Conservatism is another nodal point in the identified discourse on Saudi Arabian identity. If the mindset of the decision maker were not so conservative but open-minded, they could initiate a peaceful relationship with Iran. This utopian solution would have amounted to a different situation in Yemen were Yemenis themselves would have dealt with their own issues– instead the conflict has intensified. The peacemaking between Iran and Saudi Arabia looks today like an impossibility, as the conservative enemy picture is a key element in the identity of the state. This could in itself be a reason for the escalating tension in the region, the fact that waging war against Iran is so deeply imbedded in the Saudi Arabian role, that a possibility of a peaceful agreement would shake the entire identity and role conception of the Kingdom.

6.4 Summary

The decision makers in the two cases are described as very different from each other, King Abdullah was described as a peaceful and patient modernizer, while King Salman's leadership is described as arrogant, provocative and dangerous. Nevertheless, both governments acted in similar ways in their Foreign Policy which points to the fact that the identity of the state has indeed influenced the decision makers to act according to the role of the state.

However, the two cases do differ. In Bahrein there was a demonstration for peace and democracy, terminated before it escalated, leaving the people who were crying for democracy, stuck in oppression. In Yemen however, Saudi Arabia did not arrive to shut down a demonstration, but willingly engaged in a fully developed war with Iranian involvement. It can be argued that the more severe situation demanded a more severe action, however the government were not reluctant in their actions, which were not only excessive and ruthless, but labeled as war crimes.

This study argues that the extraordinary aggressive actions can indeed be legitimized from more than one aspect of the identified Saudi Arabian role conception. If the political goals were solely the struggle for regional influence, the religious aspect could be interpreted as an instrument to legitimize the actions inwards, and as an instrument to mobilize the people, which is in line with instrumentalist theory and has in that case again proven beneficial. As the Saudi Arabian decision making process is not open for public view, one can only speculate on what the true motive could be for engaging in Bahrein and Yemen. What is clear is that the actions are in line with what this study has identified as the role conception which brings this study to conclude that the decision makers were influenced by the role in the decision making process.

6.5 Critic

As Holsti states, role conceptions cannot dictate every aspect of foreign policy behavior. One can therefore argue that there were other external factors that enabled the decision makers to act as they did. For instance, one can argue that the current leadership did not act according to the role of the state but simply according to their own personality. In the case of the closed country Saudi Arabia, one can only speculate on the decision making process, however, as the actions fit perfectly in line with the identified discourse, I argue that this study shows that it is indeed very likely that the role conception of the state has enabled the decisions makes to act accordingly.

This study shows how the foreign policy actions could be understood through an identity and role conception perspective. However, the study was made through a discursive point of view, a study based on another method could perhaps prove a different result.

7 Conclusion

Does the perception of a Saudi Arabian identity create a role conception that influences the decision makers to act according to this role in their foreign policy?

This study argues that the answer to this question is yes, the perception of a Saudi Arabian identity can create a role conception which influences the decision makers to act according to this role in their foreign policy.

The identified discourse based on the Saudi Arabian identity is found to legitimize aggressive actions and can therefore explain the aggressive foreign policy actions taken by the Saudi Arabian decision makers in 2011 and 2015. The cases in subject of analysis were executed by different decision makers whose characters were considerably different from each other. Yet the foreign policy actions were very similar, and were both in line with the identified discourse of a role conception based on the Saudi Arabian identity. This points to the fact that the decision makers were indeed influenced by the same role conception of the state's identity. This study also concludes that the discourse of the role conception may change as the goals and interests of the decision maker change, due to the fact that the role is based on the identity of the state which is changeable over time, and can be perceived differently depending on who is the actor and how the actor interprets the identity. As this study also points out, the religious establishment's influential power has caused modernization and change to be a rare and slow process in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the role conception may change, however this will require a great amount of time.

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