Opportunities and Pitfalls of Saudi-Israeli Normalization

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Abstract

Middle East has gone through some major changes in the recent years. The relations and power dynamics of the region have always been complex and complicated, influenced by old grievances, religious differences, and sectarian conflicts. American invasion of Iraq however triggered a shift in the power distribution in the region that was only reinforced by the events of Arab Spring, Syrian civil war or the ear in Yemen. The power tipped in favour of Iran and its proxies, alarming Saudi Arabia and Israel – Tehran's main regional adversaries. With the United States slowly retreating from the region while being replaced by Russia, Saudis and Israelis started looking for new possible allies. In the great tradition of the enemy of my enemy being my friend, both countries are now trying to find a common ground. But finding new friends in Middle East often means making new enemies as well. Both countries may see eye to eye when it comes to Tehran regional policies but there are still ancient enmities and ideological differences in the way as well. The thesis uses Buzan's and Weaver's Regional Security Complex Theory and the main conflicts it describes to analyse the recent development in the Middle Eastern security complex and specifically the recent rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. It focuses on the historical development of the conflicts and on relations between Saudis and Israelis as well as on their domestic specifics to understand the decision-making, threat perception and regional interests of the actors and the way they effect the rapprochement. It will use this information and the theoretical framework to analyse the economic, security and domestic implications the rapprochement may have for both countries based on the particular conflict lines in Gulf and in Levant. Because even though the Gulf conflict may seem to have gained priority in the region, the domestic specifics and ideological differences still apply, and the Levant conflict still plays a significant role, making the rapprochement and potential normalization of relations less positive then it may seem. There may be gains in economic terms and security-wise for both actors, but their domestic political climate makes normalization still dangerous.

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Introduction

Middle East has undergone some substantial geopolitical changes in the 21st century. The relations and power dynamics of the region have always been complex and complicated, influenced by old grievances, religious differences, and sectarian conflicts. There has been a heavy presence of global powers, strong non-state actors and religious and ideological influences. It has always been an unstable and unpredictable region. However, recent developments, from the Iraqi invasion to the Arab Spring and Syrian civil war, shook the polarity of the region and intensified ancient enmities. It also created new allies and new partners. One of the new silently emerging alliances is between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Their newly found friendship is mostly just a marriage of convenience, it nevertheless shows how much the dynamics of the region changed.

Iran is the one actor who managed to deal with all the changes and recent crises that hit the Middle East in the most effective way. New Shia government in Iraq, Bashar al-Assad's forthcoming victory and even the Yemeni civil war are so far playing out in Iran's favour. Iran has been one of Israel's main enemies for decades and it has been challenging Saudis legitimacy as a Muslim leader and its position in the Gulf since the Islamic revolution. Both countries, and especially Saudi Arabia, found themselves incapable of countering Iran's recently growing influence meaning they now feel their national security is in jeopardy. Whether by choice or by accident, America's policy in the region seems to have missed a beat, leaving power vacuums all over to be filled by Iran or Russia, letting red lines be crossed without consequences and overall making their regional allies feel like they are being left alone. All that left Saudi Arabia and Israel increasingly worried and looking for new security strategies and potential allies in places where they normally would not think to look.

As they share a number of common interests, particularly in security area, Tel Aviv and Riyadh seem to have found each other. Consequently, both countries have been recently silently improving their relations. Despite being enemies for decades, they are now getting closer in an attempt to create a counterbalance to ever stronger Iran. In the great tradition of the enemy of my enemy being my friend, both countries are now trying to find a common ground. However, their differences and enmities have an ancient history and are long imbedded in the regional structure. Can they truly

find a way to cooperate? What exactly were the recent changes that are now forcing the two natural enemies into potential allies and is it the first time something like this has happened? In what ways are they trying to cooperate and how far can it go? Are the current threats grave enough for both of them to even continue in this direction? Could they go as far as normalizing their relations and what would be the pitfalls and potential gains of this development?

This thesis sets out to explore the latest developments in the Middle East. Specifically, why and in what way they affected the new rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, how they shape their current rapprochement and in what way they could affect both actors in case of a full normalization. It will use Buzan's and Weaver's Regional Security Complex Theory and focus on the two main subcomplexes in Levant and Gulf and the conflicts that define them in order to understand the decision-making, threat perception and regional interests of the key actors.

In the theory chapter, the thesis will explain the characteristics of the Regional Security Complexes, the levels of analysis and possible developments the regional complexes can go through. It will also describe the Middle Eastern complex based on Buzan's and Weaver's characteristics. The third chapter will focus on the historical developments of the subcomplexes and their conflicts as well as the global level influence. Fourth chapter will explain the recent changes the complex went through that are in some way responsible for the change in distribution of power and therefore for the rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Fifth chapter focuses on the evolution of relations between Israel and Saudis as well as the particularities of their domestic political scene and ideological background. The thesis is working with the premise that both countries have reasons to and therefore wish to continue with the rapprochement, possibly all the way to open relations. With that in mind, the analysis will use all this information to consider the economic, security and domestic implications of possible normalization. All in order to answer the question – What can Israel and Saudi Arabia gain by normalizing their relations with each other?

1. Methodology

The core of this thesis is Saudi Arabia, Israel, their current rapprochement and the various implications of this development. It will therefore mostly focus on the reasoning behind this newly found partnership and analyse the possible pitfalls and opportunities this new development entails. However, Middle East is a complex region where everyone is in one way or another tied to everyone else and many parties have different interests in different situations. No conflict is completely free standing. Other regional, global and non-state actors will therefore figure in the thesis, as they may directly or indirectly influence the decision-making of the main actors – Israel and Saudi Arabia. The most notable ones are Iran and his proxies, especially Hezbollah. Global actors such as the United States and Russia are going to be featured as well, though less comprehensively and mostly in the sense of how their respective interests in the region effect interests of Saudis and Israelis. The thesis will use the Regional Security Complex Theory, the conflicts it describes and their historical characteristics to answer the research question: What can Israel and Saudi Arabia gain by normalizing their relations with each other?

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The thesis and the research question centres around regional powers, their conflicts and their interaction within the region. Buzan's and Weaver's Regional Security Complex theory (RSCT) is used to define the parameters of the region and the main conflict lines within it. It allows the thesis to focus on the regional level, even though the global and domestic level is not overlooked either. Middle East as a region has a heavy presence of global powers and domestic characteristics of this thesis' main actors – Israel and particularly Saudi Arabia have immense influence on their regional and foreign policies.

The RSCT is therefore used as the main theoretical framework, focusing on the Gulf and Levant subcomplexes and their respective conflicts as a guideline to understanding the decision-making, threat perception and regional interests of the key actors. In the first part, the thesis will explain the main aspects of the theory and it will define the term Regional Security Complex as that is where the main focus of the analysis lies. It will then characterize the Middle Eastern security complex, its parameters and it will further concentrate on its two subcomplexes in Levant and Gulf. The

historical development of them and their respective conflicts will be explained as even though the cores of the conflicts stayed relatively unchanged over time, due to recent crises the enmities and amities and the power balance have shifted, influencing the way the conflicts are now perceived by the regional actors. Understanding of the conflicts and how they relate to each other is important in order to understand in what way they affect the actual policies and decision-making of the key actors. It will then focus on the historical relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel and the current changes these relations have undergone and why that happen. It will also take into consideration the domestic policies and ideological characteristics of both countries as they influence the decision-making of the actors as much as the outside threats.

As Buzan's and Weaver's theory was modelled at the beginning of this century, it precedes some of the dramatic changes that Middle East went through in the last fifteen years. Moreover, neither of these changes were free-standing and they affected both subcomplexes and had impact on their respective conflicts, causing an internal change in the security complex and rebalance of the priorities regarding the conflicts. The thesis will therefore feature the latest geopolitical developments and use the framework of Buzan's and Weaver's theory to show that they may have contributed to some structural changes of the conflicts of the subcomplexes and consequently cause the current rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

1.2 Analysis and Data

To answer the research question, the thesis will focus on the historical and ideological aspects of the relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel and on their interests within the security complex and their respective conflicts in Gulf and Levant. In order to reach the set-out goal, it will analyse the economic, security and political implications of normalization and how it may positively or negatively affect each of the actors considering the existing lines of the conflicts within the complex and by analysing the way the existence of the conflicts may be influencing the rapprochement and possible normalization itself.

The thesis is working with the premise that both countries, based on their current interests and based on the developments within the RSC, have reasons to want to continue with the rapprochement. It focuses on economic implications because of the existence of the Arab boycott,

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one of the most visible and long-standing anti-Israel policy. It considers security implications because both countries share same security interests regarding Iran and it considers political implications because both countries and their relationship are characteristic for their ideological overlay.

The research will be carried out by analysing qualitative data, mainly secondary sources in form of written text such as books, academic papers, peer-reviewed articles, and newspaper reports. Among the key book sources are of course Buzan's and Weaver's *Regions and Powers* explaining the main aspects of the theory used in the thesis. Michael Brecher's *Dynamics of the Arab-Israel Conflict* and T.G. Fraser's *The Arab-Israeli Conflict* are used to understand the characteristics of the Levant conflict while Yoel Guzansky (Guzansky, 2015b) and Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017) books help to characterize the conflict in the Gulf. The articles of Jacob Abadi (Abadi, 1998), Uzi Rabi and Chelsi Mueller (Rabi and Mueller, 2017) or Yoel Guzansky (Guzansky, 2015a) then explain the development of Israeli-Saudi relations. The thesis also relies on articles and reports of various news organizations and journals from *Foreign Policy* to *BBC News, CNN, New York Times, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Al-Monitor* or *Al Jazeera*. As the Middle East is a complex region with heavy overlay of various ideologies, religions, and tense conflicts, it can be often reported on rather subjectively, depending on the author's allegiance to different sides of different conflicts. All the sources and the legitimacy of the information were therefore approached with that in mind.

All these and other sources and their data will be used to understand the historical roots of the conflicts, the historical characteristics of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, their enmities, common interests and domestic specifics. The analytical sections will then use this information to give an overview of the economic, security and domestic political implications of normalization and their positive and negative effects on each country based on their place within the subcomplexes and their conflicts.

1.3 Limitations

The key actors of this thesis are Saudi Arabia and Israel and the research is therefore focusing predominantly on them, their interests in the region, their threat perception and security priorities

and how all that fits into the security complex and the existing lines of the conflicts. As Middle East is a complex region with many powerful state and non-state players from global and regional level, interests and influence of global actors such as the United States and Russia and regional state and non-state actors such as Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Palestinians are not neglected. They are however understood mainly in the context of in what way they might be shaping and influencing the decision-making and threat-analysis of Saudis and Israelis rather than as interests standing on their own.

Furthermore, as the situation in the Middle East is everchanging, the thesis has a self-imposed deadline and it will only contain events until the 14th May 2018, the day the United States opened their embassy in Jerusalem. This timeframe is necessary as the situation is still developing and constantly changing.

1.4 Literature Review

The main theoretical framework of the thesis is Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) finalized by Buzan and Weaver in their 2003 book *Regions and Powers*. RSCs are originally Buzan's idea, but the entire theory was extended and perfected by joined effort of Buzan, Weaver and others form the Copenhagen school based on their collective theoretical approach to security. It combines the original ideas of RSCT with new, broader concept of security which extends it beyond military understanding to economic, environmental, and societal threats (Buzan and Weaver, 2003, xvi-xvii). The theory unites realism and constructivism thus allowing to understand the new structure of the post-Cold War international security both in terms of power distribution and mutual relationships between actors (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 3-4).

RSCT is generally praised for its complexness, broad approach to security and focus on regional level of analysis. Some, such as Zelinka (Zelinka, 2008), are however criticizing the theory for not fully incorporating non-state actors such as transnational advocacy organizations or terrorist organizations. He claims that Buzan and Weaver's understanding of territoriality is state centric, thus ignoring the non-state actors or reducing them in order to fit the theory. Al Qaida for example is understood as a consequence of the US' penetration of the Middle Eastern complex and their interaction with states there. It overlooks how global and transnational non-state actors such as

terrorist organizations can be, how they often cooperate across regions, their financing and so forth (Zelinka, 2008). This thesis will however predominantly focus on state actors and even though some non-state actors such as Hezbollah are taken into account, it is mostly for their regional activity and the way they affect the regional dynamics of the Middle East and threat perception of the main actors – Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The RSCT is going to be used to analyse the current situation in the Middle East. The region underwent several crises since Buzan and Weaver's book was published. It will be argued in this thesis that these crises caused an internal change of the Middle Eastern RSC, that they changed the power distribution which in turn shifted the patterns of amities and enmities. Inner change of the complex is also argued by Ruth Hanau Santini in "A New Regional Cold War in the Middle East and North Africa: Regional Security Complex Theory Revisited", published in the *International Spectator* in 2017. She argues that the Iraqi war in 2003 fragmented the existing regional order and created new cleavages within the complex and especially Gulf subcomplex. The war left power vacuums in Iraq that external forces tried to fill, justifying their actions through sectarian rhetoric. It led to politicization of sectarianism and new 'Cold War' between Iran and Saudi Arabia, turning their conflict into the defining conflict of the Middle Eastern security complex (Santini, 2017).

The 'Cold War' between Iran and Saudi Arabia is put forward by Tzemprin, Jozic and Lambaré as well (Tzemprin, Jozic and Lambaré, 2015). They argue that both states use religious ideology as a source of legitimacy, national identity and foreign policy. Their effort is to export the beliefs they hold but as they are in contradiction to each other, they inevitably clash. Both countries provide patronage to their respective religious minorities all over the region which eventually leads them into disputes, usually in form of proxy conflict – as in Bahrain, Yemen or Syria – in which Iran seems to be having the upper hand. Because of that, Saudis are looking for regional allies (Tzemprin, Jozic and Lambaré, 2015).

The prospects of Saudi Arabia-Israel relationship normalization were explored already in 1998 by Jacob Abadi (Abadi, 1998). The improving relations in the 1990s were mostly due to the progress in the Palestinian negotiations as that is, how many experts agree, the crucial obstacle in any Arab-Israeli normalization and their relations often fluctuates with the development of the Palestinian-

Israeli conflict. But he concludes, just as Guzansky (Guzansky, 2015a) or Rabi and Mueller (Rabi and Mueller, 2017), that public opinion is what keeps the Saudi leaders from openly claiming relations with Israel despite the secrete cooperation. Not necessarily for democratic purposes but in fear that it could damage their legitimacy. Abadi still sees the Saudi-Israeli relations in term of economy and larger regional peace though, with Palestinian settlement in the middle (Abadi, 1998). Guzansky reflects on the recent developments, stating that the new rapprochement is for the most part because of Iran and security interests. Both countries share the same worries when it comes to Iran's growing regional influence or its nuclear program. But Guzansky argues that even though Saudis and Gulf states in general are apprehensive of Iran, there is no saying how they would react to an open conflict between Tehran and Tel Aviv in fear of being drag into it as well, with their strategic infrastructure like oil field being in danger of getting destroyed. In general, he argues that any open relationship truly depends on the danger Iran imposes on crucial Saudi interests, for example whether Tehran succeeds in gaining nuclear weapons. In such case, even open relations with Israel might be acceptable for the Arab public. Until then, Riyadh can gain enough from Israel while keeping their relations open secret and not suffer any real consequences (Guzansky, 2015a).

This thesis connects Buzan's and Weaver's Regional Security Complex Theory and the current Israel and Saudi Arabia rapprochement in the light of Iran's growing power. It will analyse the economic, security and political implications of the rapprochement and the influence the existing conflicts have on it to find what can both actors gain or lose going forward.

2. Theory

The end of the Cold War led to changes in the structure of international security. Great powers are still capable of intervening and influencing development in the regions, but it does not happen as frequently and strongly as it used to. States are more acutely concern with their immediate neighbours. The reality is that most threats travel easier on short distances. There may be strong presence of great powers in some of the regions, but regional specifics and dynamics are strong enough to maintain some independence. To properly understand global security, one must understand the global and regional level both independently and in relation to each other (Buzan and Waever 2003, p.3-4).

Three main theories studying security after the end of Cold War are globalism, neorealism and regionalism. Neorealism is a state-centric approach, it focuses on polarity of the system. The attention is on distribution of material power of the actors as it decides the global political structure and closely relates to the polarity of the system. Its main level of analysis is the global level. Globalist approach allows for more actors in the system, not just states. Entities such as corporations, NGOs and other political organisations are individual actors as well. That leads to one of the main themes in globalism – deterritorialization. State system is no longer the centre stage. Through globalisation and capitalism, boundaries between states blur and are instead replaced by complex networks of various actors on various levels. The security aspect of globalism is often connected to globalisation which is perceived differently by different philosophical streams of the theory (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 6-8).

Last of the approaches is regionalism. Its central theme is the focus on regional level as the main level of analysis and the principal stage of all interactions between actors. That is even more apparent after the end of Cold War – with the bipolar rivalry gone, global powers no longer have such need to try to penetrate and influence other regions. Not to mention that they often are not strong enough to do so in long-term or are too preoccupied with problems of their own regions. None of it is to say that regional level was not significant during the Cold War. However, the superpowers were too dominant over the entire system and the regional dynamics were often over shadowed by that dominance (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 10-11). In general, regionalism borrows

points from both neorealism and globalism. It is rooted in territoriality and security, just like neorealism but regionalism puts more focus on a different level of analysis. Like some streams of globalism, it also sees globalisation as a possible threat, unlike globalism it however does not agree with the idea of deterritorialization – quite the opposite in fact (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 11-12).

This thesis will use Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) which is derived from regionalism. It establishes the regional level as the main level of analysis, although it does not disregard other levels either. The key element is that regional security complexes are the main components of international security (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 12).

2.1 Levels of Analysis

To be fully capable of using the RSCT one must first define the levels of analysis. Having a distinct level of analysis between system and unit level gives regionalist approach its analytical power. Boundary between unit and regional level is rather straight forward. Units need to have high degree of independence. Regions, then, are composed of geographical groups of units, and these groups are set in a larger system, which has a structure of its own. Moreover, only units act as actors in the international system (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 27).

Defining the line between regional and global level is little bit more complicated. Obviously, regional level needs to be less than the whole, but finding the line is the troublesome part. We can use neorealism to help us define the global level. Generally, it means one must identify the great powers and then consider their interaction as the global level. That becomes harder in the post-Cold War world now that the bipolarity has ended – which countries can be considered great powers? (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 27). Great power status requires a level of material capabilities, formal recognition of one's status by others in the system and observation of behaviour of others in the system – particularly which actors are being responded to based on global level calculations – ergo if one is treated as a great power, one is considered great power (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 31-33). In addition, we also need to differentiate between great powers capable to operate across the whole system (superpowers) and great powers that are somehow confined to parts of the system. Superpowers and great powers define the global level. On the other side of the

spectrum are regional powers and that is where regional level is placed (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 33-34).

2.2 RSCT

Regional security complexes are defined by their security practices. They are considered regions as seen through the lenses of security. We may not even consider them regions otherwise. In regions, states are so closely tied together that their security cannot be considered separate from each other. There might be cultural or economic factors influencing the security, but security is still the main factor (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 44-45).

RSCs are defined by durable patterns of amities and enmities and by power balance, thus connecting features of realism and social constructivism. Regions can be, just like system level, analysed based on their polarity, ranging from unipolar, bipolar to multipolar. RSCT also analyses patterns of enmities and amities that have otherwise been taken into account much less than the distribution of power in the IR theories. They are the socially constructed part of the regional structure, but they are as important to look at as the power distribution to predict conflict patterns. Old friendships or grievances can also trigger conflicts or cooperation and define the inner functioning of the complexes (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 49-50).

Patterns of amity an enmity are generally inherent to the regions. They are internally created by historic, cultural, material and political conditions. Balance of power is often inherent to the region as well but can be prolonged or sustained by the presence of great powers or superpowers in the region. Especially during the Cold War, both superpowers would often attach themselves to different sides of conflict in the regions and therefore linking regional security relations with the global ones. However, security features of regions are durable. They are not necessarily free-standing but self-contained enough to survive even if the global level changes. Middle Eastern conflict survived rather unchanged even after the end of Cold War and change in world polarity (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 45-47).

Not any group of states can be considered a regional security complex. Particular group of states or other actors must possess a sufficient degree of security interdependence that links them together and separates them from other complexes. RSC is an analytical concept, but it is socially

constructed. It depends on the security practices of the actors. Parameters can change based on what the actors decide to securitize. They themselves prioritized or hierarchized the security issues. Dependent on that, the complexes may change. It is also important to remember, that complexes cannot be overlapping. Therefore, world consists of mutually exclusive RSC, insulators (states that are at the border of two RSCs but do not entirely belong to either one and do not possess the power to unite them) and great powers (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 47-48).

Even though RSCT is a regionalist theory, we must still focus on all four levels in order to study the security complexes. On units - are there weak or strong states; on state to state relations which creates the regions as such; on interaction between regions and on the presence of global powers or superpowers. These four levels together create security constellation. The main point of the theory is the importance and often dominance of the regional level, it does not however mean that it must be dominant all the time (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 51-52).

Each RSC has its essential structure – or four main variables we need to observe:

- Boundary that separates two complexes
- Anarchic structure – each RSC is composed of at least two units
- Polarity and distribution of power
- Socially constructed patterns of amity and enmity

Based on observation of the essential structure on all four levels, there are three possible outcomes or evolutions of RSC:

- Maintenance of status quo
- Internal transformation – changes in polarity or dominant patterns of amity and enmity
- External transformation – changes to the outer boundary of the complex (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 53).

The structure of RSC is defined by patterns of amity and enmity and by power balance. Historical relations and issues that trigger strong responses are part of what defines the structure of each complex. However, the stability of the complex and its security dynamics highly depends on the

type of states it consists of as well. How cohesive are the socio-political structures - are they weak or strong states? Are they post-modern, modern or pre-modern? (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 22).

Within these parameters we can then identify types of RSC:

- Polarity – unipolar, bipolar, multipolar
- Amity and enmity – conflict formation, security regime or security community (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 53-54)

Complexes can also be standard or centred (dominated by great or superpower). There are also unstructured regions which consists of units which are so weak or failed that they are uncapable of creating their own security interdependence patterns or they are too remote to create any security patterns (islands). Last type then is overlay which happens when great power dominance in the region is so vast that all independent security structures cease to exist (e.g. colonization) (Buzan and Weaver 2003, p. 61-62).

2.3 The Middle Eastern RSC

Security complex of Middle East and Africa stretches from Morocco all the way to Iran. It includes the Northern Africa, Arab states and Israel. Turkey and Afghanistan work as the insulators of the security complex. The exact beginning of the complex is difficult to pinpoint as not all the states involved were colonized or their independence status remained murky even after the decolonization. However, in general, the beginning is set to be between 1945 and 1948 when Israel was formed and most of the states decolonized. It has been operating as an autonomous region since despite pressures from the global level. It is an example of a conflict formation. It has strong cultural features and premodern influence of religion, tribe and clan thinking. It consists of modern, mostly weak states. Thanks to oil revenues and generous Cold War aid, the region managed to create mostly functioning authoritarian states prone to use of force in political life thus repressing the civil society. Some of the states, especially in the Gulf were able to use the oil revenues to buy its population's allegiance. However, even the resource riches could not have helped create truly national states. Ideas of pan-Africanism and especially pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism are prominent in the region. All that leads to vulnerable and insecure ruling elites which in consequence

makes the whole region and its security rather vulnerable and insecure too (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 186-188;194).

Middle Eastern RSC is clearly geographically vast and culturally diverse. It is therefore divided into three subcomplexes: Levant, Gulf and Maghreb. This thesis is mainly interested in the subcomplexes in Levant and Gulf and the conflicts that define them. Both conflicts have roots far back in the past. It is tempting to break them among religious lines as Arabs vs. the others (Persians in Iran and Jews in Israel). The reality is however as always, a lot more complicated. Even though ideas of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism are strong in the Middle East, they can often divide as much as they unite. In addition, states compete for the role of the leader of the Arab world, they fight over ideology, territory or water. All that is also complicated by clan and tribe rivalries and succession struggles. This makes the amity and enmity patterns of Middle East complex, broad and unpredictable (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 190).

In general, the Levant subcomplex revolves around the conflict between Israel and Arab states. The originally local conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has grown into a wider conflict between Israel, its Arab neighbours and eventually the wider Arab world. The Gulf subcomplex is centred around a power rivalry between Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. In its core it is a power balance game, again being complicated by ethnic, sectarian, religious, economic and territory disputes (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 191-192).

Both subcomplexes and their conflicts have been existing next to each other for decades. They were never completely separate, though. Iran is one of Israel's biggest enemies, Saudi Arabia always lobbied for Palestinian cause and so on. However, since Buzan's and Weaver's theory was written, the region underwent some major changes and shake-ups – the Iraqi war, Arab spring, and Syrian civil war among others. These events changed the dynamics not only of the RSC but of the subcomplexes and their respective conflicts. Is it possible that one of them is now given a priority?

3. Subcomplexes and Their Conflicts

In this chapter, the specific characteristics of the subcomplexes and their respective conflicts will be explained. Understanding the particular reasoning behind each conflict and its development over time is important to be able to later analyse new developments. As Middle East has always been a region with heavy presence and pressure from the global level, a part about global power influence is added as well.

3.1 Gulf Subcomplex

The Gulf subcomplex seems to be in a state of permanent crisis. Since the British left the region there were three regional wars, energy crisis, terror attacks, outside interventions and other smaller conflicts (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 2-3). As mentioned before, the beginnings of the complex itself can be tracked to 1948, the conflicts of the Gulf subcomplex however have historical roots. The core of the conflict is in the power balance between Iran, Iraq and the Gulf states (but most notable Saudi Arabia). However, it goes deeper than just that. There are ideological, religious, economic and ethnic differences. Iran, as a Persian and Shia state, is clearly seen as an enemy for the Sunni states of the Gulf and Iraq. Moreover, there is a large Shia minority in the south of Iraq, border disputes and problems surrounding the Kurdish minority. At the same time, Iran fights with Saudi Arabia over the leadership role of the Muslim world. Simultaneously there are conflicts and tension between Iraq and the Gulf – fighting over oil prices and over Saddam Hussein's ambitions. All of that generated a complex and complicated net of amities and enmities in the Gulf subcomplex. Britain's withdrawal from the region only created the idea of a power vacuum that was waiting to be filled and each of these three powers saw it as their right and existential need to fill that vacuum. Oil revenues and generous aid from Cold waring superpowers made it easy to build up arms (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 191-192).

Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 changed the security dynamics of the Middle East. Iran has always been seen as a threat in most of the region because of its vast territory and large population (basically more than all the Gulf states combined). It is also majority Shia and Persian, unlike Arab and Sunni states of the Gulf. It also has old history and nation roots that goes back hundreds of years creating a national feeling and loyalty (despite ethnic and cultural diversity). That is

something most of the other states in the Middle East do not have – they were often created barely a 100 years ago based on imperial decisions (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p. 3-4). The Islamic revolution that completely altered Iran's direction in regional and global politics was therefore both welcoming and apprehending affair for the Arab states. On one hand, they saw it as a change that would temporarily weaken Iran and make it more pre-occupied with its own domestic problems rather than regional ones. At the same time, they were worried of the possibility of spill over of the revolutionary ideas among their own Shia minorities (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p. 13-14).

Tempted by vulnerability of post-revolution Iran, Saddam Hussein launched an attack in September 1980. Both countries relations were tense since before the revolution – minorities, territory struggles, plus pre-revolution Iran was a close ally of the United States while Iraq was after the Baath revolution cooperating with USSR. What followed was one of the bloodiest wars in the region's history. Iran turned out to be strong enough to fight Hussein and to keep its revolutionary ideas alive. In 1982, when war between Lebanon and Israel broke out, Tehran became involved in the chaos that was Lebanon's domestic politics and eventually helped the creation of Hezbollah. All Arab countries, with the exception of Syria, supported Iraq in its war against Iran (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p.22).

Despite his unsuccessful campaign in Iran, Saddam Hussein was not deterred. The war has taken its economic tall on Iraq though and it was for this reason and for territorial claims that in 1990 Iraqi troops invaded and annexed Kuwait (Matthews, 1993, p. 41-43). Such action threatened to change the balance of power of the Middle East, not to mention it indirectly threatened Saudi Arabia and Israel – two allies of the United States (Matthews 1993, 98-99). In 1991, US-led coalition of Western and Arab states attacked Iraq, pushing it out of Kuwait and placing Bagdad under severe economic sanctions (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 192).

All Arab countries except for Syria supported Iraq in its first war against Iran. Mostly through financial aid. That of course turned in the Second Gulf War where Saudi Arabia was one of the main actors in the US-led coalition. Even Iran eventually decided to side with Kuwait and the coalition against Saddam Hussein, albeit not in any truly active way (Bahgat, Ehteshami and

Quilliam, 2017, p. 6). None of this is to say that the Gulf states were not worried about the ambitions of both regimes. In 1981, in reaction to the war, the six Gulf countries decided to establish a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Its main aim was to increase cooperation and coordination in various areas. Security was one them even though it mainly stayed on the paper (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 20).

Wars with Iran and Kuwait and the international sanctions debilitated the already weak Iraq. Iran lost its strength too, trying to deal with the impacts of the war and revolution. With Russia gone from the Middle East, the United States believed they should be able to balance both countries at the same time and for most of the 1990s, D.C. pursued the policy of so-called dual containment. The US also supported cooperation in the Gulf and between Gulf and the US. However, the presence of American troops in the Gulf and continuing incidents with Iraq caused slow deteriorating of the US image in the streets of Arab towns (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 12).

The events of 9/11 changed everything. It allowed more hawkish leadership to come to power in Washington and invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq followed. Saddam's regime was toppled, and the country thrown into a civil war and sectarian fighting. Iraq as a regional actor essentially disappeared. New Shia government in Bagdad, as fragile as it was, was however a welcomed development for Tehran. With Taliban and Saddam gone, Iran was the main benefactor of the changes. The series of revolutions amidst Arab Spring, civil war in Syria and rapprochement with the United States in the form of the nuclear deal also generally benefited Iran and made leaders in Saudi Arabia nervous. Both rivals have been fighting through proxies in several Middle Eastern conflicts – notably in Yemen. Iran still seems to be the one to be getting out on the better side of things (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p. 30-32).

3.2 Levant Subcomplex

The main actors in the Levant conflict are Israel and Arab nations. It has ancient roots but the shape we know and deal with now has its origins in November 1947 with UN General Assembly's Partition Resolution 181. It called for creation of two independent states, one with majority of Jews, the other Palestinian in the territory up until then known as British Mandate territory of Palestine (Brecher, 2017, p. 13) This action led to the proclamation of Israeli independence in May 1948 which was in return rejected by all Arab states and Palestinians. Although the conflict is in general

between Israel and the wider Arab world, the most active were Israel's imminent neighbours – Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Since its independence, Israel fought several all-out wars with them (Brecher, 2017).

The first time this conflict resulted in a full-scale war was in 1948. Arab states were enraged by the UN Resolution. Open fighting broke out after the last of British troops departed and Israel proclaimed its independence. The Independence war lasted on different fronts until 1949. It ended with UN mediated bilateral armistice agreements (Brecher, 2017, p. 133). The second full-scale war followed the Suez crisis. Egyptian president Nasser ordered a nationalization of Suez Canal in July 1956 which triggered a crisis for Britain and France. Israel attacked Egypt in October 1956 and both powers quickly joined. However, after a pressure from the UN, the United States, and the USSR, all three countries were eventually forced to retreat (Brecher, 2017, p. 134). That was humiliating especially for France and Britain and it in many ways marked the change in post-war geopolitical layout. Imperial powers were pushed in the background and new superpowers took their place in the Middle Eastern complex (Matthews, 1993, p. 30).

The tension between Egypt and Israel stayed high, eventually leading up to another open conflict. Six-day war in June 1967 was undoubtedly the most successful one for Israel and it changed the dynamics of the Middle East as a whole. Series of non-violent yet threatening acts on side of Egypt led to Israel's pre-emptive strikes against Nasser's regime, Jordan and Syria. In an astounding victory, Israel managed to gain control over all of Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza, Sinai and Golan Heights. It turned Israel into a main military power of the Middle East. It however also deepened the riff between the Jewish state and other Arabs – occupied territories and the status of Palestine would be a key issue of the conflict for the years to come (Fraser, 2008, p. 84).

In the centre of that issue is Jerusalem. It precedes the modern conflict as we know it now, it is however one of the crucial points and its future status one of the main obstacles to any peace agreement. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim their sovereignty over the city and neither is willing to bulge. Originally, according to UN decision, Jerusalem was meant to be an international territory. However, in 1949 Israel proclaimed West Jerusalem its capital and eventually in 1967 captured and annexed all of the city (Brecher, 2017, p. 15-16).

Six-day June War was a great humiliation for the Arab states and the hostility and tension stayed high leading up to a so-called War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel between 1969 and 1970 with raids and bombings in the Sinai, now mostly occupied by Israel. Ceasefire was eventually agreed upon after pressure from the United States, but Egypt was not satisfied. In October 1973, on Yom-Kippur, Jewish holiest holiday, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on two fronts. Israel itself just few hours before decided against a pre-emptive strike. It suffered great losses in the first few days but quickly managed to get its footing and turn the fighting around. Israel managed to cross the Suez Canal and even threatened to destroy Egyptian Third Army. Superpowers however got involved in the conflict again and pushed through a ceasefire. Israel agreed to pulling its armies 20 km away from the Suez Canal, so it could be open again and also returned part of the largest Golan Heights city back to Syria and allowed a creation of UN buffer zone in the area (Golan heights are still under control of Israel today though) (Brecher, 2017, p. 135-137). Even though in general we can consider Israel as the victor of the Yom Kippur war, it lost the illusion of invincibility that perpetrated after the Six-day war. The Arabs also gained a new weapon – the oil weapon. In reaction to the war and America's involvement in it, Gulf states announced first a reduction in production of oil an eventually a complete embargo on the United States and some other Western allies (Fraser, 2008, p. 101).

The conflicts took a toll on Israel as well as on Egypt. In the following years both countries with the US as a moderator worked towards a peace agreement. After years of back and forth and thanks to American mediation at Camp David in September 1978, Egyptian president Sadat and Israeli prime minister Begin signed a framework for peace treaty normalizing the relations between the two countries in which Israel also agreed to give back Sinai territories it gained in 1967. Part of the treaty was also a framework for peace in Middle East in general that was supposed to deal with the Palestinian question. Both sides however had different interpretations of what it meant, and in the end, it was not successful, even threatening the peace between Israel and Egypt as such. Worried that the negotiations were in vain and needing a diplomatic win, American president Carter pushed through at least the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. It was signed in Washington in March 1979. The Camp David agreement was seen as an Egyptian betrayal in the occupied territories and

all over Middle East, pushing Egypt into isolation. Even less radical states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia condemned it (Fraser, 2008, p. 122-124).

Yom Kippur war was the last of all-out wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours. There were however other military conflicts. With the western border secured by the Egyptian peace treaty, Israel turned its focus to Lebanon, at that time being ravaged by a civil war. A substantial number of Palestinian refugees as well as PLO - Palestine Liberation Organisation resided in Lebanon. Israel's campaign that started in 1982 however had grave consequences – scores of lives lost on Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese and Western-ally side, destroyed Lebanon and divided Israeli society while all it achieved was a small portion of Lebanese area under Israeli control. Since the south of the country under Israeli control is inhabited by majority Shia population that is strongly anti-Israeli and through some Iran participation, Hezbollah was born (Fraser, 2008, p. 127-134).

Israel fought a war with Hezbollah in 2006. In July Hezbollah forces attacked IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) and launched an air strike against Israeli settlements. Israel quickly responded with a strike on southern Lebanon (Israel left the area in 2000) and sea and air blockade. War escalated quickly, causing evacuations in both Israel and Lebanon and claiming many casualties. It took a lot of pressure from UN, the United States and other actors to force through a ceasefire and re-establishing peacekeeping operation (Brecher, 2017, p. 138-139).

3.2.1 Palestinians

The core of the Levant conflict is of course between Israelis and Palestinians. Based on the UN Partition Resolution, two states should have been formed. It is worth noting though, that Palestinian state was never established after 1947 – Gaza Strip felt under Egyptian occupation and West Bank became part of Jordan (Fraser, 2008, p. 55). Palestinians felt as if they were being forgotten. At the end of 1950s, Fatah was formed, and Yasser Arafat emerged as his leader. Fatah's raids against Israel were not yet truly dangerous to its national security, it was nevertheless enough to keep the awareness of the problem alive and to keep the tensions high. Similarly, in 1964 PLO was established. Created on Nasser's initiative and led by people close to him, it had not much support or respect from Fatah (Fraser, 2008, p. 74-75).

In 1967 Israel gained the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and all of Jerusalem, putting all Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation. Tel Aviv's confident victory made it seem that there was no Arab power able to defeat it. Nevertheless, Palestinians were able to bounce back. Fatah guerrilla fighting in the West Bank and Arafat's strong leadership proved that Palestinians are capable of resistance. Encouraged by Fatah's success, PLO underwent a reorganization in the summer of 1968. Palestinian national charter, originally written and signed in 1964 when PLO was established was changed to mirror Fatah's leadership and to commit the organisation to armed fight. Other organisations were brought under the PLO and Arafat became its chairman (Fraser, 2008, p. 87-89).

Israel also faced two intifadas (or uprisings) in the occupied territories. First one started in 1987. It was an unplanned and uncoordinated uprising that took even the PLO a little bit by surprise. Not least because it saw emergence of Hamas, radical religious group that took its inspiration from Muslim Brotherhood (Fraser, 2008, p. 136-137). Constant fighting and growing number of casualties caused the US and other allies to put pressure on both sides of the conflict to come up with a solution. At the beginning of 1990s, secret negotiations were underway in Norway between Israelis and PLO – the Oslo Accords. In 1993, in Washington, an agreement was signed by Israeli prime minister Rabin and Yasser Arafat, promising Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and West Bank city of Jericho and elections in the occupied territories. It also set up a five-year period in which both sides were to find a final settlement (Fraser, 2008, p. 143). Another success for Rabin's diplomacy was a peace treaty with Jordan in 1994 (Fraser, 2008, p. 147).

However, the agreement between Rabin and Arafat had a lot of opposition in both Palestine and Israel. Hamas and other radical organisations continued and even intensified their terrorist attacks, settlers in the West Bank protested and right-winged opposition in the parliament kept fighting it. In 1995, Rabin was shot dead at a peace rally by an Israeli student opposing the agreement. More violence, political crisis in Israel and never-ending back and forth led almost nowhere. In his last year in office, Clinton tried to bring the parties back together one last time in Camp David II, but no consensus was reached. On the contrary, outraged by right-winged leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount, second intifada started. Violence and many casualties eventually led to the end of Oslo peace process, Israelis have nevertheless left Gaza Strip and left it to the Palestinian

Authority (Fraser, 2008, p. 150-162). However, there were still two Gaza wars between Israel and Hamas – one in 2008 and 2014 (Brecher, 2017, p. 139).

3.3 Global Powers Influence

Even though the Middle Eastern complex and both of the subcomplexes have been functioning independently for seven decades, there have always been and still is strong global power presence. At first, the Middle East was mainly the domain of European powers. Britain and France are in many ways responsible for the creation of the state of Israel which for many Arabs was seen as displacement of European problem (Matthews, 1993, p. 13). However, after the Second World War and most visibly the Suez crisis, they were replaced by the two superpowers and their bipolar conflict. Middle East then became one of the fronts of the Cold War and its rich oil resources tied it strongly within the global economy. The US and USSR would align themselves with different sides of both conflicts, often deepening them, nourishing them and in a way capitalizing on them. The Gulf countries became economic and strategic partners of the West while radical regimes such as Syria, Iraq or Yemen allied with the Soviet Union. Iran pre-revolution was a close partner of the United States but became a pariah in eyes of both USSR and the US after 1979. Israel was not only a close ally of the United States, strong Jewish lobby also gave it a lot of influence in the Congress (Matthews, 1993, p. 23-24).

Even though they had strategic interests in the region and therefore were heavily present and spend a lot of money, at times both superpowers would still find themselves unable to fully control the behaviour of its partners. There was limited ability of the US to control Israel's actions towards Palestinians which would often cause problems with Saudis, in extreme cases leading to conflicts such as the oil embargo (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 199). At the same time, they would use the influence they had, to try keep the fragile stability in the region. Most of the wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours were mediated and ceasefires were negotiated thanks to the US, the UN or USSR. In some situations, they directly influenced the progress of the war as in 1967, when Israel's advance in Syria began to threaten Soviet Union's interest in the country. Moscow threatened to use military power, thus engaging the United States and forcing through a cease fire

as neither Israel nor Syria wished for a military intervention from either of the superpowers (Brecher, 2017, p. 134-135).

The end of Cold War saw a decline in Russian presence in the region and rise of the US engagement. Washington intervened in Kuwait and championed the peace process through the Oslo Accords. However, the intense American presence was not always welcomed by the Arab public, leading to rising animosity. United States' reputation got only worse following the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Obama led his election campaign largely on a promise to pull American troops out of Iraq and in 2011 he did. He was later criticized for that decision and blamed for emergence of ISIS, although it is fair to argue, that there was multiple mistakes on multiple sides that eventually led to ISIS and its military success (Traub, 2016).

While the United Sates were trying to figure out Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia under the new leadership of Vladimir Putin began to look for ways to get back to the Middle East. It tried balancing its relations with Israel as well as exploiting the declining prestige of the United States by courting radical old allies such as Syria, Iran, Hamas and at the same time also eying the Gulf states which were increasingly unhappy with America's reckless Iraqi policies and Iran negotiations (Freedman, 2010). In 2015, Russia launched military operation in Syria in support of president Assad, ultimately helping to keep him in power and thus gaining a lot of influence. It is now leading the diplomatic efforts for a settlement in Syria and it is eyeing the possibility of becoming the deal broker in the region in general. The US lost a lot of its reputation since Iraqi invasion and president Trump's recognition of Jerusalem only further undermines US' credibility as a neutral mediator (Rosenberg, 2017).

Russia is said to be a mediating force between Israel and Iran. Israel is also keen on keeping good relations with Russia and is careful to not threaten its interests, resources or personnel in Syria. There is said to be a 'hotline' between Israel and Russia, established shortly after Moscow begun its presence in Syria. It is not to coordinate a join action but rather to prevent any serious misunderstanding and incidents. Russia's interests in the region are not aligned with Israel but they are not necessarily aligned with Iran either and the whole situation in Levant is therefore rather

precarious right now. Even more so, as Trump's administration in Washington is unpredictable to say the least (Suchkov, 2018).

Last but not least, one must not forget China. Beijing is rather new to the Middle East and its entangled politics, but it has important economic interest there. China is looking to ensure its energy needs, especially when it comes to oil and gas. But most importantly there is the new Silk Road initiative, ambitious economic project that should connect China and Europe by road and by sea, turning the emerging markets of East Asia, Middle East and Africa into hub of possibilities and home to new and fast-growing construction industries that China could profit from immensely. The question is, how is China going to approach the conflicts of the Middle East now that it has so many interests there since it was long known for its non-interference policy (Al-Tamimi, 2017).

4. Recent Developments

In the previous chapter, the characteristics of each of the subcomplexes and their conflicts were explained. Buzan's and Weaver's book was finalized in 2003. That means it precedes some of the changes that Middle East has undergone in the last fifteen years –uprisings, regional and civil wars, power balance shakeups and change in outside hegemonic power among others. These crises led to change in the power balance of the region and a shift in amities and enmities, forging new alliances and enemies. To be able to understand why countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia can be contemplating a cooperation and diplomatic rapprochement, one must first consider some of these regional changes and how they effected and to certain degree altered the conflicts Buzan once described.

4.1 Saudi Arabia and 9/11

Saudi Arabia has been a US ally for decades – during the Cold War and even more so after the Iran revolution. During the Desert Storm, many of the coalition troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia. There have been of course differences between the two allies, namely their relations to Israel, that led to some disagreements and unarmed conflicts (oil embargo to name the most visible one) but in general, Washington and Riyadh has been friendly, bound by Saudi's need for security and US's need for oil (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 2017).

However, lot of strain has been put on this partnership over the years and even more so in recent years. Many Muslims oppose the close relations Saudi's government has with America. In the other direction, Saudis stern religious rules and disregard for human rights have often been hard for the US to overlook. The real test came after 9/11. Osama bin Laden was of Saudi origin and so were 15 out of 19 hijackers. Also, majority of suicide attackers that came to Iraq after the invasion of 2003 came from Saudi Arabia. It is also said that no other country (but Tunisia) send more foreign fighters to ISIS than the Saudi kingdom (Shane, 2016).

The official ideology or strain of Islam that Saudi Arabia follows is Wahhabism. It is a fundamentalist, patriarchal, and ultraconservative form of Sunni Islam. Using the oil revenues, Saudi Arabia has been spreading Wahhabism to Muslim communities all over the world for decades, building mosques everywhere from Sweden to Chad and South Korea. There is little doubt

that these actions disrupted local traditions in many Muslim communities, leading some to believe that "*if there was going to be an Islamic reformation in the 20th century, the Saudis probably prevented it by pumping out literalism*" (Shane, 2016).

It is of course hard to verify that Saudi Arabia's ideology was indeed one of the factors that led to the spread of radical Islam and emergence of terrorist groups, nevertheless, there was a lot more pressure put on the Saudi government after 9/11 to reverse some of its policies. Although some progress was made – Saudis for example cracked down on radical imams and preachers – when ISIS started educating children in its occupied territory, it originally used Saudi Arabia textbooks before it created its own (Shane, 2016).

Despite the obvious normative differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia, both countries were and remain allies. Saudi Arabia is still dependent on the US for its security and defence, while US has (even though less so now) oil interest in the country, among other. Both countries are allies in counterterrorism. However, during the years of Obama administration, some new friction points were introduced. Obama refused to take up a larger role in the Syrian civil war, leaving a space for Russia and Iran to intervene. The US also did not include Riyadh in negotiations of the Iran nuclear deal (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 2017). New Trump administration's foreign policy is hard to predict, although it seems to be a little bit more hawkish and therefore more favourable to Saudi needs. On the other hand, Trump seems adamant on removing the troops from Syria and to generally 'put America first' (DeYoung and Harries, 2018). Basically, further limit the presence of American power in the Middle East which is problematic for Saudi Arabia as it grew accustomed to having a big ally who can protect it. With the United States' role in the future development in the Middle East uncertain, Saudis has started looking for powerful military allies elsewhere.

4.2 Iran and War in Iraq

The infamous official reason for the invasion of Iraq was the possession and readiness to use weapons of mass destruction as well as Saddam's dictatorial regime. The first one proved to be inaccurate and effectively wrong. It still did not stop the troops of the USA, the UK, and their allies from invading Iraq in March 2003. Despite president Bush's declaration of the mission being

'accomplished' barely month later, the Iraqi war officially lasted until 2011, cost thousands of lives of US and Iraqi soldiers as well as thousands and thousands of civilian deaths. Instead of establishing a democratic and stable government it threw Iraq into a whirl of sectarian fighting and violence (*BBC News*, 2016).

Iraq held its first elections in 2005 and Shia parties won majority in the parliament. Nouri al-Maliki, lifelong politician with ties to Iran was named prime minister. He built a unity government with both Sunnis and Kurds but the sectarian hostilities kept getting worse with destruction of Shia shrine in Samarra sparking the fighting even more (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 2011).

The biggest winner of the Iraqi war seems to be Iran. Not only did the war removed one of Iran's biggest enemies Saddam Hussein, it also installed the majority Shia population to power. Iranians took advantage of the chaos and temporary power vacuum and tried to gain as many footholds in Iraq as possible to be able to project their power later. Iran formed and supported several political parties and armed militias, supplying them with weapons and other resources, giving money and military training. The United States on the other hand spent billions of dollars, lost countless lives and even further destroyed their reputation in the streets of Arab cities (and in many all over the world) but with little gains in return. One could argue that since Iraq is officially a democracy, fortunes can easily turn away from Iran with just a few casted ballots. Moreover, the theological difference between religious centre in Najaf and between Qum and Khomeini's legacy means there are certain friction points between the religious establishment of both countries. However, the bottom line is, that once mighty Middle Eastern power is now a weak, unstable reminiscent of its former glory and as of now Iran has its interests in it firmly secured (al-Khoei, 2010).

4.3 Hezbollah and Lebanon

Lebanon is a small yet important country in the Middle East. It has been a prosperous cultural and economic hub for centuries. It is also the most religiously diverse country in the region, with Shia and Sunni Muslims, Christians and Druze living together. Lebanon suffered long and bloody civil war from 1975 until 1990. Afterward, it became a parliamentary, so called 'confessional' democracy, meaning that power is shared between the different religious sects. The president is a Christian, prime minister a Sunni Muslim and speaker of the parliament is a Shia. There are 18

religious groups living in Lebanon and it is a home to a large number Palestinian refugees – many of whom still live in the camps (Shadbolt and Macguire, 2012).

Large number of Palestinian refugees and active PLO were a reason for Israel invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Consequently, Hezbollah was born. Hezbollah or the Party of God is Shia Islamist political, military and social organisation. It started with the support of Iran as a Shia militia fighting occupying Israel and other foreign powers. Over the years it evolved into a political and military powerhouse, successfully participating in Lebanon's political life, enjoying an overwhelming support of Shia Lebanese. It continued its guerrilla war in the south of Lebanon eventually being credited for forcing Israelis out. Now it holds important positions in the Lebanese parliament and government (*BBC News*, 2016).

In 2006 Hezbollah attacked Israeli soldiers across the borders, killing and taking few, sparking an Israeli-Hezbollah war. The conflict lasted 34 days, killing more than a thousand Lebanese and hundred Israelis (*BBC News*, 2016). The war proved, that Hezbollah was no longer just an ordinary militia. With Iranian support, training and thanks to supplies of advanced and sophisticated weapons and missiles coming through Syria, Hezbollah became more like an army, surprising the Israelis (Erlanger and Oppel Jr., 2006).

The link of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah was one of the main reasons Tehran and Hezbollah engaged in the Syrian civil war so actively. Thousands of Hezbollah fighters are said to have fought for Assad, helping him defeat the rebels while gaining more fighting experience for themselves. On the other hand, their engagement only increased the already high sectarian tensions in Lebanon and all over the region. It also further antagonized the Saudis who in 2016, along with other Gulf countries and the Arab league declared Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation (*BBC News*, 2016).

The already precarious political situation in Lebanon deteriorated in November 2017, when prime minister Saad al-Hariri unexpectedly resigned in televised speech made in Saudi Arabia. In it he proclaimed to fear for his life (his father, prime minister at the beginning of 2000s was assassinated in 2005 – some blame Syria and Hezbollah) and protested against Hezbollah's growing power in the parliament and Iran's growing power in the region. The resignation however came under suspicious circumstances making many believe Hariri was forced by Saudi Arabia to make the

announcement thus thrusting Lebanon in the middle of the regional power struggle between Tehran and Riyadh (*Jerusalem Post*, 2017). Hariri stayed in Saudi Arabia for seventeen days, causing some at home including the president to accuse Saudis of keeping the prime minister under house arrest. After his return to Beirut, Hariri withdrew his resignation (Hallam, 2018).

4.4 Arab Spring, Syrian Civil War, and ISIS

Arab Spring started in December 2010 in Tunisia. Young man set himself on fire in a public protest in front of a government building sparking demonstrations that soon spread all over Tunisia and later spilled to Libya, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and other Arab countries. Each protest was unique but generally calling for the same – regime change (*NPR*, 2011).

Successful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia gave hope to Syrian pro-democratic activists. Peaceful protests started in March 2011, triggered by arrest and torture of young boys who sprayed anti-government slogans on buildings. Assad's regime tried to violently suppress the demonstrations, shooting at the marching crowd, killing protesters. Rebels in return started arming themselves, creating militias and eventually the Free Syrian Army, sending the country into a civil war that lasts until today (*Al Jazeera*, 2018).

The chaos soon turned the Syrian civil war into an arena for regional and global powers and non-state groups to settle their conflicts and advance their interests. The war became a tangled mess of different actors with various and often contradictory interests. The emergence of ISIS in 2013 and its sudden and unexpected success made some parties to band together for convenience. The United States refused to participate in the war actively, apart from their air strike efforts to defeat ISIS and some material and tactical support for the rebels. Saudi Arabia and Gulf states also supported the rebels, but their abilities could in no way counter Iran and Hezbollah who backed their long time strategic ally Assad. Turkey entered the war siding with the rebels and even tacitly helped the Kurds in the north fight the ISIS but lately, as the Islamic State has been defeated they turned against them, worried about the prospect of a Kurdish state forming at their borders. America's absence left space for Russia who supported and essentially kept Assad in power (with indispensable help of Iran and Hezbollah). Israel mostly controlled the events from across the borders, getting more active lately, targeting what it claims to be Iranian strongholds (Gadalla, 2018).

4.5 Yemen Civil War

Yemen is world's poorest Arab country. Since 2014 it has been trapped in a bloody civil war, costing tens of thousands of civilian lives, causing millions of people to be displaced and triggering an immense humanitarian crisis (*Al Jazeera*, 2018). The conflict started as a result of failed transition of power. Arab Spring uprisings forced a long time authoritarian president Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down and surrender his position to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in 2011. Hadi's rule was weak and incapable of tackling some of the main problems facing the country such as corruption, unemployment, al-Qaeda attacks, and separatist movements as well as loyalty of military officers to the old political elite. The Houthi movement fought the old government for many years. It used the opportunity of weakened new president and took over areas in the north. The Yemeni population was unhappy with the new leadership and therefore, despite being largely Sunni, supported the Shia Houthis at first and the rebels eventually took over the capital Sanaa in 2014 forcing the president to flee. Supported by pro-Saleh forces as well, the rebels then made a bid to take over the entire country (*BBC News*, 2018).

As Houthis are a Shia group, the events soon sparked Saudi interest. Worried it is another Iran regional power bid, Riyadh created an Arab coalition with the material help of the US, the UK and France and joined the war on the side of pro-government forces. Since summer 2015, they managed to push the rebels from most of the south, but Houthis still keep control of Sanaa. Hadi's government established a temporary seat in the port of Aden but the president remains in exile (*BBC News*, 2018).

Yemeni civil war is said to be another proxy war in Saudi Arabia's and Iran's cold war. Iran denies support for the Houthis, but the US claimed several times that they intercepted an Iranian weapons delivery. Saudis worries are somewhat understandable – Iran in a way has control over Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and now Sanaa. Coalition airstrike are however the main reason behind high civilian casualties. Furthermore, Houthis fight with the Yemeni government is more complex than just a simple Sunni vs. Shia rift. Their demands were mostly economic and political in nature (*Al Jazeera*, 2018).

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Yemen is beyond dire. It is said to be largest human made humanitarian disaster ever, with 75 % of the population – more than 22 million people – in need of humanitarian help. More than 8 million people are at the risk of starvation. Moreover, the chaos brought the al-Qaeda and ISIS into the country and strengthen their positions. The situation in the country is unstable and dangerous with many foreign actors involved making it major regional crisis threatening to even decrease the regional stability (*BBC News*, 2018).

5. The Relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia

The previous chapters explained the characteristics of the subcomplexes and their respective conflicts as well as the recent crisis that hit the Middle East and, in many ways, shifted the balance of power in the region. It was precisely this shift of power balance that made Saudis and Israelis ban closer together. Even though each country is central player in different conflict – Israel in the Levant and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf, they have often had impact on the development of the conflict they are not strictly part of. The next chapter explains the relations between Saudis and Israelis over time, how they contributed to the development of the conflicts and how their approach to each other changed overtime. It also considers the recent changes in the complex and points out some of the signs proving that relations between Tel Aviv and Riyadh are truly ameliorating. Firstly though, it focuses on the inner politics of each country, as the domestic particularities are important to understand as well.

5.1 Inner Politics of Saudi Arabia and Israel

In order to analyse the possible normalization of relations between Saudis and Israelis, one must also understand the political scene and characteristics of decision-making in both countries. Both states have a strong connection with religion – Israel being the only and long awaited Jewish state and Saudi Arabia the leader of the Muslim world and guardian of Islam's holiest sites. They are however two different political regimes and thus religion and ideology play out differently in both of them. They put different kind of pressure on the ruling elites and influence their decisions to different extent.

5.1.1 Israel

As mentioned before, Israel proclaimed its independence in May 1948, therefore marking its 70th anniversary this year. It is a secular parliamentary democracy, but many laws are still influenced by religion, especially regarding family and civic matters such as marriage. Religion is an essential part of the how Israelis understand their nationality and majority of them describes themselves as religious or very religious (Ben-Porat, 2013, p. xi). However, the level to which religion affects political decision-making and foreign policy specifically is nowhere as high as in Saudi Arabia. During those 70 years of existence, the main motive driving the decision-making was maintaining

the survival of the state, leading to strong feeling of nationalism in the society and focus on security and defence.

The essence of the decision-making is usually affected by the political nature of the government, rather than religion or religious ideology. Is it a right-winged or left-winged government? Is it more hawkish? Current government of prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is right-winged. Some even argue it is one of the most right-wing and radical governments on Israel's history. It however mirrors the consensus in the Israeli society that is becoming progressively more nationalist (Frantzman, 2017).

This shift might be driven by recent regional developments but also with a little help from the ruling elites. Netanyahu has now been the country's prime minister for nearly a decade. His time in office is characteristic by intense focus on Iran and its nuclear program as the main threat to Israel's security. His Iran-centric and hawkish approach in many cases trumps every other problem the country may have. Furthermore, he pressured most of the political elite to accept this narrative, thus pushing the entire political system and the centrist parties more towards the right (Mualem, 2018b). On 30th April, Knesset approved reform to a law, allowing prime minister and minister of defence to declare war in extreme circumstances. The law in general needed to be updated as per the old version, all of the government needed to agree on the declaration but the new law is too far-reaching and giving an immense amount of power without a check to the prime minister (Mualem, 2018a).

All this new tension, escalation and increasing war talk comes at a time, when Netanyahu and his family are under police investigation for corruption. Despite that, worsening economic situation and rising tensions in Gaza, Netanyahu's and Likud's poll numbers are growing. Eventually, most of the things in Israel come down to security. The more violence there is, the more right the Israeli electorate tends to go. There has not been a successful election for the left since the second intifada. Less than quarter of Israelis believe that peace is possible, so they do not vote for someone who can broker peace but for someone who can manage the security situation and protect them. Netanyahu mastered the use of crises to generate support and he is currently the second longest serving PM Israel has ever had. It allows him to build his cult of personality and consolidate the

status of a strongman, but he might be potentially hurting the democracy in the process. Next to the war declaration law, the government is currently trying to present a bill that would largely limit the power of the Supreme Court and give Knesset power to easily override its decisions (Scheindlin, 2018).

Iran, Hezbollah or ISIS are mostly just looming threats, not truly tangible for the people of Israel, there are nevertheless omnipresent and constantly reminded by Netanyahu himself. His improved relationship with the US administration and Trump's decisions to pull out of the Iran deal and move embassy to Jerusalem are also widely attributed to Netanyahu. Despite all the domestic problems, his political status seems to be strong. Moreover, statistics suggest that less than half of Israelis actually support the two-state solution (Scheindlin, 2018). At the beginning of this year, the government approved more new settlements on the West Bank, a trend that has been picking up pace since 2014 when the peace negotiations froze. Many of the latest housing projects are also located deep inside West Bank, causing even more criticism and alarm, as in case of a peace agreement, they would have to be evacuated, making many believe that Israel is trying to prevent the two-state solution from ever happening (Heller, 2018).

5.1.2 Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established at the beginning of the last century. It was created by uniting several previously independent territories which were however still maintaining their regional identity. That was a disturbing fact for the leaders of the new state and fearing instability and possible intervention from the West, they urged the spreading of an religious ideology to unite all of the kingdom and legitimize the rulers (Tzemprin, Jozic and Lambaré, 2015). Wahhabism is a fundamentalist, Sunni doctrine which has its origins in 18th century. It was developed by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who preached return to the roots of Muhammad's teaching, refusing all new elements introduced to Islam later. It was his religious-political alliance with the Saud family that lasted for centuries and eventually shaped the image of Saudi Arabia, consolidated its collective identity and legitimised the rule of the royal family (Nevo, 1998).

From its very beginning, Wahhabism was interrelated with political power. Saudi Arabia is a state, but it is not really a nation. The religious ideology was used to provide private and collective

identity as well as national values. The constitution of Saudi Arabia is the Quran, it follows the Sharia law. Education is used promote Islamic values. What threatens the royal family is often explained as a threat to Islam itself. The royal family has a monopoly of power and over resources which means it needs to maintain exclusive authority. No other religious domain should therefore compete for the loyalty of the citizens (Nevo, 1998). The kingdom therefore strictly limits all the religious minorities in the country, especially the Shia living in the oil rich Eastern province. Wahhabism disputes their legitimacy as Muslims and even as Arabs, restricting their worship and political expression (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 44-45).

The emphasis on strict compliance with Wahhabism and Islam has however caused troubles for the royal family as well. Extremist and fundamentalist groups were created as a by product and the country is vulnerable to criticism whenever it seems like its decisions are not in line with the ideology. It also had to on several occasions throughout its existence fight domestic religious zealots who were accusing the monarchy of straying away from its true religious path (Nevo, 1998).

House of Saud has been ruling the country since its creation and since the regime is a monarchy with a ruling family, legitimacy is so much more important to justify the dynasty and the right of certain people to rule. So far, all the rulers were sons of Ibn Saud, the first king and founding father of current Saudi Arabia (Nevo, 1998). Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the current crown prince is the first of the new generation to be in line for the throne. In the last few years, under MBS influence, Saudi Arabia has set off on brand new course.

Mohammed bin Salman, son of a current king replaced his cousin as the new crown prince in June 2017. He was first named a minister of defence in 2015 and it was on his decision that Saudis and their allies started their campaign in Yemen. He is known for his ambitious, active, and often slightly rash decisions in both domestic and foreign policy. He is the author of a grand policy plan called the Vision 2030, that is supposed to radically change Saudi economy. He is championing cultural and social liberalization. He led a crackdown against radical clerics and against corruption in the public sphere although it is generally believed that the latter was mostly a move to further consolidate his power. In foreign policy, he is taking a lot more radical stance toward Iran, he initiated the Qatar boycott and is said to be behind Lebanese PM's sudden resignation (*BBC News*,

2018). His bold leadership is one of the reasons why Israeli rapprochement seems feasible. At the same time, all the changes he is planning will put certain strain on Saudi society, especially the conservative parts. He therefore needs the region and the country to remain stable.

5.2 Saudi Arabia and Israel

Saudi Arabia and Israel do not share a border or ever fought each other in an open war. Despite that, even from the distance, Saudi Arabia played an important role in the Israeli-Arab conflict. Rather than relying on its military power, Riyadh used financial ways to support its Arab neighbours that were on the frontline of combating Israel. Any hostilities toward the Jewish state remained fully rhetoric. As a custodian of Islam's holiest sites and one of Arab's wealthiest countries, Saudi Arabia had to remain vocal on the issue while figuring out a way to maintain its relations with the United States, also Israel's ally (Abadi, 1998). The relations between the two countries has however evolved and changed, fluctuating with the progress of the peace process, and influenced by the geopolitical situation. As US allies, Israel and Saudis were on the same side of the Cold War. However, Saudis were and are in many ways bound by Arab public opinion.

In the early years, Saudi Arabia's participation in the conflict was limited. Saudi population was indifferent to the struggles between Israel and its neighbours and there were little strategic incentives to get actively involved in the conflict. The tensions started rising during the 1950s when arms deals between the US and Saudis became public and Israel started criticizing them (Abadi, 1998). Despite the tensed relations, both countries were able to find common ground on some issues. In the 1960s, when Nasser's Egypt supported new Yemeni rebel government and thus threatened the Saudis and British security and regional interests, both countries turned to Israel for help with secret air drops of supplies and weapons. Israeli jets are said to have used Saudi airspace in order to evade Egyptian planes surveilling the red sea (Orkaby, 2015).

As mentioned before, it was the 1967 war that radically redraw the map of the Middles East. Despite not actively participating, it changed the role of the Gulf states in the region too. The defeat took great toll on Egypt, Syria, Jordan and their economies, giving the oil powers an opportunity to turn their new riches into influence. Gulf countries started financing the front-liners of the Israeli conflict and with that, the leadership of the Arab world shifted from Egypt towards the Gulf and

Saudi Arabia in particular. In the aftermath of the war, Arab league also adopted a Khartoum resolution with the so called three no's – no peace, no negotiation and no recognition of Israel (Rabi and Mueller, 2017).

Before the Islamic revolution, Iran and Israel were close allies. They traded openly and cooperated secretly on security issues. Israel's relations with the Gulf were much more complicated. However, the revolution changed all that. With the Shah gone, Iran turned vehemently anti-western and anti-Israeli. It proclaimed itself as the last defender of Palestine, leader of the axis of resistance against Israel and the only legitimate leader of the Muslim world, causing a lot of problems for the Saudis as well, threatening their own legitimacy. Riyadh's relations with the US and Washington's relations with Israel already made Saudi Arabia a target of criticism from radical Arab countries like Syria, which brand them as traitors, causing opposition and challenges at home. Saudis therefore used their finances to prove themselves as a reliable Arab ally and fighter against Israel as well as using its oil weapon on the allies from the West. The skyrocketing prices after the embargo in 1973 and the newly found influence was then projected in Washington where virtually no decision about Arab-Israeli conflict could have been made without Saudis input (Rabi and Mueller, 2017).

After the Egypt-Israel peace treaty that was in most of the Arab world seen as a betrayal, Saudis presented their version of a regional peace plan – the Fahd plan. It called for Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 borders, including East Jerusalem, establishment of the Palestinian state and for the right of all Palestinian refugees to return. There was however an implicit recognition of Israel and its right to exist and live in peace with its Arab neighbours which caused controversy and backlash. The plan was eventually adopted at a summit of the Arab League, some modifications were made though, to accommodate the more radical voices in the Arab community. Generally speaking, Saudis found themselves in a precarious position, trying to prove to the US that they can be a reliable partner in the peace process and anti-communist crusade while accommodating and seeking consensus among all the Arab states, including radical ones like Syria, Iraq and Libya (Guzansky, 2015a).

The 1991 war put a small rift between the Saudis and the PLO and Arafat who supported Saddam's invasion. All the Gulf states backed the peace negotiations, hoping for the conflict to be resolved as it would bring long needed regional stability, not to mention that it cost them a lot of money and fuelled radical opposition at home. It also complicated their relations with the United States. The success of Oslo accords led to improvement in relations between Israel and some GCC members – notably Oman and Qatar. Both countries have a long tradition of trying to remain independent in the midst of otherwise Saudi-dominated council. Both countries in 1990s visited Israel and hosted Israeli diplomats as well as opening trade offices. However, the partnership as always fluctuated based on the evolution of the peace process and as the negotiations failed and fell apart, so did the cooperation (Rabi and Mueller, 2017). The process did however make the Gulf countries consider lifting their ban on doing business with companies that had commercial dealings with Israel. Economic boycott of the Jewish state was and still is a longstanding Saudi policy even if it is often bypassed by private sector companies on all sides (Abadi, 1998).

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Saudi king Abdullah introduced new peace proposal – Arab Peace Initiative. With its reputation in the United States tarnished by the attacks, as large number of the hijackers came from Saudi Arabia, Riyadh hoped to reinstate itself as a champion of peace in the US eyes. However, once again, it also had to accommodate all its Arab partners and their stances. Therefore, next to the usual demand for Israel to return to the pre-1967 borders and the establishment of Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem, the initiative also included return of all refugees and the Israeli withdrawal from Golan Heights and contested territories on Lebanese borders. As the initiative was meant to be only the basis of the negotiation, it was not accepted by Israel. It did signal a major change in Saudi approach to Israel though, as it offered a full peace and normalization of relations in case the criteria are met (Rabi and Mueller, 2017).

Despite their differences both countries do have something in common. Specifically, their apprehension and distrust of Iran. One of Iran regime's main goals is the destruction of Israel. It dubbed itself as the leader of the axis of resistance against it. It is also a vocal critic of Saudis kings for their relations with the US and therefore Israel. The invasion of Iraq and Saddam's fall gave Iran a strategic opening to gain influence and to challenge the US and Gulf's primacy in the region. It used its cultural, economic, and political ties to create and cultivate relations with Shia majority

in Iraq. It supported Shia militias in their fight against Sunnis and Americans. It found its way into Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon and Palestine. The 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel was in many ways a war between Iran and Israel, fought through a proxy. The growing power of Tehran all over Middle East alarmed Saudis, making them warn about the dangers of a forming Shia crescent. Sectarian rhetoric and fear-spreading led some analysts to begin to speak of Arab-Iranian 'cold war' (Rabi and Mueller, 2017).

Furthermore, Iran took advantage of America's indecisive Syria policy and along with Russia, Hezbollah and other Shia militias kept Assad in power. In return it was able to establish a military presence on Israel's borders as well as keeping and strengthening the Shia corridor. That was of course a troubling development for both Saudis and Israelis. Both countries are also threatened by Yemeni Houthi rebels, another of Iran's proxies. Since the beginning of the civil war, Houthis have shot dozens of missiles toward Saudi territory and threatened that in case of a war between Israel and Hezbollah, their fighters would join the fray (Frantzman, 2018).

Israel and Saudi Arabia now share a number of security interests to a level that is quite unprecedented. Power vacuums left by Obama's policy were filled by Iran and Russia and Trump's administration, although loud and seemingly tough has not come up with a comprehensive policy for the Middle East or Iran itself (Marcus, 2017). In wake of all that, there is no surprise that Israel and Saudi Arabia are both looking for new possible allies. And that they seemed to have find each other.

The rapprochement of both countries is not entirely out in the open. They do not have official diplomatic relations. Any possible ties are not often discussed openly, although Israelis are not trying to hide them either. It is the Saudis who need to be more careful, with the eyes of the Islamic world on them. There are however small hints that prove that both countries are warming toward each other. In September 2017 for example, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot gave an interview to Saudi news site Elaph, the first time an Israeli official did such a thing. He said that Israel and Saudi Arabia share the same opinions regarding Iran and that Israel is ready to share information with Saudis if need be (Liebermann, 2017). Saudi Arabia also allowed Indian Airlines on their way to Tel Aviv to cross its airspace, a significant shift in a decades old policy.

In recent interview with *The Atlantic*, crown prince Mohammed bin Salman stated he believed the Jews had a right to their state (as long as there is a fair Palestine-Israel settlement) (Marcus, 2018). It is also said that both countries have raised almost identical points during various diplomatic negotiations, in particular in relation to the Iranian nuclear deal which both countries oppose (Salama, 2017). Several Israeli officials also stated that they indeed have some kind of covert relations and talk with Arab countries. Israel energy minister Steinitz said for Reuters that *"It's the other side that is interested in keeping the ties quiet. With us, usually, there is no problem, but we respect the other side's wish, when ties are developing, whether it's with Saudi Arabia or with other Arab countries or other Muslim countries, and there is much more ... (but) we keep it secret."* (Heller and Kalin, 2017).

6. Analysis

The analysis will focus on the positive and negative aspects of the normalization for both countries. At first it will look at the change of the security complex itself and how it influenced the decision to even consider a rapprochement in relations. Then it will consider possible opportunities and pitfalls the rapprochement has regarding economy, foreign policy and security and domestic policy. Last but not least, it will focus on what it would mean for the subcomplexes vis-a-vis their respective conflicts and in what way – positive or negative – the conflicts play out in the rapprochement.

6.1 The Subcomplexes and Their Changes

As Buzan's and Weaver's theory states, parameters of the complexes can change. Regional security complexes are defined by their security practices. They are an analytical concept introduced by Buzan and Weaver, but they are still socially constructed. They depend on the security practices of the actors they comprise of and therefore, their parameters can change based on what the actors decide to securitize at any given moment or on what they prioritize as the major threat (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 48)

There are three possible evolutions of the security complexes – keeping the status quo, internal and external transformation. Internal transformation means a change to the essential structure within the borders of the complex. In other words, a change to the anarchic structure of the complex, change of polarity or patterns of amity and enmity (Buzan and Waever, 2003, p. 53). The Middle Eastern complex have not undergone a change to its anarchic structure, one could argue however, that there was change to the polarity and in consequence to the patterns of amity and enmity.

The US invasion of Iraq changed the polarity of the Gulf subcomplex and in a way of the whole complex. The Gulf conflict always revolved around the power balance between Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. Saddam Hussein has never tried to conceal his regional ambitions and Saudi Arabia and Iran (and especially post-revolution Iran) have always fought for the primacy in the Muslim world. But since the invasion, Iraq as a regional player essentially disappeared. It got too preoccupied with inner conflict and sectarian fighting and virtually collapsed. It also tipped the power scale in favour of Iran as a new, albeit weak Shia-dominated government was installed.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have not always been enemies. In the time before Iran's Islamic revolution, they were almost allies, bound by common interest and threats, being in the same geopolitical orbit. They had their differences but they together balanced Iraq and its Baath regime as well as Soviet expansions in the region. The revolution nevertheless changed everything, and Iran emerged as an enemy to Saudi Arabia, threatening not only its regional position but its position as a leader of the Muslim world. Policy of both countries and in many ways their legitimacy heavily rely on ideologies which conflicts each other (Tzemprin, Jozic and Lambaré, 2015).

The balance of power kept on tipping towards Iran in the last few years, leaving Saudis increasingly worried. As it perceived Iran as a larger and larger threat, a slow transformation in the regional amities and enmities begun to take shape. It has been a conventional wisdom for many years that there can be no peace in the Middle East without a settlement between Palestinians and Israelis. However, latest developments and rumours suggest that the Arab-Israeli conflict is being put on the backburner, at least for the Saudi ruling elites. Iran is proving to be more of a threat and the Arab countries may need Israel to mitigate it. Some rumours suggest that Saudis may be willing to push for a settlement that does not benefit the Palestinians in any major way. In December 2017, the crown prince was said to pressure and threaten Palestinian president Abbas to accept a proposal that does virtually nothing to accommodate Palestinians. The rumours were denied by all the senior officials but alarmed Palestinians since there are analysts and experts who believe that MBS might be willing to expedite the solution to the Palestinian problem in order to be able to focus on the more pressing one and cement his cooperation with Israel (Barnard, Halbfinger and Baker, 2017). Whether that is something the general Arab population would approve of is a different question.

Nevertheless, the recent developments in the complex that caused the shift in balance of power are in a way responsible for this change in enmities and amities, pushing Saudis and Israelis closer together. All of that was further highlighted by the change of the global power level, as the USA kept on slowly pulling out of the region and leaving power vacuums to be filled by Russia (and from regional point of view Iran), making both actors feel like they were being abandoned and in need of a new security ally.

6.2 Economic Implications

Israel's economy is highly affected by international politics. Out of the 192 UN members, Israel has official trading relations with just 158 of them (Rotunno and Vézina, 2017). One of the incentives and possible benefits of normalizing or at least improving relations with Saudi Arabia can therefore be economy. The Arab League's Israel boycott has been implemented since before the creation of Israel and Saudi Arabia has been a member of it since the very beginning. The boycott has three tiers. The primary boycott prohibits the companies and individuals of the Arab League countries to buy from, sell to or engage in any business contract with an Israeli government or citizens. Secondary boycott extends this prohibition to any entity worldwide that does business with Israel. The League creates a list of blacklisted companies that is then pass over to the member states. The tertiary boycott prohibits the League members or their citizens to do business with any company that deals with any of the blacklisted companies (Weiss, 2013).

Today, the boycott in general and especially the secondary and tertiary are sporadically applied and enforced with little power. It has strong symbolic effect though. The Arab League itself does not enforce the boycotts and the rules are not binding for the members. However, the regulations have been a base for domestic legislation. Also, the Arab League does not formally state which members comply with the rules and it is generally believed that for most countries it is mainly a rhetorical tool while in reality they secretly keep some sort of trade relation with Israel or Israeli companies. Some Arab League countries do not enforce the boycott at all as they have peace treaties with Israel – for example Jordan, Egypt or Palestine (Weiss, 2013).

In theory, the trade between Israel and the boycott countries should be zero but Israel was never against economic ties with the Arab states and its strategic geographical position and proximity to many of the boycott countries makes that virtually impossible. It is believed that the private sector has been bypassing the rules when it seemed profitable. Some experts state that the annual trade between Israel and Arab League countries can amount up to 400 million dollars. According to Rotunno and Vézina and their analysis of Israel's trade statistics, the country exported more than 6.4 billion dollars' worth of merchandise to Arab League countries between 1962 and 2012. Most boycott countries do not report Israeli imports meaning there is a gap in the trade statistics. Israeli

imports are often classified as imports from unspecified countries. Despite that, Rotunno and Vézina estimates, that Israeli exports to the boycott countries were still up to 90 % below their potential (Rotunno and Vézina, 2017).

On the other hand, Israeli's business is believed to be quietly thriving in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia or Indonesia. The wealthy Gulf states are particularly attractive for Israeli companies. They are often doing business in the Gulf through European or American intermediaries, delivering high-tech and security goods, plastic goods and other high value-added products (Sadeh, 2012). Moreover, Saudis could in general benefit from Israel's advanced technological expertise, especially in security and water resource management such as desalination or irrigation technologies (Guzansky, 2015a). Israeli companies are also said to be negotiating their way into the development of Saudis new 'Smart City' NEOM being built close to Israel's southern border. However, their participation on the project is complicated by the boycott. The entire project is part of crown prince's new modernization and regional economic cooperation initiative and Israel is now in danger of being left out (Schindler, 2017).

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is said to be one of the countries which do not enforce the boycott so sternly, mainly because of the pressure from the US and WTO of which the country is a member. As with every other boycott country, the enforcement of the rules fluctuated with the Palestinian peace process. In 1990s after Oslo accords, GCC led by Saudi Arabia said they would stop enforcing secondary and tertiary boycott. Saudi Arabia then applied for WTO, promising to lift the boycott, however, the Al Aqsa intifada deteriorated the Arab-Israeli relations and the ban stayed on. They diminished the power with which it is enforced though (Kontorovich, 2003).

In conclusion, even though both countries could obviously benefit from having open trading relations, the actual effects are hard to measure. There is little doubt that business is being done between Israel and the boycott countries, including Saudi Arabia, even though always secretly and through intermediaries. The economic loss of the boycott and how much could Israel (and in smaller scale Saudi Arabia) realistically gain is however difficult to measure. Some analysts argue that the losses are minimal. Some argue that there is actually a significant sum to be gained if the boycott is lifted, at least form the side of Gulf states.

6.3 Security Implications

As mentioned several times, the key reason behind the recent rapprochement between Israel and Saudis is Iran. It threatens Saudi Arabia's position in the region and as the leader of the Muslim world and it criticizes and undermines the legitimacy of Saudi royal family. There is also a large Shia minority in Saudi Arabia that remains a security threat to the regime and its stability, not to mention that they are mostly located in the Eastern provinces of the country where one of the largest oil reserves in the world can be found (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 45).

Despite being one of the main regional powers, Saudi Arabia always refrained from using hard power. It prefers to act behind the scene, using diplomacy and money rather than open military tools. But while its vast economic capabilities combined with religious authority and US backing may have been enough in the past, the Saudis are finding that they may not be enough to tackle the new challenges the Kingdom and the region are facing now (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 49). None of that is to say that Saudis army is outdated or poorly supplied. Saudi Arabia is one of the largest defence spenders in the world and owns some the best equipment money can buy. However, despite being one of the best equipped armies in the world, the Saudis do not militarily threaten Iran. The army is best prepared for a conventional war but most of the fighting in the Middle East is now happening through proxies. Saudis lack logistical equipment and the experience to wage a complex campaign in such conditions, their forces are not trained well enough. The war in Yemen is a good example of that. Saudis outman and outgun Houthis but even after three years they were not able to reclaim the capital (Brimelow, 2017).

Israel on the other hand has never shied from using military power and it is known to be one of the military superpowers of the region. Ever since the 1967 war, Arab states were wary of Israel's fighting capabilities. Nevertheless, Iran pursued the path of destruction of Israel ever since the revolution, supporting proxies all over the region, including Hamas and Hezbollah. Hezbollah is said to be better armed and organized than Lebanese official military (Brimelow, 2017), despite the reports that Saudis allegedly support the Lebanese army with billions of dollar in a bid to strengthen Lebanese Sunnis factions (Guzansky, 2015b, p. 52).

Iran can prove to be one of Israel's main adversaries yet, even though the high officials including the IDF Chief of Staff are confident about the overall superiority of Israeli army. The country may potentially have to face Iran as well as Hezbollah, Syria, Hamas and other Palestinian jihadi groups at the same time in case things escalate even more than they already have. Iran and Israel have been increasingly confronting each other in Syria and the reality is that even despite its military superiority, in case of an all-out war, Israel defence system would not be able to intercept all the missiles that would potentially be flying toward its territory, causing high casualties. Israel is nevertheless hard set on not letting Iran establish a permanent presence in Syria and tension therefore remain higher than ever (Caspit, 2018).

Israel is, as well as Saudis, also worried about the possibility of nuclear Iran. Israel follows its Begin doctrine – never allowing another Middle Eastern state to have nuclear weapons. They have performed pre-emptive airstrike against nuclear sites in Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007). Iran's nuclear program is however more robust and complex and too far away making its potential destruction a more demanding task. In a way, Israelis would much better prefer the United States to complete that task for them (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p. 50-51).

Both countries are generally dependent on the United States as a financial source and weapons supplier and a strong ally to have at your back who can also do most of the dirty work. For Saudis mostly because they do not have that ability themselves, for Israel because their situation is still rather volatile and uncertain when it comes to its Arab neighbours. Both were rather disenchanted in Obama's policy in the region and his unwillingness to use force in Syria even after the regime crossed his self-imposed red line by using chemical weapons. That particular inability to follow through on his words made America lose its face and reputation in the region, disappointing the US allies (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p. 50). Seemingly hawkish new Trump administration was therefore a welcomed change for Tel Aviv and Riyadh both. President Trump criticized the nuclear deal, a sentiment shared by Israelis and Saudis alike and eventually on May 8th decided to pull the US out of it and reinstating some sanctions against the advice of his European allies and many experts making the US technically in violation of the deal. Although the decision as well as naming Iran hawk John Bolton the national security advisor made Saudis and Israelis rather happy, the reality remains that the US do not have a comprehensive Middle Eastern or Iranian

policy, neither do they have a plan B for what should come after the nuclear deal (Liptak and Gaouette, 2018).

Even though the new administration shares Saudis and Israelis outlook on Iran, they still seem adamant on keeping America first and therefore making an Israel-Saudi alliance on Iran potentially profitable for both. Saudis despite their advanced military are not experienced enough (or virtually at all) to contradict Iran's influence or to face them militarily should the conflict escalate into an open war. Israel is undoubtedly capable of countering Iran and is vehemently doing so, at least in Syria, but should the conflict escalate, Iran has enough proxies settled around the Israeli borders, therefore being potentially able to keep the fighting centred in the Levant without any real dangers to its own territory.

Moreover, should the US pulling out of the nuclear deal lead to a restart of Iran's nuclear efforts, Saudis may be the Israel's best new ally. The most beneficial though currently unimaginable development would be for Israel to be able to use Saudis airspace and airbases to refuel and rearm and generally speed up any potential air campaign against Iran, making it more intense and comprehensive than should the Israelis try just from their territory. But even though that would sound like something that makes sense from military point of view, politically it is practically impossible. So far, all the relations have been secret, giving both sides the benefit of the doubt. But Israeli jets using Saudi territory is something that would be nearly impossible to hide from the general public. It would threaten to shake the roots of the royal family's legitimacy, as well as giving lot of power to Iranian and Islamist propaganda. Even though we can argue that Saudis currently hate and fear the Shia more than the Zionist and that they are the lesser of two evil, Saudis political elite is unlikely to survive an open military cooperation like that. Small-scale clandestine operations and intelligence sharing are possible. At best, Israelis could hope to be able to cross Saudi airspace en-route to Iran. As long as Saudis have plausible deniability and maybe even a chance to condemn such actions. Just as Israel is most likely secretly hoping that the United States will take care of Iran, Saudis are probably hoping the same for Israel (Bahgat, Ehteshami and Quilliam, 2017, p. 51-52).

Nevertheless, even if open military alliance is unlikely right now, Israel can still benefit from gaining a powerful Arab ally, even if only as an open secret. It can work as a deterrent towards Iran and slowly help accommodate the general Arab society to the possibility of future open relations. Moreover, crown prince's ambitious new policies of modernization and development are something that Israel can get behind, but it may all need a peaceful, stable region to work out. Last but not least, should the relations between them normalize completely, Israel would lose one more enemy (and potentially up to six, should the rest of the GCC follow) and gain new allies making its general existence so much safer (Marcus, 2017).

6.4 Domestic Implications

Public opinion has a great impact on decision-making in both countries. Israel is a parliamentary democracy, its ruling elites are therefore subjected to elections and can lose power with just a few casted ballots. Saudis may not necessarily care for its public's opinion for democratic or representative purposes, they are actually known to keep opposition restricted, however, as a theocratic monarchy whose legitimacy is strongly tied to religious ideology, their hands are tied even more. Due to the absence of political participation, religion became the exclusive source of legitimacy for the rule of the royal family (Nevo, 1998). They therefore cannot afford to stray too far away from it.

Wahhabism was a great tool in uniting the country, justifying the dynastic rule of the royal family, and spreading Saudis influence all over the globe. Domestically, it was a mean of creating a collective allegiance to the state and globally a soft power tool creating a sphere of influence among Sunni population. But it is a double-edged sword. It is constricting and, in many ways, determining the decision-making of Saudis rulers and exposing the country and its leaders to criticism whenever they do not act in compliance with the ideology. As self-proclaimed leaders of the Muslim world and guardians of Islam's holiest sites, Saudis have responsibility to protect the faith against heretics. In this case, Jews and Shia both are considered enemies. Thus, Saudis are currently stuck between the two Middle Easter conflicts. On one hand, Iran is a strategical threat to Saudi Arabia's national security and national interest and Israel is neither. However, the religious and symbolic significance of the Arab-Israeli conflict goes beyond that. Israel may not be direct security threat

to Saudi Arabia but the idea of choosing Zionists over Palestinians would be inexcusable for the Arab population and opening the royal family to vast criticism.

When Egypt signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979, Arab world condemned it and called it a traitor. Egypt's subsequent seclusion was one of the reasons Saudi Arabia could become the Arab leader in the first place. Saudi Arabia itself was many times throughout its history criticized by radical Arab regimes for its ties with the US and its stances toward Israel. There is no reason to think that would change now, on the contrary. Open relations with Israel would be a new fuel for Iranian, Syrian and other Islamic propaganda.

So even if the rulers may consider the conflict in the Gulf and Iran as a more imminent threat, their citizens (and Muslims worldwide) may not see it that way. Saudi Arabia is also indirectly part of the Levant conflict and as Arab leader should play an important role in it, championing for the Palestinians. Officially, the regime maintains that no normalization or improvement in relations can happen without the Palestinian settlement based on the Arab initiative from 2002. Israel has not been willing to accept the initiative and the negotiations have been mostly frozen in the past few years. The world and the US seem to be looking towards Saudi Arabia as neutral power which could give the negotiations a needed political and religious weight (Liebermann, 2017). However, the question is to what extent are the Saudis still impartial, as there are rumours the crown prince has been pressing the Palestinians toward any settlement, even if it should be disastrous for them (Barnard, Halbfinger and Baker, 2017). Moreover, America's recognition of Jerusalem as a capital of Israel with no statement regarding the East Jerusalem that Palestinians claim as their capital is casting doubts on Washington as the neutral mediator, possibly pushing that responsibility towards Moscow as the new emerging global power of the region (Rosenberg, 2017). It is also not clear who would be the negotiating party on Palestinian side, as they are still divided and the Palestinian Authority weak. Moreover, it is doubtful to what extent is Israeli right-wing government even willing and able to negotiate right now, without suffering political consequences *(Jerusalem Post*, 2018). Any speedy solution to the Palestinian problem is therefore hardly plausible.

But without a comprehensive peace agreement, it is almost impossible for Saudis to normalize their relations with Israel. The potential price they would have to pay with the public at home is too

high. In doing so, Saudi Arabia would weaken its own regime and strengthen Iranians who they are trying to fight in the first place. It would give Tehran a lot of content for their propaganda, strengthening their soft power while simultaneously hurting the soft power of Saudis. The ultimate aim of Saudi Arabia is to counter and balance the growing power of Iran in the region. They may need Israel to do so but, in the process, normalization with Israel could also hurt their reputation and diminish their power too.

Some experts therefore suggest, that Saudis may be trying to gain as much as possible from the relationship with Israel while still keeping it a secret. The unexpected resignation of Lebanese prime minister last year that was officially justified by growing power of Iran and especially Hezbollah was by many seen as a mean to destabilize Lebanon, anger Hezbollah and potentially push Israel into a conflict with it (Liebermann, 2017). As mentioned before, Saudis do not have the fighting capabilities to tackle Iran or its proxies on its own and the essence of their rule does not really permit them to openly claim Israel as an ally. Thus, fighting Iran through Israel while remaining seemingly neutral would be their safest approach.

Moreover, crown prince has great ambitions for the country, including cultural liberation and economic reforms. He will need the Saudi public on his side if he is to accomplish everything. There will no doubt be a lot of pressure from the more conservative parts of the society. The lifting of the women driving ban that is to be put into effect in June and some other changes such as allowing women to participate in National day celebrations have been welcomed by many in international community but caused criticism from some of the conservative forces at home (*BBC News*, 2017). Saudi Arabia has a history of religious zealots challenging the dynasty and its legitimate right to rule based on the notion that they are in violation of the ideology. So far, the regime was able to suppress the disorder each time it happened (Nevo, 1998). But the Middle East is still volatile, dealing with the consequences of the Arab Spring, Syrian war and ISIS. Saudis themselves have a lot on their plate - oil prices have been falling and the new young prince is facing many challenges at home and abroad. Adding another destabilizing factor into the mix may not be the best decision (Heistein, 2018).

Israeli public might be more open to potential normalization. The country has a lot to gain especially regarding its overall security and stability. Moreover, prime minister's Netanyahu's latest rhetoric and actions of his cabinet – regarding air strikes in Syria and war declaration law change – are creating an atmosphere that makes it look like war with Iran is almost inevitable. In such state of mind, alliance with Saudis would not seem like a bad move. Netanyahu enjoys a vast support of the Israeli public. He won several victories lately – namely the US leaving the Iran deal and moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Both of these Trump's decisions are widely attributed to Netanyahu's persuasion and lobbying. Despite domestic problems and corruption investigation, his political status among electorate at home is strong. As mentioned before, people want someone who can control the security situation and Netanyahu managed to create an image, that he is the only one who can.

Having good relations with the Gulf is something that should be accepted by the public rather easily and therefore not threaten the government in any substantial way. As it was mentioned before though, it is unlikely that any real normalization can happen without the Palestinian conflict being tackled first and that is where Netanyahu could encounter some opposition. He is presiding over a right-wing government and the society itself seems to be turning more nationalist and religious in the recent years. There is not an overall support among the Israeli public for two-state solution, many do not even believe that peace is possible. Not to mention the approximately half a million Israelis living in the settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem (Heller, 2018). Also, Israeli society has its radical elements too. In 1990s, amid the Oslo negotiations implementation, there was a lot of opposition within the Israeli society too. Especially settlers from the West Bank protested the agreement and the escalating terrorist attacks from Palestinian side antagonized most of the Israeli population. It eventually cost prime minister Rabin his life when he was shot by an Israeli student opposed to the concessions (Fraser, 2008, p. 150). Moreover, there are radical elements in Netanyahu's government as well. Israelis governments in general rarely survive an entire election cycle, they can be very fragile and unstable. The cult of personality that Netanyahu built around himself often means that he is the one credited for the successes of the government, but it also means he could be blamed for the failures (Scheindlin, 2018).

Israelis can be passionate about the Arab-Israeli conflict too, not just Muslims. The truth remains, that even though there are positive aspects of the relations with Saudi Arabia, they are not of strategic importance. There might be economic advantages and possibly some tactical ones in countering Iran, but Israel should still be perfectly capable of doing that on its own. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan made Israelis day-to-day lives a little easier but they did not lead to some massive changes in economic or security situation. The Arab-Israeli conflict remained frozen and anti-Zionist forces in the region are still present and strong. The reality also is, that was it not for Iran, Saudis would probably never consider open relations with Israel in the first place and it is therefore doubtful how they would evolve should the Iran threat disappear.

6.5 Vis-à-vis the Conflicts

If we consider the conflicts themselves, both countries have potentially a lot to gain. Israel is in the core of the Levant conflict. For Israel, it is not just about negotiating an agreement with Palestinians, it is about its survival in general for some of the radical movements within Palestinian and Arab public wish it would cease to exist all together. Having a strong Arab ally, and no smaller one than Saudi Arabia, would be an advantage for Israel. It would make its overall security in the Levant more certain, it would further reaffirm its right to exist. It could in general help to stabilize the region. But even without Arab allies, Israel has been able to survive for 70 years, and even become one of the economic and military powers of the region. The price of normalization would most likely be a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The negotiations have been frozen for four years now, the Palestinian side is divided and there is not much political will or public support on the Israeli side either. The gains of normalization are not necessarily enough to justify a peace agreement, not when Israel lived within the conflict for 70 years and remains strong. It could use Saudi Arabia as an ally, but it does not need it.

For Saudis, the core of the conflict is balancing Iran and so far, they have not been able to do so. They do not have the capacities to counter its influence all over the region. With Israel's help however, that could change, give Saudis some tactical advantage and even tip the power balance in their favour. The governments in Tel Aviv and in Riyadh see eye to eye on the Iran threat and pulling their resources and capabilities together could shift the geopolitical development to Saudis

advantage. The normalization would be very advantageous for Saudi and their role in the Gulf conflict. But it is the existence of the Levant conflict that makes it impossible or at least incredibly costly. Saudi Arabia may not be a direct actor in the Levant conflict, it never fought a war with Israel but its role as a Muslim leader and the Wahhabi nature of the regime still mean it is part of it. The political cost on domestic turf of a normalization with Israel without comprehensive Palestinian agreement (and maybe even with it) is too high. Even if the Gulf conflict gained priority in the eyes of the ruling elite in Riyadh, it may not be so for the Saudi population and Muslims worldwide. Alliance with Israel could strengthen Saudi Arabia militarily but weaken it politically.

Because of the existence of the conflicts, normalization would be positive and helpful – for Saudis to deal with the Gulf conflict and for Israelis to improve their situation in Levant. But it is the conflicts that do not make it possible.

7. Discussion

The recent crises in the Middle East changed the conflicts of the security complex. First, the US invasion erased Iraq as a regional power and turned it into a weak state locked in sectarian fighting instead. That, together with subsequent events such as Arab Spring, Syrian civil war or Yemeni civil war, led to Iran gaining more influence and shifting the regional balance of power to its advantage. That worries Saudi Arabia and Israel both, as Iran managed to establish powerful proxies close to their borders, threatening their national security. With the United States slowly pulling out of the Middle East and focusing on new regions, both countries found themselves potentially needing new allies and the regional amities and enmities begun to shift as well.

The region is however a complicated tangle of various interests, ideologies and beliefs, making any new relations difficult and potentially dangerous. The enemy of my enemy is my friend may often work there but by making new friends, one often makes a lot of new enemies as well. The thesis aimed to explain the main positive and negative aspects of the possible normalization, using the Regional Security Complex Theory and the conflict lines within it, focusing on economic, security and domestic implications. Each of these areas presents different opportunities and pitfalls and therefore in order to be properly able to answer the research question, we must discuss which area is the most dominant one.

From economic point of view, normalization would be rather positive for both countries. Saudi Arabia has been part of the Arab League's Israel boycott since its very beginning. Therefore officially, there is supposed to be no trade between the two countries. The rules have however been often circumvented by the private sector and the real calculations of the level of GDP missing because of the boycott are therefore difficult to quantify. But in general, it is believed that both countries could profit from open trade relations in economic as well as technological terms. Saudis could benefit from Israel's advanced technological know-how and Israelis in return could take part in the grand projects the new crown prince is planning.

The normalization may have some possible economic gains, but it is hardly the main reason or the main traction behind the recently warming relations. The real reasons are purely practical, related to the security and national interest. Both countries share same views regarding Iran, its nuclear

program and its growing influence in the region. Saudis do not have the capabilities or experience to counter Tehran in its campaign. Security-wise, now that the US are retracting from the region, Saudi Arabia has a great deal to gain from improving relations with Tel Aviv. Israel has the means, intelligence, and the experience to wage a comprehensive campaign against Iran and its proxies in order to cut back Tehran's influence and power in the complex and giving it back to Saudis. Simultaneously, Israelis could gain a security advantage in general. Alliance with the Saudis may not substantially change their chances of potentially fighting off Iran or destroying its nuclear program, unless they would be able to use Saudi airspace and airbases to refuel and rearm. However, it would help its general position within the Middle East as there are still forces (and Iran and its proxies among them) which pursue its destruction.

However, next to the national interest, there is the ideology the countries are built on and next to the Gulf conflict, there is the conflict in Levant. Even though normalization and alliance against Iran would make sense form military and foreign policy point of view, it could be very dangerous domestically, especially for Saudis. Saudi Arabia brands itself as the leader of the Muslim world and custodian of its holiest sites. Its Wahhabi ideology unites and defines the regime and legitimizes the royal family. As it is portraying itself as the one true direction of Islam, it means the royal family is tightly bound by it. Alliance with Israel would help Riyadh militarily, but it would weaken it politically, opening it to criticism from conservative parts of its society, from radical groups and regimes all over the world and from Iran itself, as it could try to paint them as traitors to the faith and itself as the only remaining defender of Palestine.

Palestinian conflict is not free standing in this. Even though balancing Iran is the core of the Gulf conflict, the Levant conflict still overshadows it. Saudis themselves officially claim to not be willing to normalize relations with Israelis without a comprehensive settlement for Palestinians first but right now, that seems unlikely to happen. The negotiations have been frozen for four years now, the Israeli government is tilting increasingly towards the right and in the tensed and unpredictable security situation, with Iran so close to their borders, so does the Israeli public. Palestinians do not have a strong enough leadership to be able to legitimately adopt such decision and the position of a global neutral power is also insecure now that the United States acknowledged Jerusalem as Israeli capital and with Russia emerging as the diplomatic power in the region.

Moreover, even though Israel could use a strong Arab ally, it does not need it per se. The country was able to survive for seventy years and grew into a regional economic and military superpower and even though Iran seems to be threatening it more and more lately, it does not strategically speaking need Saudi Arabia as an ally to survive.

It may be best for both sides and especially for Saudis to wait for further development within the security complex. The United States seem to be adopting a more radical policy toward Iran and maybe their retreat from the RSC is not definite. Maybe a comprehensive shift within Levant will allow Saudis to officially claim Israel without fearing the consequences from its population. Maybe Iran will keep getting stronger or maybe the nuclear deal will fall apart allowing Tehran to restart its program and the Sunni Muslims will share the views of their leaders and also perceive the Gulf conflict as more important than the Levant conflict. Until then however, Israel's gains of the normalization are not strategically important enough to push the rapprochement and Saudi Arabia has still more to lose than gain by going public with it.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the positive and negative implications of a possible Saudi-Israeli normalization. It used Regional Security Complex Theory to analyse the regional actors and the way their behaviour is affected by the existing conflicts. The focus was predominantly on Saudi Arabia and Israel as they are in the centre of attention of this thesis, but influence of global and other regional actors was also considered. The analysis is based on the premise that considering the current developments in the region and interests of the main actors, they both have reasons to want to continue with the rapprochement. Based on that, the analysis focused on economic, security and political implications of that rapprochement.

The new friendship between Saudi Arabia and Israel is mostly caused by Iran's growing influence in the Middle East. The new distribution of power in Tehran's favour is an alarming development for Saudis as they do not seem to be able to counter it or effectively fight against it. As the United States slowly retract from the region, Riyadh found itself vulnerable and in need of support. Israel's same views of the Iranian nuclear threat and its proxies eventually caused a change in amities of the Middle East and pushed the two ancient enemies closer together. It was not the first time Saudis and Israelis found themselves having the same geopolitical interests but any contacts between them always stay secretive. Their relationship also often fluctuates with the development of the Palestinian peace process as Saudi Arabia has an interest in that conflict as well. However, Iran's growing influence seems to be trumping the Levant conflict, at least in the eyes of the ruling elites.

The Middle East is a complex region though and creating new allies can often create new adversaries as well. In order to answer the research question, one must consider not only the regional but the domestic dynamics too and to a certain degree the impact of the global as well. Because while the normalization of Saudi-Israeli relations could be beneficial for both from economic and security point of view, there are pressures from the domestic level that make it dangerous and potentially harmful and even though the ruling elites may be prioritizing the Gulf conflict over Levant, it does not mean the public does too.

Economically, even though the exact numbers are difficult to quantify, both countries could benefit from opening the trade, allowing each other on their respective markets and sharing technological

know-how. From security point of view, both countries can use more allies. Saudis, because despite their advanced armies, they are inexperience and therefore vulnerable to Iran's growing influence and for Israelis in general, as almost all their neighbours in the region are somewhat hostile. But even though balancing Iran's growing power falls under the Gulf conflict, the Levant conflict cannot be forgotten either as it heavily influences the decision-making and limits the manoeuvring space of most of the actors in the security complex.

Saudis may be threatened by Iran and they may need Israel's help in countering it, but their status as Muslim leaders and the religious nature of the regime limits their possibilities of openly allying with a Jewish nation. At least as long as the Palestinian problem is not resolved and potentially even after. The more conservative and radical elements of the society would most likely rebel against such decision. The region is still vulnerable. The revolutions of the Arab Spring toppled many regimes and even though Saudi family survived that turbulent times this would potentially put a lot new pressure on it. The regime used a Wahhabi ideology as a means of legitimizing the royal family and its dynastic rule and it is this ideology that constrains it.

While Israel could use strong Arab ally, it does not necessarily need it. Unlike Saudi Arabia, it has enough experience and resources to counter Iran's growing influence and should be able to do so with or without Saudis. Especially considering that any normalization would most likely demand a Palestinian settlement for which there is no real political climate in Israel these days. So even though both countries could gain some advantages economically and security-wise, there is a price to pay domestically for them. Because of the existence of the conflicts, normalization would be positive and helpful – for Saudis to deal with the Gulf conflict and for Israelis to improve their situation in Levant. But it is the conflicts that still make it very costly.

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