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The Use of Strategic Bombing against Non-State Actors in the Middle East

Objectives and Limitations of Air Power in the Cases of Hezbollah, Houthis and ISIS

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Introductory Chapter

In the last decades, states revealed a tendency for expanding their dependence on so-called strategic bombing in wars against other states, an approach that raised questions on whether it is possible to reduce the involvement of ground and naval forces in future military confrontations. It is usually hard to find a specific definition for "strategic bombing" in either academic publications or declassified military documents, but one definition states that this concept applies to:

"those operations intended to directly achieve strategic effects by striking directly at the enemy's centers of gravity. These operations are designed to achieve their objectives without first having to directly engage the adversary's fielded military forces in extended operations at the operational and tactical levels of war." (Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.2 1998, p. 1)

The successful employment of strategic bombing as the major pillar of military operations that took place within different geographical areas and terrains encouraged states to limit, or even avoid altogether, resorting to campaigns that involve putting their "boots on the ground." As a matter of fact, one can claim that improvements in the military aircraft industry—including persistent research on issues of technology, effectiveness and accuracy—have pushed for this result. Another set of reasons, however, that are indirectly connected to developments in aerial capabilities of militaries should not be ignored, including demands by governments for shorter, less costly wars, concerns about public opinion and electoral implications, fear of high rates of casualties, or even all of them.

Airmen, meanwhile, were also called to implement strategic bombing operations against non-state actors. Perhaps the clearest examples in the meantime time can be found in those of external military interventions in war-torn states. Yet, the outcome is certainly an issue of debate, especially that most aerial campaigns are targeting non-state actors, implementing the traditional principles of air power on their cases is a challenge for even the most advanced armies in the world. In general, launching air strikes on states differs on many levels from aerially attacking militant organizations, terrorist groups or local tribes. Armies are fundamentally trained to

fight against other armies, in addition to the difficulties of differentiating between civilians and militants, the so-called principle of discrimination. This study seeks to examine both the rationale and objectives of states in resorting to air power against non-state actors in the Middle East, focusing on the three cases of aerial operations on Hezbollah in Lebanon, ISIS in Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen .

Nature & Changing Nature of Warfare

Ahead of discussing the research questions and main assumptions of this research project—which will be presented in the next chapter in addition to the conceptual framework—it is crucial to examine the development of the theoretical literature on war. Air power, as it has been stated, is just one way of using military force. Therefore, it cannot be separated from broader academic debates on war. This part of the introductory chapter will tackle some of the key traditional views on the so-called nature of warfare and its dynamics, as well as showing the contemporary arguments about a change in its nature, or "character" as some authors describe it.

As it will appear throughout the following part of the chapter, major military concepts of air power—as well as the literature on war's nature—were created at a time when targets were easily identified, states were fighting other states and technology—especially in terms of weapons and means of communications—was still at its early stages of development .The challenge for air power, in the meantime, involves maintaining its efficiency and effectiveness when states are aerially attacking non-state groups—accumulating knowledge of guerilla tactics throughout long years of warfare—and technology of weapons and communication is developed to a higher extent than any other previous, historical eras. Perhaps—when combining the arguments in this section with the conceptual framework part—one can complete his understanding of the ongoing challenges facing air power, especially when employed in Middle Eastern war zones, for the latter is an example of all of such problems that were tackled in many academic and military texts.

Throughout history, states had largely counted on a series of mechanisms in order to achieve their foreign and security policy goals, which ranged from diplomatic and economic means to military ones. The decision of a state to choose the third option, involving the use of military force, is related to seeing it as the best possible channel through which a political outcome can be reached while assuming that other channels are less effective. Such emphasis on the strong interrelation between war and politics has been suggested in studies on the topic. (McMaster 2015, p. 7)

However, in the conceptualization of war, what exactly a favorable "political outcome" entails and the definition itself of a "military victory" remain subject to a substantial debate. One, as an example, can possibly highlight disagreements among the diverse traditions of the International Relations (IR) theory, although they mostly accept war as a "large-scale organized violence between political units." (Levy 1998, p. 141) For the neo-realist school of thought, for instance, war is the end result of an international system that is characterized by a state of anarchy, which results from the absence of an international-central government to handle conflicts and settle disputes among states. As Kenneth Waltz had put it, "war occurs because there is no automatic adjustment of interests. In the absence of a supreme authority there is then the constant possibility that conflicts will be settled by force." (Fearon 1995, p. 384) This argument rests on drawing a distinction between politics on the domestic level and politics on the international level. Domestic governments are commonly authorized—whether politically, legally, constitutionally or through means of using force—to maintain order within all territorial areas of their states. The absence of a similar condition in terms of inter-state relations leads eventually to a decrease in chances of peace and increase in prospects of war. (Rosenberg 1990, p. 285-286)

Realists also argue that war is less likely to happen whenever a balance of power—which is military-based by nature—takes place between states, a situation that can partially explain, for instance, the non-occurrence of a direct confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War decades. Within such context, one can understand the logic of Thucydides—one out of several classical political thinkers and philosophers that realists claim that their assumptions are historically rooted in their texts—in his so-called theory of hegemonic war. A hegemonic war, for Thucydides, begins with an economic, technological and military

transformation in the "hierarchy" of the international system, motivating some states to get engaged in a war against the existing hegemon in a bid to create a new system. Yet, the theory does not rule out the fact that some changes in the international system can be too minimal to influence the superpower status of certain states. In that case, war is less likely to happen. (Gilpin 1988, p. 592-594)

On the contrary, scholars of the Marxist tradition focus on the economic benefits of war that motivate states to be involved in them, or at least play a role in the eruption of conflicts. War, based on this perspective, offers an opportunity for states to test new weapons produced by their domestic companies, open new markets for their products, gain access for raw materials required for industrial purposes or even human capital that comes on lower costs. As an example, it is most likely that Marxists will argue that Nazi Germany adopted a military interventionist approach because of its need for *lebensraum* (living space), a situation that can also be traced in the case of Mussolini's Italy that described itself as a "proletarian nation." (Geier 1999)

There is no doubt that classical Marxists and neomarxists have some disagreements. For example, the classical Marxist theory argues that capitalism is the major cause of international conflicts, pointing out that "capitalist states battled each other as a consequence of their incessant struggle for profits and battled socialist states because they saw in them the seeds of their own destruction." For neomarxism, its scholars are precisely concerned with the relationship between the developed, capitalist countries and the developing ones, stressing that the former became richer and economically stronger as they are supported by the ruling elites of the latter. (Walt 1998, p. 32-33)

Yet, both Marxists and neomarxists share a common ground in terms of their conceptualization of war, which is generating wealth through the use of military force. Moreover, they generally believe that a military action offers an opportunity to enhance the economic interests of the ruling class and social and political elites—such as the "monopoly capitalists" of Lenin or "military-feudal elites" of Schumpeter— although this situation should not necessarily have the same positive impact on the rest of the society. Instead, the presence of war implies that the society will pay its price, which comes in the form of an increase in taxation, reduction of spending in

healthcare, education and other domestic priorities for the people or—on a politico-military level—extraordinary measures such as the imposition of conscription policies. (Levy 1998, p. 156-157)

Such realist and Marxist arguments, nevertheless, pose such a long list of questions on the nature of war that answering them might require examining further academic literature that worked on surpassing the limited scope of the two camps. Both realist and Marxist theories provide an explanation for international phenomena within the boundaries of their basic assumptions and theoretical logic. The above-mentioned ideas can most likely offer an explanation for the way through which states can stay aside from the war option, or at least present a perspective on causes of war, though offering little insight on the nature of warfare itself. One can hardly argue that any of these theories did present a comprehensive, well-structured theory of war. The same problem can also be seen in other IR traditions. For example, a feminist perspective on war will show preoccupation with its implications on women and children, as well as refer to the "gendered nature" of states, cultures and the international system as the reason behind the continuation of wars on the international arena.

There is no doubt that interpreting "nature of war" differs from one scholar to the other. Scholars who use such term to label their work are normally preoccupied—of course among several issues—with the objectives of war, definition of military success and amount of force required for accomplishing the targets of a military mission. Nonetheless, the US Marine Corps' basic doctrine manual, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, states that "the basic nature of war is constant." Moreover, it stresses that such nature signifies "a violent clash between two hostile, independent, and irreconcilable wills, each trying to impose itself on the other." According to such document, the "violent essence of war will never change. Any study of war that neglects this characteristic is misleading and incomplete." (Meilinger 2010, p. 25)

Whether to critique their work or to give them credit for their contributions in enhancing the academic understanding of war, scholars of war studies do rarely ignore the ideas of Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu when reviewing the evolution of the literature on the topic. In *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu and *On War* by Clausewitz, both

authors had managed to develop their own theories on the nature of war, which continues to be used in most—if not all—research projects in the meantime. Hence, it is important to clarify the key aspects of the arguments provided by Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, in addition to underlying the current, counterarguments about a transformation in the nature of war as a second stage. For Clausewitz, he conceptualized war as :

"Not only a genuine chameleon, since it alters its nature somewhat in each particular case, it is also, in its overall manifestations, a wondrous trinity in with regard to its predominant tendencies, which consist of the original violence of war's nature, namely hatred and hostility, which can be viewed as a blind natural force; of the play of probability and of chance, which make it into an unpredictable activity; and of the subordinating nature of a political instrument, since it submits to reason itself." (Echevarria II 2003, p.321)

Clausewitz, who was a Prussian general in addition to being a military theorist, asserted in his book that war is a violent clash of opposing wills, being "not waged against an abstract enemy, but against a real one who must always be kept in mind." On basis of such conceptualization, Clausewitz structured his so-called trinity, which encompasses the government, the military commander and the army and the people. Throughout his book, Clausewitz examines the relationship and the interactions among those three elements, which some of its major aspects will be explained in the coming paragraphs. Meanwhile, perhaps not included in the above-mentioned definition, Clausewitz showed concern with two major dimensions of war. On the one hand, although stressing that war "is merely the continuation of policy by other means", Clausewitz portrayed fighting as one of the most—if not the most— significant part of the war equation. (Waldman 2009, p. 19-23)

He believed that the political framework and objectives of war will never remain the same, for they will always be in change, whereas "physical violence" is unchangeable: a war means that fighting will inevitably occur. This argument should not lead to a conclusion about a marginal importance for politics in war in Clausewitz's theory—especially amid his emphasis about the need for establishing a clear objective for war—but rather indicate that he believed that a political end result of war is related to the anticipated impact of using force. (Waldman 2009, p. 19-23) Clausewitz described fighting—or "combat" in accordance with the terminology he used—as:

"the only effective force in war… That holds good even if no actual fighting occurs, because the outcome rests on the assumption that if it came to fighting, the enemy would be destroyed…All action is undertaken in the belief that if the ultimate test of arms should actually occur, the outcome would be favourable. The decision by arms is… in war what cash payment is in commerce…regardless how rarely settlements occur, they can never be entirely absent." (Waldman 2009, p. 26)

On the other hand, war is an action that is conducted by humans, a perception that Clausewitz attempts to prove throughout his text by explaining and giving recommendations on the way through which political and military leaders should act in times of war. For example, although Clausewitz insisted that politicians are entitled to lead the war, he admitted that this is not always an applicable process. It is worth noting that, by the time Clausewitz was writing his incomplete text, a series of logistical and technological problems hindered the presence of quick and effective means of communication between the army leaders and politicians. Accordingly, he stated the army commanders should, when forced to do so, have the right to take decisions based on the conditions they are encountering. However, Clausewitz is often criticized for not elaborating on the conditions under which the leadership rights should be transferred to the military commanders, including the ability of the enemy to impact the flow of events in a war through its military strategies and moves. (Handel 1991, p.40-43)

Pertaining to Sun Tzu, he believed that a war should occupy the shortest possible time span, with the lowest possible losses in terms of human casualties and effort, a perception that Clausewitz would not disagree about to a great extent. Sun Tzu, yet, had a firm belief in keeping resorting to war as the last option, or at least combine it with other diplomatic and intelligence mechanisms in order to reduce dependence on using force as much as possible. As the Chinese general and military strategist puts it, "to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence." Since "victory is the main object in war", the matter should be examined and investigated carefully, a situation that might not necessarily suggest— which Clausewitz had called for—a need for an excessive use of force in all cases. Instead, the "supreme excellence in war" requires "to attack the enemy's plan; next best to disrupt his alliances; next best to attack his army; the worst is to attack his cities." (Kuo 2007, p. 7-9)

In order to apply this strategic thinking in real-life wars, Sun Tzu focused on resorting to diplomatic, economic and psychological tools—which Clausewitz ignored despite his emphasis on morale-related elements such as the opposing wills of fighting parties—ahead of getting involved in a war. Moreover, which Sun Tzu is highly credited for discussing and Clausewitz is critiqued for underestimating their importance, Sun Tzu tackles a number of concepts that are all related to intelligence and deception such as "surprise", "speed" and "maneuver." Deception necessitates an understanding of an enemy's ideas, plans and anticipations, a target that can be achieved through competent intelligence skills and "penetration of the opponent's side by one's own spies." Aside from its military aspect—which also includes spreading false news about one's military and the approach of "when near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near"—deception can also occur on a political level. Sun Tzu, at such point, focused on endeavoring to cause disagreements and tensions between an enemy's military and its allies. (Critzer 2012, p. 8-12)

It is true that these techniques will possibly be considered as naïve and outdated for wars in the meantime, But Sun Tzu—who wrote about war almost two millennia before Clausewitz—gained prominence due to his concern with shaping the surrounding conditions of a war in order to reach the highest possible degree of guaranteeing a victory. Most of these techniques were to be perceived by Clausewitz as useless and adopted only by the weaker parties in a war. But Sun Tzu—agreeing with Clausewitz in most of his assumptions such as those related to the need for leadership skills, quick victories and inevitability of putting competent and strong commanders on top of the military—understood the need for examining the other side of the story. Sun Tzu thought it is strongly important to "know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant of both your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril." (Critzer 2012, p. 8-12)

In the last decades, a number of scholars developed a series of arguments in order to highlight a change in the nature of warfare, while seeking to prove that the classical perceptions on war can no longer serve as an appropriate analytical framework for wars in the 20th and 21st century. One can simply argue that these

arguments are problematic to a large extent, especially amid the absence of a coherent theory on the matter, for they only represent a rising—though currently dominant—trend in the literature on warfare. But, by all means, it is crucial to discuss their major pillars for two reasons. The first reason involves the tripartite emphasis on issues of technology, rise of non-state actors and the reduced tendency among states to launch "great wars", issues that neither orthodox texts as that of Clausewitz nor IR theories had sought to explain their impact on warfare. The second reason involves their importance for this study, for presenting such arguments will pave the way for tackling the relationship between air power and non-state actors, which will be discussed in the coming chapters. Hence, this part of the chapter will present two key features of the transformation in war nature .

Firstly—being generally described as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)— the technological development in means of communications and weapons raises many questions about their impact on warfare in the future, resulting in the creation of a series of models on the issue, such as the so-called network-centric warfare. Technology, which Clausewitz, aside from stating that "knowledge must become capability, attempted to exclude from his theory in order to arguably make a long-lasting theory on war, brought new realities to war, which even reached the extent of expanding the scale of the concepts that lies under the term warfare. For example, one can possibly argue that a major aspect of contemporary warfare might include the "cyber-attacks" that intelligence agencies around the world conduct against each other. This situation makes Sun Tzu's demand for hiding or sending wrong information in times of war a much harder task to accomplish. It is worth noting that such advanced weapons technological tools—such as smart devices, broadcast stations and access to satellite-produced information—can be available to states and their opponents, including other states, individuals, criminals and militant groups. Moreover, pictures and videos of wars are provided to the public while a conflict is ongoing, keeping little secrets to be hidden. (Cronin 2013, p.25-28) According to John Arquilla, the worldwide advancements in technology has produced a state of an "increased size of the operational battlefield, which is the result of both the increasing accuracy and destructiveness of weaponry, and the emerging ability to

coordinate and control complex maneuvers, along with logistical support, over great distances." (Arquilla 1994, p.25)

Secondly, the emergence of violent non-state actors became an unavoidable aspect of war. It is important at this stage to highlight the concept of "new wars" that was developed by Mary Kaldor in the late 1990s. Kaldor defined a new war as:

"The new wars are 'globalized' wars. They involve the fragmentation and decentralization of the state. Participation is low relative to the population both because of lack of pay and because of lack of legitimacy on the part of the warring parties. There is very little domestic production, so the war effort is heavily dependent on local predation and external support. Battles are rare, most violence is directed against civilians, and cooperation between warring factions is common. "(Kaldor 1999, p. 90)

Kaldor mentioned that militant groups have two major features. The first feature entails depending on light weapons such as rifles, machine-guns, hand-grenades, landmines and short-range missiles. Kaldor stated that conflicts—such as the Cold War and wars in Afghanistan and South Africa—had increased the accessibility of these groups to weapons, explaining the economic and political mechanisms used by them to buy these weapons. The second feature involves winning the "hearts and minds" of both local population and people within the ranks of their adversaries. She noted that "revolutionary warfare" usually takes place in geographical areas that central governments cannot guarantee high levels of control over them. These areas "provide bases from which the military forces can engage in tactics which sap the morale and efficiency of enemy forces." (Kaldor 1999, p. 93-95)

As General Sir Rupert Smith argued in his book "The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World", wars always include non-state actors, which are divided into two types. The first type of non-state actors—which Kaldor spoke about in her book—involves those that can mostly be found in Western states, such as military alliances, coalitions and even regional and international organizations. The second type—which absorbed the attention of most academics—includes non-state actors that emerge from within a domestic socio-political environment such as Al-Qaeda. Some of these militant groups can manage to have an international influence, though not all of them have succeeded in taking such step. Smith points out a military victory, within such context should be based on "capturing the will of the people" instead of defeating the enemy in the battlefield. The reason lies in the difficulty of

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applying the ideas of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, which originally targeted states, on non-state actors, stressing that it is also impossible to determine the time span for a conflict. (Gow 2006, p. 1162-1163)

Reviewing the Literature on Air Power

The above-mentioned section of the chapter provided the basic, classical perceptions of the most prominent military thinkers about war. Although they might disagree on some aspects of their arguments, one can hardly argue that any of these scholars is arguing that a military action can exist without having well-defined objectives, a preliminary estimation of the expected outcome, and clear plan about the needed amount of firepower. As strategic bombing is normally one type of a military action, it should necessarily be examined and analyzed in light of the same standards. As the British Air and Space Power Doctrine mentions, strategic bombing represents "the ability to project power from the air and space to influence the behavior of people or the course of events", seeking to "achieve militarily and politically favorable outcomes in complex crises by using all available levers of power in a cross-governmental and inter-agency approach." (British Air and Space Power Doctrine 2009, p. 8)

However, this definition is not enough to shape a clear understanding on how air power should be used, which embodies a key debate in studies of air power. While some scholars—especially the early ones—believe that an air force can solely accomplish goals set for a specific military campaign, others argue for the necessity of combining it with ground and naval troops and limiting dependence on them for objectives related to the tactical level of war. A major feature of the literature on air power involves the firm connection between its empirical dynamics and theory, which is reflected in most of the academic papers and books on the topic. The aircraft was used for military purposes during the First World War for the first time, nearly a decade after the Wright Brothers finalized their invention. (Biddle 2002, p. 3-4) However, the influence of warplanes on the flow of events during the war was quite limited due to a number of obstacles that all parties of the conflict had encountered. Each of the states involved had no adequate information about the aerial capabilities

of their enemies. Governments—in addition to militaries—had also suffered problems of establishing a communication system between ground and air forces, creating a production system of airplanes and accomplishing high levels of accuracy. Some of such industrial and technical difficulties were arguably not resolved until the early 1990s. (Morgan 2013, p. 2-3)

The early theorists of air power started developing their assumptions during the interwar phase, a period of time when air forces in all countries were still taking their first steps. For them, strategic bombing is a "war-winning strategy; decisive strategy; the bomber would always get through; and only an independent air force commanded by airmen could implement the strategy." (William March 2009, p. 17) With his prominent book on the topic titled "The Command of the Air", published in 1921, Giulio Douhet was the first scholar to start advocating for strategic bombing. Douhet, a former officer in the Italian military, presented a number of ideas that were considered both unprecedented and shocking at such point of time.

Firstly, Douhet argued that airpower is capable of replacing both ground and naval military formulas, in addition to considering the combination of air, ground and navy troops a waste of resources that can be avoided. Secondly, he believed that air power is capable of achieving a "material, moral and psychological" devastation to the enemies. (Haslam 2012, p. 754-755) Thirdly, Douhet, critiquing the traditional military structures of the armies, had also called for the creation of independent air force within each country's militaries, for he thought that army leaders have a higher tendency to depend on ground forces. (Berkland 2011, p. 391-392)

There is no doubt that other early theorists—mainly Hugh Trenchard and Billy Mitchell—had been influenced by the ideas of Douhet, despite the fact that they rejected his seemingly excessive confidence in air power. Perhaps this can reveal one reason behind the development of air power theory in a different direction than that of Douhet. Describing air power as "one of many means" to achieving military successes that basically seeks to "assist the army"—Trenchard and Mitchell criticized the preoccupation of Douhet with strategic bombing. Trenchard and Mitchell favored examining air power as part of a comprehensive strategy that includes ground and

naval operations, stressing the need for concern with the effectiveness of the military option rather than the type of military power. (Haslam 2012, p. 755)

In fact, Trenchard—ex-British Chief of the Air Staff who is regarded as the "father of the Royal Air Force''—was the first in history to lead a strategic bombing campaign against non-state actors, yet he did not contribute theoretically to the development of the literature in that manner. British warplanes conducted the so-called air policing campaigns against insurgencies within their colonies during the interwar period. Although the support of ground, colonial forces cannot be denied, the British government resorted chiefly to air power to regain order in states such as Yemen, Iraq and Somaliland, a situation that was pushed by security and economic problems and leaning towards reducing reliance on ground forces in the post-First World War period. (Longoria 1992, p. 14-16) Not differently from Douhet, Trenchard and Mitchell emphasized the importance of providing air forces with autonomy in terms of funding, resource and organizational aspects, a suggestion that is related to their belief that aerial roles in wars will expand as the technological problems of warplanes are solved by virtue of time. (Berkland 2011, p. 391-392, Haslam 2012, p. 755)

The subsequent versions of the air power theory had backed the calls of Trenchard and Mitchell for the integration of air, ground and naval troops in military confrontations. Yet, they revealed an interest in determining the limitations of strategic bombing, critiquing and contrasting with earlier theorists who focused exclusively on the benefits of air strikes. In general, the contemporary literature on air power points out to two main issues, which can be considered as analytical framework more than a strict set of theoretical arguments amid a dominating scholarly pattern of case-by-case analysis. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the "neo" trend in air power theory, to a large extent, had contributed to the development of the existing literature on the relationship between air power and non-state actors, for it stressed the need for expanding the scope of analysis beyond the narrow boundaries of military strategies and tactics.

Contemporary scholars—such as Daniel Lake—objected the generalizations and high expectations of early scholars concerning the use of air power, providing some explanations on why strategic bombing succeeded in some cases, while failed in other ones. Early scholars assumed that the diverse strategies of coercion through air power are generally expected to lead to the destruction of state's economic capacities, military capabilities or eruption of a domestic uprising against the government of the attacked country. As an example, the NATO strategic bombing operation against the Serb military in Kosovo could mostly represent a successful case study for supporters of such arguments. Under the Operation Allied Force in 1999, the NATO air strikes targeted Serb military targets in Kosovo and Belgrade, in addition to communication centers, power stations and other sites that negatively affected the economy of the attacked party to the conflict. After roughly three months and thousands of air strikes, Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic capitulated, though he did not lose power. (Lake 2009, p. 83-84)

Moreover, within such context, it is certainly difficult to analyze the outcomes of other campaigns of strategic bombing, especially those that targeted militarily stronger enemies. For instance, during the Second World War, air forces of the Axis and the Allies launched air strikes against civilian areas. Although the aerial campaigns caused a high degree of psychological harm on civilians—in addition to massive destruction in many towns and cities—they did not produce calls for regime change or put a quick end for a war that lasted for roughly six years. In addition, arguing that the Allied troops had achieved military victory through strategic bombing only is problematic by all means. Contemporary scholars, hence, continuously stressing need for expanding research on determinants of outcomes of strategic bombing operations, usually have a single answer for this issue: both the coerced and the coercing parties can affect the path of the conflict. The attacked states can sometimes start a "counter-coercion effort" before the attacking air force succeeds in making the cost of tolerating the consequences of war higher than the cost of surrendering for the former. Such effort can also involve resorting to the support of third parties or re-distributing financial resources to survive the economic pressures of war. (Horowitz & Reiter 2001, p. 151-153)

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Furthermore, some contemporary scholars believe that the psychological impact of air strikes is not only determined by the act of war itself, but also with the ability of civilians to express their demands for ceasefire. For instance, authors such as Lambert and Hosmer argue that military soldiers tend to have higher willingness for peace in some incidents than civilians, as they are the most likely side to lose their lives amid an aerial attack. Other academics claim that autocratic leaders give little room for freedom of expression, thus civilian populations might lack a political opportunity to reveal their rejection for war. (Mueller 2010, p. 9-12) Thus, it is no surprise that some dictators managed to stay in power after losing war, including the case of Iraq's Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Kuwait war, which involved a US-led operation of both ground and aerial forces. (Mueller 2010, p. 9-12)

On the other hand, some analysts—such as Daniel Byman, Matthew Waxman and Daniel Lake—urged examining strategic bombing within the context of the surrounding regional and international contexts, a situation that cannot be separated from the "two-way" nature of coercion endeavors. States normally count on a series of mechanisms in order to achieve their foreign and security policy goals, which range from diplomatic and economic means to military ones. The decision of a state to choose the third option, represented specifically in the use of strategic bombing, is not an aim in itself. Instead, it is seen as the best possible channel through which a political outcome can be reached on basis of assuming that other channels are less effective. Hence, one cannot disregard or at least give little attention to the interactions among states and their impact on an aerial attack before, during or after its commencement. For instance, it can be argued that the NATO aerial campaign on Kosovo could not have led Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to surrender if the economic and diplomatic weight of the European Union (EU), the absence of Russian support and the NATO threat to deploy ground forces had not existed. (Byman & Waxman 2000, p. 11-12) .

There is no surprise, despite limited discussion on such aspect within the air power theory, that a considerable part of the academic literature on case studies involving air power focuses on the interactions among states within a particular region as an independent variable. As a matter of fact, previous instances showed the same complexities in relation to non-state actors, as such groups usually enjoy the support

of external parties amid facing air strikes, a situation that can sometimes restrict the influence of the military action. A number of scholars argued that the US détente with the Soviet and China—supporters of the Viet Cong—had served as a key catalyst in increasing the effectiveness of US air strikes during the Vietnam war. As a result, using air power without considering the political and strategic aspects of a military campaign reduces chances of producing a positive outcome. (Lake 2009, p. 86, Clodfelter 2015, p.115-116, Smith 2002, p. 21-22)

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework

The integration of air power—as well as naval power—in military doctrines tackling the issue of fighting non-state actors has largely been avoided until the mid-2000s. Despite the inclusion of air power in actual operations against militant groups, the best way through which such process can take place remained unknown. This situation was apparently related to a dominating trend of thought, which suggested that air power is an "indiscriminate weapon" that causes collateral damage, mainly related to the killing of civilians. In that sense, many academic publications on the topic usually circulate a quote by a US battalion commander in Iraq who said that he had "rarely put air into my plan—this was because we did not understand how it could assist in a counter insurgency fight." (Baltrusaitis 2008, p. 90-91)

The aim, at such point, is not to argue that using air power against non-state actors is a meaningless act, for—in the meantime—many of the military doctrines in Western states had realized some important benefits for airmen in such type of warfare, which some of them were mentioned in the previous parts of the study. Instead, this matter reflects the absence of a single theoretical framework that covers the diverse aspects of the topic. This study, as a result will synthesize a number of approaches in order to provide a comprehensive theroetical framework that can allow one to have clear conceptualization of the key ideas that will be tested within the next chapters on the case studies. These approaches include the conceptualization of Ron Tira on "asymmetrical wars" against non-state actors and the approach of Edward Luttwak on avoiding casualties. The study will also depend on the understanding of the US Air Force doctrine and the approach of Derek Read on the issue to examine the roles of air power in war against non-state actors within urban enviroments, which represent the majority of the cases in the meantime.

Pertaining to non-state actors, one can differentiate between two kinds of them. Some groups endeavor to gain recognition as an actor within the established international system, as it had been the case—for example—with the Viet Minh or the communists in China. The end of a war against a conventional military, for them, should eventually lead to their rise to power within their state. Hence, although they are fighting asymmetrically—which will be defined in the next paragraphs—they have no objections towards being involved in negotiations or a process of dialogue with state officials they are fighting against their militaries or those who do not accept their politico-military logic. On the contrary, other non-state actors such as Al-Qaeda express rejection to the present international system, seeking to replace it with another system that functions in consistency with their political or ideological beliefs. (Tira 2010, p. 70) Yet, in both cases, wars will carry a different nature than inter-state ones. Wars among states—or "simple symmetrical wars"—are traditionally based on measuring the "military effectiveness" of the parties to the conflict. These wars are also identified by a relationship between tactical and strategic levels of wars, in which the outcomes of the former will most probably have implications on the latter. This is related to the clear military aim which both fighting militaries do have in mind: destroying the assets and troops of the opponent. (Tira 2010, p. 31)Tira identifies symmetrical wars as those in which:

"the force buildup of the two sides is similar, and both sides believe that the fate of the war would be sealed at the operational center of gravity located in the operational space, and by attacking it in the prime major battle. The intention of both sides was meeting of force-on force in the field, and no attempt was made to act against strategic centers of gravity that did no directly affect the fighting" (Tira 2010, p. 31-32)

For asymmetrical wars, the fact that non-state actors prefer to stay aside from adopting the military reasoning of states—which is significantly related to their ideologies, cultural beliefs or strategic decisions—produces unusal challenges. Non-state actors, on the one hand, do not always have a crystal-clear administrative hierarchy thorugh which the actual decisionmakers within their ranks can be determined. The relationship, moreover, between its members or the ways through which they receive orders from their leaders and distribute tasks can sometimes be unknown for their opponents. These dilemmas do not only affect the accuracy of the information collected on these groups, but also raise questions about their real intentions behind

engaging in a war against a conventional military. For example, some non-state actors—especially those that are associated with jihadist ideologies—might not view war in terms of calculations of costs and benefits, but rather in terms of abiding by a religious obligation that is most likely unending. But—in light of the state of ambiguity surrounding them—it is not always plausible to assume that all non-state actors have such belief in mind. (Tira 2010, p. 71)

The sophistication of an asymmetrical war, on the other hand, increases by the unwillingness of non-state actors to fight directly against conventional forces, for they are aware of the extremely-limited chances they have in terms of defeating the latter in a battlefield. Non-state actors will, hence, resort to alternative tactics such as targeting the "civilian-strategic centers of gravity" of the regular forces they are combating. They will also take advantage of locals and use them as "human shields", which—aside from the legal and humantarian implications of this issue—will most likely lead to expanding the time span of the conflict with no concrete victories for the conventional forces, putting the war objectives of governments under domestic criticism. (Tira 2010, p. 71) Perhaps this situation had taken place during the US war against the Viet Cong in Vietnam. While the Viet Cong suffered massive casualties among its ranks and many tactical losses, its frequent killing of US soldiers had imposed domestic pressures on the US government to eventually withdraw its troops from Vietnam. The United States could have managed to resume the war for longer periods, but its inability to translate its tactical victories into political and strategic gains left little support or even a strong rationale for the continuation of the war.(Tira 2010, p. 72)

Perhaps the difficulties of asymmetrical wars and uncertainty about the expected outcome could have played an important role in pushing policymakers in certain situations—such as the case with the Israeli aerial operations in Gaza—to act cautiously when expanding the scope of their military campaigns. As mentioned earlier, this study will depend on a post-heroic approach of Edward Luttwak as the basis for addressing the research questions of the topic. Luttwak believed that restraint in the use of military power had existed during the Cold War. Although the Cold War had resulted in dozens of wars across the globe, the fact that each of the two superpowers enjoyed control over their "allies and clients"helped them to produce

such outcome. Restraint, at this point in history, was related to concerns about the eruption of a nuclear war in case escalation reached levels that are beyond the control of the United States or the Soviet Union. The main argument of Luttwak suggests that—although wars are "easily started and then fought without perceptible restraints" in the post-Cold War era—the dominating norm in warfare should involve shifting military strategies and plans in order to produce the most possible state of "casualty avoidance." (Luttwak 1995, p. 109-110) Luttwak argues that:

"Given the performance of certain modern weapons, if military planning is appropriately modified to fully exploit their technical potential, it may be possible to emulate the casualty-avoidance methods of eighteenth-century warfare and thus conduct armed yet virtually-bloodless interventions. To be sure, US aims would have to be correspondingly modest and remain so, resisting all temptations to achieve more than partial, circumscribed, and often slow results as firmly as any good eighteenth-century general." (Luttwak 1995, p. 114-115)

This type of argument involves achieving a common ground between the traditional public dissatisfaction with human casualties as governments decide to go to war and the continuous need for using military power. It is worth mentioning that the academic literaure on post-heroic warfare mostly focuses on the so-called "low-intensity conflicts."Low-intensity conflicts, unlike the so-called "high-intensisty conflicts", are those which at least one of its parties is a non-state actor. (Kober 2015, p. 97-98) For example, Robert E. Osgood pointed out that the "public's readiness to sacrifice" is limited when wars will not expectedly be short and hard to end up as the victorious side. Other scholars such as Hugh Smith and Martin Shaw argued that technological developments—including those related to air power—should lead to a reduction in the deployment of ground forces in war areas. (Kober 2015, p. 97-98)

Some scholars, such as Martin Van Creveld argued that the spread of an arguably cautious military strategies can be rooted in empirical and statistical data, which can show a reduction of defense budgets around the world in the aftermat of the Cold War. (Creveld 2008, p. 6-9) This situation can be defended by—according to figures released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute—the occurrence of only three large-scale armed conflicts from 1998 to 2007, as opposed to 30 conflicts that were classified as civil wars. This development puts the orthodox consideration of military power as a means of achieving policy objectives in question due to an apparent keenness by states to keep war as a last resort. (Mello 2010, p. 2-3)

For Luttwak—who is addressing US policymakers through his text—believes that both the United States and its allies are facing lesser security threats in the post-Cold War era. Hence, as military power is a tool of policy, an adjustment to combating rules and doctrines should take place in order to become consistent with the foreign and defense policy objectives of the state. (Luttwak 1995, p. 113) Though no discussing the issue in details, Luttwak pointed out that air power can serve as an important pillar of a post-heroic military policy. He, yet, believed that airmen cannot solely achieve military victories, for " any one precision air strike can easily fail because the assigned targets are concealed by bad weather, are no longer where last spotted or are successfully camouflaged." Air power, thus, cannot allow states to win wars. But a sustained aerial operation can decrease the need for dependence on artillery, especially when cities are involved in wars. (Luttwak 1995, p. 120-121)

It is possible to argue that Luttwak does not provide concrete policy recommendations for military commanders and governmnet officials on the ways through which they can reduce military involvement, satisfy the anti-war public and maintian supremacy in wars. Yet, maintaing such balance in actual asymmetrical wars does certainly surpass the analytical capacity of his renowned text.

For this reason, representing the third aspect of the conceptual framework, it is important to determine the ideal conditions under which air power can reach its utmost effectiveness in asymmetrical wars. Air strikes are generally challenged by the urban nature of the cities that non-state actors are based in their territories, which represents the majority of the cases in the meantime. The density of the population in cities allows armed groups to spread among civilians, which makes the accuracy of aerial strikes a tough task to achieve. Such problem is not linked to technological problems in military aircrafts, but rather associated with challenges of collecting intelligence information on the actual sites that members of non-state groups are hiding in. (Read 2010, p. 142) Therefore, most—if not all—of the military documents on asymmetrical warfare usually stress that the employment of air, ground and naval power is the final within a war of such nature. Perhaps this situation can allow one to grasp the difference between aerially attacking conventional militaries or civilians areas and using strategic bombing against non-state actors that are adopting guerilla tactics ana benfiting the connections they enjoy with local populations.

The focus, in symmetrical wars, always involves using air power by militaries as a means of coercion to enemies that are conventional militaries, seeking to make the latter accept a political end result that is favourable for other states that are attacking them. On the contrary—as it will be explained in the coming paragraphs—having deep understanding of the socio-political and geographical conditions of the battlefied and separating it from non-state groups acting within its borders are the major pillars of strategic bombing campaigns in asymmetrical wars. The phases that both preceeds and follows the campaigns of strategic bombing within asymmetrical wars. The so-called "shock and awe" concept—first adopted by Douhet—involved launching an attack against an enemy without issuing a warning. The aim is destroy the enemy's aerial capabilities—which is not normally possessed by non-state groups—lead to the "command of the air" and make the enemy less capable of defending its territories. The next stage will involve attacking civilian areas in order to "break their [civilians] will to resist and their war capacity." Pushing the civilians on the enemy's side to call for a halt of fighting and avoid a military escalation was the main aim of Douhet. Thus, a military would stop a war—or surrender in clearer terms—not because of its interest in peace, but rather in response to popular pressure, leading wars to be finished within shorter time spans than usual. (Berkland 2011, p. 391-392) When further academic contributions—as it has been explained in the literature review section in the first chapter—emerged to critique the work of Douhet, they were not fully against his arguments. Instead, there have been high degrees of faith in the ability of air power to achieve fruitful results, though whether or not the integration of ground—as well as naval forces—operations are needed to accelerate and support the strategic goals of the war was the issue of concern.

On the contrary, as a first step, asymmetrical wars—whether backed by domestic troops or foreign ground troops—have to deal with the "core grievances" that led local populations to support a non-state group. Although it is hard to find a clear definition for "grievances" that needs to be addressed, especially that some of them might take long years to be resolves, such as the nonexistence of social services such as health and education. Under these circumstances, a military operation will be challenged by the factor of time, which can allow non-state actors to strengthen their social and political positions. The major focus, instead, entails attempting to gain the

support of the locals in order to eventually win their cooperation with military troops fighting the non-state elements. (Air Force Doctrine Document 3-2 2013, 6)The British Royal Air Force (RAF), as an example, were responsible for transporting Afghan Muslim pilgrims to Saudi Arabia for Hajj amid the inability of the Afghan national airline company to perform such mission. One can argue that such move—described in some of the literature as acts of counterinsurgency (COIN)—had increased the legitimacy of the then newly-declared government in Afghanistan in 2002 and weakened the extent of support to the Taliban militants. (Read 2010, p. 142) Local populations can sometimes offer their support to non-state actors, which increases the hardships and challenges faced by specifically by air power and generally by all forms of military forces. For example, it is widely argued that the support of the Sunni tribes and clans to the militants of the ISIS in Iraq adds more strength to the latter, while putting the US-led coalition and the Shiite government forces in a tougher situation. Based on US pressures, some attempts were made to include Sunni ministers in the government as an attempt to obtain their support against ISIS. But the failure of such process immediately indicated the continuation of the Sunni sects and their people to ISIS. (Blaydes & Crenshaw 2015)

The US Air Force doctrine document described gaining the backing of the population as the "essential element; it represents the battleground and operational terrain. Like physical terrain factors, planners should skillfully navigate social structures, culture, religion, language and history." As these factors might differ from any geographical area to another, it is important to put such consideration in mind while attempting to create alliances with the population. It is important to highlight the fact that the aim of creating local support to military operations against non-state actors does not mean that civilians should have combating roles. Rather, the key goal is to motivate them to provide information about the non-state actors, as well as giving them lesser causes to protect or support the elements of the latter. The degree, if these conditions are achieved, of using military power can reach higher levels of accuracy, for a separation between civilians and armed groups will be in place. (Air Force Doctrine Document 3-2 2013, 6)

It can be argued that the majority of conflicts in the Middle East were historically taking place among states, which accordingly gives an impression that strategic bombing is suffering from a weak, empirical connection when applied to non-state groups in the region. This situation, nevertheless, has been considerably reversed in the post-Arab Spring period, which was dominated by conflicts between conventional militaries against non-state actors, or even non-state actors fighting each other. Furthermore, aside from the three case studies that are included in this study—which will reflect the importance of studying the issue of employing air power in the Middle East against non-state groups—one can easily point out to several cases of wars of the same nature in previous decades.

The United States, for example, has been continuously launching drone strikes against militants of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen since the early 2000s, aiming at "diminishing AQAP's presence in the region." These aerial strikes managed to cause the death of several leading figures of Al-Qaeda in Yemen—such as Anwar al-Awlaki and Nasser al-Wuhayshi—as well as arguably "degrade, disrupt and destroy its [Al-Qaeda] remnants" in the country. (Helsel 2016) Other examples include the air strikes of the Iraqi military against Kurdish groups and Shiite Muslims during the early 1990s, which were stopped following a US-British no-fly zones imposed as part of a then package of international sanctions against the ruling regime of Saddam Hussein. (BBC 2006)

However, these examples show that strategic bombing has either been used for extremely short periods of time or even employed on frequent basis without being maintained throughout a prolonged period of time. It is difficult to build a coherent, theoretical generalization in light of these instances, as air strikes were not tested to the maximum limits, though they were—with no doubt—part of the military strategies of the states using them. As the 21st century saw more states resorting to air power against militant groups in the Middle East, it becomes more urgent to create an analytical framework through which questions about why, how and under which conditions air power becomes more effective within asymmetrical confrontations can be answered. This can explain—as it will be mentioned in the methodology section—

the reason behind tackling three case studies within a roughly similar time span, which involves producing conclusions that can be generally applied on future cases. Wars in the Middle East, in the meantime, are highly based on air power, with a noticeable reduction in levels of using other types of military power, mainly land power. Accordingly, when studying cases that occurred in the same period of time, one can possibly manage to ensure the validity of the observations that will be reached.

As it has been stated in the above-mentioned paragraph, the historical examples of Iraq, Syria and Yemen cannot be considered as sustained military campaigns in which air power was used for prolonged period of time. Yet—a debate that has apparently emerged since the Vietnam war—the effectiveness of strategic bombing in asymmetrical conflicts has been strongly put in question for long decades, especially in regards to its ability to achieve the objectives of any given military campaign. During the Vietnam war, the US military witnessed an internal debate between the Air Force and Marine Corps—on one side—and General Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff, on the other side over this issue in 1964. The former believed that air strikes "would compel Hanoi to cease and desist in its efforts to take over South Vietnam", while the latter shared a totally different view. As then US Air Force, General Curtis LeMay, had put it, "my solution to the problem would be to tell them frankly that they've [Viet Cong] got to draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age." Yet, for Johnson—responding to arguments about increasing dependence on air power—argued that the "Viet Cong insurgency could continue for a long time at its present or an increased intensity even if North Vietnam were completely destroyed." (Global Security 2016) The outcome of using air power against a non-state actor in this war was by all means negative, which implies that Johnson had an accurate estimation of the military situation in Vietnam, especially in light of the guerilla tactics of the Viet Cong and their knowledge about the terrain in the country. As General John Paul McConnell—ex-Air Force Chief of Staff and vice commander of the Strategic Air Command—said in 1965, employing air power may:

"seem futile in trying to combat extensive guerrilla activities, especially under conditions as they exist in Viet-Nam. There are no well-defined fronts; virtually all of South Viet-Nam is the battlefield and combat operations shift rapidly and unpredictably from one locale to the other. Hiding in the jungle or mixing with the civilian population, the Viet Cong normally strike in relatively small numbers and whenever they have the advantage of surprise." (Air University 1965)

In light of such context, it will be indisputably logical to question the motives of conventional militaries in renewing their trust in air power within contemporary, asymmetrical confrontations against non-state actors in the Middle East. There is no doubt that the post-Vietnam war period provided militaries around the world with ideas and solutions about the best possible means through which non-state groups can be defeated, specifically amid the gradual, technological advancements in military aircrafts, strategies as well as the accumulation of expertise among army commanders in relation to handling such untraditional type of warfare. Yet, all of such considerations should not allow one to ignore the fact that non-state actors in the region—such as the Houthis in Yemen or ISIS in Syria—successfully depend on tactics of guerilla warfare in a manner that is not different than that of the Viet Cong's case. Hence, the risk of failure in achieving the objectives of military campaigns continues to be in place, specifically when air power becomes chiefly employed. This study, on that basis, suggests two research questions:

1. Despite the poor record of air power in asymmetrical conflicts, why did the contemporary military operations in the Middle East—as those of Syria or Yemen—involve a heavy reliance on strategic bombing?
2. What are the limitations of strategic bombing when employed against non-state actors?

Hypotheses

The history of warfare, as a matter of fact, includes few instances of dependence on strategic bombing as the sole military option within an armed confrontation between a state and a non-state actor. As a result—despite showing unsatisfactory results when heavily relied upon—it is important to question the rationale behind using strategic bombing against non-state actors in the Middle East, the expected outcome of such process and the relationship between resorting to strategic bombing and the political dimension of a military operation. This study will present two key assumptions, which their validity will be tested in terms of the three case studies.

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Firstly—which provides an answer for the first research question—this study assumes that the use of air power against non-state actors in the region has been motivated by attempts to limit the extent of military involvement and human casualties among the ranks of the conventional armies. The post-heroic approach in warfare focuses on achieving military objectives, while reducing levels of human casualties within the ranks of the military. A key aspect of this type of argument does not intend to give higher priority for military casualties over civilian casualties, but rather to point out to the non-urgency of getting engaged in high-intensity conflicts in the contemporary period, for no threat to the national security of states can be seen. A strong case, therefore, exists for reducing the extent of military involvement, an approach that air power can serve as its essential tools. In case non-state actors do not possess anti-aircraft weaponry, there is a great likelihood that no casualties will be recorded, and thus states can count on air power, while depending on domestic actors—regardless of their military capabilities—for a ground missions or disregard such aspect as a whole. (Kober 2015, p. 97-98)

One can refer to the case study of Israel, which increased its reliance on air power to maintain its control over the Palestinian "armed resistance movements" in the last fifteen years, amid a series of international diplomatic arrangements that led to a reduction in the deployment of ground troops. The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and some areas of the West Bank led to a process of revisiting the mechanisms through which Israel can maintain control over the Palestinian groups in the territories, even if Israeli troops are not "physically present." As severe security threats by the Palestinians towards Israel had started to become relatively less frequent, the Israeli military decided to benefit from its control over the airspace to impose military pressures on the Palestinian groups through air power. A rocket attack by a Palestinian group, for instance, towards Israel will inevitably lead to an operation of strategic bombing by the latter against the former within a short period of time. These aerial operations might include the destruction of Palestinian buildings, killing of members of armed factions and leading resistance figures and—as the case with Gaza—consecutive strikes against Palestinian areas that can last for weeks or months. (Weizman 2012, p. 239-242)

At such stage, it is worth stressing the fact that a post-heroic approach is chiefly related to political leaders. Military commanders are generally aware of the problems linked to air power when militaries employ it against non-state actors within asymmetrical wars, though they do not have the final say when it comes to the finalization of military strategies. There is no doubt that some military commanders continue to have high expectations for air power—which will be shown in some parts of the case studies—but this cannot be regarded as a general rule by all means. It will extremely challenging to assume that air power is the most preferred military option for armies around the world, for such situation comes even in contradiction with their structure, which also includes land and naval power. Thus—for the sake of distinguishing a clear, separating line between governments and armies—policymakers are those who push for post-heroic military policies based on air power despite its flaws, which are already known in advance for them .

Secondly—concerning the issue of the limitations of air power—if unassisted by ground forces, air forces can neither defeat non-state actors nor restore territories under the control of the latter. There is no doubt that the development of air power came at an extremely quick pattern since the First World War. Military aircrafts are capable of fulfilling combat missions—being unrestricted by calculations of speed and distance—providing support for ground and naval personnel in conflicts, accomplishing tasks of reconnaissance, and transporting people and equipment. But in contradiction to the assumptions of early theorists, air power did not manage to replace the ground forces and navies by virtue of time. (Bosilca & Bunoara & Rosu & Sava 2013, p. 77-78)

Whether in terms of the literature involving the employment of air power against non-state actors, one can argue that no theory provides a claim about the ability of air power to solely enforce the targeted actors to shift their behavior or make politico-military concessions. It is true that supporters of air power usually refer to the decade-long successful experiences of resorting to air strikes by the United States in armed confrontations in Kuwait, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the so-called "precision air power" was mainly credited in these instances for supporting ground forces to achieve a quicker and more efficient military victory against their adversaries. The combination of several types of military power in a war usually

represents a dilemmatic situation for enemies. As Robert Pape puts it, "If the enemy concentrates its ground forces in large numbers to form thick and overlapping fields of fire, they become vulnerable to air raids. But if it disperses them to avoid air strikes, opposing ground forces can defeat them in detail, mopping them up with few losses." (Pape 2004, p. 119)

Such argument does not indicate that air power can be eliminated from military operations. Instead, as mentioned before, air power plays a number of roles that put ground forces in better strategic and tactical positions. Through the so-called "air mobility", large numbers of individuals and amounts of supplies are transported amidst an ongoing fighting. For example, during the war in Afghanistan in 2006, military aircrafts transported more than 1,000,000 personnel and about 90,000 pallets of cargo, which—as an alternative—could have required slower and less safe "ground-based means" to achieve the same task. Aircrafts can also perform other roles such as immediate evacuation and humanitarian and medial support for both military personnel and civilians, which can raise levels of domestic support to armies fighting against socially, ideologically or religiously-rooted non-state actors. As non-state actors are usually invisible targets that do not directly confront conventional armies, the backing of local populations to the latter eases the complexity of the military mission. Furthermore, air power can contribute to the missions of intelligence and communication that are highly "space-based" in the meantime due to technological considerations, in addition to launching campaigns against targets that ground forces might need longer periods of time to reach. (Peck 2007, p. 4-6)

On that basis, a post-heroic military policy—based on almost absolute reliance on air power—does not contribute to the fulfillment of the political objectives that led to the eruption of war. Although the so-called "asymmetrical warfare"—which will serve as a key pillar of the conceptual framework of the study—did not exist at the time he wrote his text, Clausewitz argued that "no one starts a war—or rather, no-one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it." (Mourad 2013, p. 104) The failure of air power to accomplish the "stated objectives" had taken place during the Israeli aerial operations against Hamas in December 2008. The air strikes, which ended in January 2009, had originally aimed at stopping the rocket attacks by the

Islamist movement and other Palestinian movements into Israel, as well as pressing Hamas to release Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier who was arrested by Hamas two years earlier. Concerning the outcome of the operations, the rocket attacks of Hamas, which governs Gaza, did not stop after the war. Instead, Hamas continues its frequent launching of rockets towards Israeli territories until the meantime, managing to re-gain access to weapons through rebuilding the tunnels that were destroyed during the war. Israel was obliged to launch a new aerial offensive against the Palestinian armed groups in 2014, which raises questions on the ability of air power to solely restrict the military moves of these groups. Moreover, Shalit was released in 2011—two years after the end of the war—through an Israeli-Hamas deal that stipulated the released of more than 1,000 Palestinians in return of freeing the Israeli soldier. (Mourad 2013, 104-105)

It would be challenging to argue that the Israeli air strikes were not effective at all, for it managed to destroy a number of Palestinian facilities such as tunnels, weapons storage sites, Hamas training camps, communications networks and others. However, which can be partially related to the absence of ground troops, none of the strategic aims were accomplished. An equally significant factor that led to such negative outcome involves the so-called "relational maneuver" adopted by non-state actors when encountering conventional militaries. (Maitre 2007, p. 37) Benjamin Maitre argues that :

"As war becomes less "intense", the number of fielded forces declines, thereby making targets less defined more dispersed, and harder to quantify. The chances of decisively employing superior firepower become increasingly remote, while the enemy's opportunities to exploit the structural weakness of the established authority become more pronounced. As the nature of the conflict trends away from conventional warfare, the advantage continuously shifts towards the irregular opponent, for "not even the most accurate of our precision-guided munitions can be aimed at an atmosphere of terror or at a climate of subversion." (Maitre 2007, p. 38)

Whether insurgents, guerillas or terrorists—as the naming of non-state actors usually represent an issue of debate—these actors lack adequate financial and military resources in order to directly face armies. Therefore, they avoid direct confrontations as much as possible, while striking only when possible. The traditional characteristics of these groups, such as wearing no military uniform or the hardship of distinguishing between civilian and militant elements, usually paves their way to engage in a war in an unconventional manner.(Maitre 2007, p. 37) Due to these conditions—which will

be tackled in the next section of the study—the discussion on air power and non-state actors do mostly involve preparing the social and political environment in order to earn as much local support as possible for the air strikes in order to increase chances of turning the tactical victories into political and strategic gains

Methodology

This study completely depends on qualitative tools of analysis. It includes a number of references with diverse nature in order to meet its previously stated objectives. Articles of academic journals and books are unquestionably used, especially in relation to tackling the academic and military literature on air power and its applications within operations targeting non-state actors. The study also relies on analytical pieces published by thinks tanks and research centers, for they are regularly written by academics that many of them were former military officers in general or airmen in specific. To a large extent, this situation can indicate their awareness of both the theoretical and practical aspects of the matter. Due to the nature of the topic, declassified military documents are used as well.

National security councils and defense ministries regularly publish their military doctrines and strategies on annual basis on the internet. Military academies also post many of their undergraduate and graduate projects of their officers online, in addition to the journals that are owned by armies. All of this material is certainly used for the research purposes of the study. Some of them were already used as it has been clear in the previous parts of this research projects. Since the hypotheses will be measured through three case studies, the study will include firsthand information such as reports of media outlets. The reason is that determining the success or failure of an aerial operation might require examining both the announced objectives and the hidden motives of states.

Therefore, dealing with the discourse of policymakers might be useful in that sense. The aim is not to conduct a process of discourse analysis, but rather to compare and contrast the statements of officials with the declared objectives of an aerial operation during different phases. A more important reason is related to the problem

of finding accurate information about the case studies. Two of them—those on ISIS and the Houthi militants— are ongoing while this study is being written. Hence—unlike the situation with the third case study on the Israel-Hezbollah war—it is highly challenging to find well-structured, academic articles on the developments of these conflicts. Combining news reports with the available academic material, hence, allows one to overcome such problem as much as possible. The study accordingly focuses on the first year of US and Saudi military operation on ISIS and the Houthis.

Regarding the rationale behind the selection of these three case studies, a preliminary look to them might suggest a high degree of similarity within their details, and accordingly raise questions about the need for depending on more than one case study. The three military campaigns—on the one hand—relied strongly on strategic bombing within wars that are asymmetrical by nature, which involves confrontations between conventional armies against non-state actors. On the on other hand—as it will be tackled in details throughout the next chapters—Israeli, American and Saudi officials had serious concerns about the likelihood of high death tolls among the ranks of their militaries in case of a large-scale military campaign was adopted and on basis of considerable dependence on ground troops. Therefore, in the three cases, air power became the best possible option for these governments that are fully persuaded with their decisions about going to war, while being cautious about military and civilian—especially in the Saudi and Israeli cases as they share borders with states hosting their non-state enemies—about deaths on their side.

Although the strategies of war were built on basis of the same considerations of state leaders, each of the three case studies had resulted in a different military outcome, and eventually different political implications. In the first case study about the Israeli war against Hezbollah, the former did not manage to either defeat the latter or achieve most of its other objectives, despite the employment of massive firepower embodied in air strikes. As it will be explained in the chapter on such case of an asymmetrical conflict, nothing was achieved by Israeli air strikes beyond the destruction of Hezbollah's assets such as weapons storage sites and official headquarters.

Perhaps a totally opposite end result was seen in terms of the air strikes of the US-led coalition against ISIS: all the objectives that were declared were met through the military campaign. It is crucial to point out that this case study will mainly focus on the aerial operations of the US-led coalition within the Kurdish areas. The coalition is launching air strikes against ISIS assets and personnel in both Syria and Iraq, the two countries which the latter controls many of their territories. Thus, it will be extremely problematic to analyze such case study on such a large scale, and accordingly focusing on a specific aspect of the operations will allow one to easily have a better understanding of the extent of success in terms of accomplishing the goals of the US-led military actions. For the case study of the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, one can most likely describe the situation as a deadlock, in which neither the Saudi-led Arab coalition nor the Houthi militants had managed to completely achieve their objectives. The country is almost divided between both parties of the conflict, with none of them succeeding in establishing full control over the whole territory.

Such differences normally lead one to question the effectiveness of military strategies that are influenced by post-heroic tendencies of leaders and are almost fully depending on aerial campaigns. This dissimilarity in outcomes can justify the presence of three case studies. One, therefore, can apparently depend on their details in order to reach valid and accurate generalizations about strategic bombing when used by conventional militaries against non-state group. In a more precise manner—as it serves the aim of testing the second hypothesis—it will be quite challenging to disregard another difference in terms of the deployment of ground troops within each of the three asymmetrical conflicts. There is no doubt that all case studies had witnessed an extent—which varied among them—of ground support to the air strikes. Examining the quality, types, and roles of ground troops—as well as the previous experiences of the examined conventional militaries within asymmetrical conflicts— seemingly offer a strong explanation of why aerial bombing did not work successfully in some case studies.

In the case of the Israeli war on Hezbollah, the whole 34-day campaign was based on air strikes, and the integration of the latter with ground troops had happened only during the last two days ahead of the declaration of a UN-sponsored ceasefire.

Perhaps the absence of such key component of the military equation had made victory an almost impossible end result to reach, which had actually happened. As it will be explained, Hezbollah enjoys strong social, ideological and religious connections with the Shiite locals in southern Lebanon. Many of the guerilla and rocket-launching operations against Israel could not have been achieved by the Shiite militant group if the support of the population did not exist. Hence—amid the absence of local groups that provide the ground support for the Israeli air strikes and challenge the absolute Hezbollah control on southern Lebanon—air power became ineffective by all means. It might be surprising to find the Israeli military incapable of achieving a military victory in an asymmetrical conflict, for it carries a prolonged record of being engaged in such throughout modern history. Following the 1973 war, Israel witnessed asymmetrical confrontations against non-state actors in many parts of the Middle East such as Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank. Moreover, these events were repeated many times in each of the three geographical areas, and accordingly military experience was accumulated by virtue of time, especially in terms of familiarity with the challenges that armies encounter in such types of wars, which were tackled in the conceptual framework section. (Shay 2010) Perhaps no other military forces in the world—with the exception of the United States—are credited for knowing the dynamics of asymmetrical conflicts more than the Israeli military commanders and personnel. But—as it will be explained—the post-heroic military policy of the Israeli government had resulted in an underdeveloped military strategy that created obstacles towards achieving the goals of the whole military campaign.

On the contrary, both the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthis in Yemen and US-led coalition combating ISIS in Syria were supported by ground forces— mainly non-state groups—that supposedly acts in coordination with aerial campaign. It can be argued that such military strategy had aimed at ensuring the presence of land power, even if not provided—though backed by—the conventional militaries. Despite the fact that it contradicts with the way through which Israel had handled its military campaign against Hezbollah, post-heroic theorists will be highly supportive of such approach, since the burden of casualties will most likely be carried by other parties to the conflict. But the distinction between the quality of ground troops within these two cases had resulted in contradicting politico-military outcomes.

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In Yemen, the coalition is depending on the ground support of the so-called Popular Resistance, which is composed of a series of non-state groups. These groups include the Southern Separatist Movement in the South and the tribal militias in the governorates of Taiz, Ibb, Al-Baidha, Marib and Al-Jawf such as the Islah Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. Some reports are also pointing out that the coalition is receiving the support of Sunni extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS militants in Yemen. The presence of many non-state actors fighting besides the Saudi-led coalition might give an indication that the latter is in a perfect position to end the war with a victory. Although such parties are sharing hatred and enmity towards the Houthis, they have different objectives—in addition to their cultural, religious and ideological differences— behind joining this war. Thus, it will be almost impossible to ask their leaderships to militarily coordinate with each during confrontations against the Houthis, especially that the coalition—despite its massive financial and military support to them— showed limited ability in controlling such process. (AL-Hamdani, Baron & Al-Madhaji 2016)

Due to such consideration, the coalition had frequently deployed some ground troops from the military ranks of its members, though being continuously challenged by the harsh non-urban, underdeveloped and mountainous nature of many of the Yemeni towns and cities, as well as the lack of asymmetrical experience for most of the coalition's members, as some of them—such as the Emirati troops—are witnessing their roughly first foreign, military engagement against a non-state group. Furthermore, the coalition is enforced to both fight the Houthis in an ongoing conflict and provide military training for the pro-coalition groups. But such two processes are extremely difficult to handle effectively at the same time, and accordingly air strikes do not always end up being effective. Unlike the case with most of the coalition's militaries, Saudi Arabia had previous experiences in being involved in asymmetrical conflicts. But leading a coalition, organizing, equipping and training a ground-based bloc of supportive non-state actors and coordinating between both of them for the sake of meeting the objectives of the war are too many tasks to handle for Riyadh. There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia is capable of purchasing the most advanced weapons in the world, which has actually happened in light of this war and wad embodied in many agreements with the United States over this issue.

But in no other previous incident of asymmetrical war—especially those related to Yemen—was Saudi Arabia faced with managing such complex military-logistical responsibilities, a situation that can explain the reason behind its partial success in Yemen. On the contrary, the Houthis—in addition to benefiting from the military support of ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh's loyalists in the army and his strong tribal alliances that have been in place for decades—are getting stronger with the existence of Iranian support. Iran is one of the most distinguished militaries in the world when it comes to handling asymmetrical confrontations. In 1979, the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and its Quds Force had opened room for the development and growth of a conventional military entity that is preoccupied with this type of warfare. Many Shiite non-state actors— including the Houthis—in the Middle East were created, trained and funded by the Quds Force. For examples, infiltrations into Lebanon by Quds Force officers had taken place in the past for the aim of conducting these missions with a group of Shiite militants that later became Hezbollah. The same process had been conducted by Iran with the Houthis, as large numbers of Iranian military personnel are engaged in training and equipping the Houthis in Yemen. (McCauley 2014) The presence of such military policy by Iran for long decades had given it an extensive time span to guarantee the emergence of strong Shiite groups in different parts of the region. As the Saudis are still witnessing the first phases of training the pro-coalition groups, it is extremely difficult for the latter to challenge the Houthis due to differences in quality and prolonged timeframe of military training that was received by the latter.

For the third case study—the US-led coalition's aerial campaign against ISIS in Syria—it represents one out of dozens of asymmetrical confrontations that the United States had historically launched. Most of the published military documents, manuals and doctrines on asymmetrical warfare were developed by the US army in recent years, which some of them were used in different sections of this study. It is important to mention that these documents were not in place before US military men developed them, a situation that implies the fact that it took the conventional militaries around the world long years to grasp the nature of asymmetrical wars, their obstacles and the best means of handling them. But asymmetrical confrontations in Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan—as well as others—encountered by the US army in

the past has given it an edge over other militaries that faced similar situations, especially in terms of recognizing the importance of ground support to aerial operations. For instance, the US drone strikes against Taliban militants along the borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan are traditionally backed by the Pakistani army, which—in addition to "clearing the airspace" for air strikes—engages in battles with Taliban. The backing of the Pakistani army, in fact, guarantees "nearby search-and-rescue forces to recover downed drones, satellites or assured access to commercial satellite bandwidth to transmit command-and-control data, and human intelligence assets on the ground to help identify targets." Moreover, the US-Pakistani military cooperation against Taliban ensures the protection of US air strikes from "antiaircraft guns or surface-to-air missiles." (Zenko 2013, p. 7-8) As no "host-state support" accompanies the US aerial campaign against ISIS in Syria, the ground backing provided by the Kurdish militant groups offered an exceptional opportunity for the coalition to find a strong non-state ally that hold the responsibility of the ground operations, unlike the case with other conflict-hit parts of Syria, which extremely weak and fragile non-state groups are performing the exact task, and accordingly cannot successfully defeat ISIS. As it will be explained in the chapter on such conflict, the Kurds managed to receive reinforcements from other Kurdish groups inside Syria and Iraq, enjoying the support of the local population and deep knowledge of the geographical conditions in the towns where they are clashing with ISIS. Perhaps the absence of such perfect conditions for a successful military operation had affected the aim of achieving successful outcomes in the two other cases of Yemen and Lebanon. Therefore, without resorting to such contemporary examples from the region, one can hardly formulate an understanding of the actual limitations of air-power-based military strategies regardless of a similarity in the types of such wars as asymmetrical ones and political mindsets that are concerned about the exact casualties-related issues.

Chapter 3

Israel-Hezbollah War

Overview of the Conflict

On 12 July 2006, a cross-border attack by Hezbollah militants resulted in the capturing of two soldiers and killing of roughly ten others. The Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert responded then by describing the Hezbollah operation as an "act of war", arguing that Hezbollah is "trying to undermined regional stability" and warning that Lebanon "is responsible and will bear the consequences of its actions." (McGreal 2006) Skirmishes along the borders had been witnessed between Hezbollah and Israel for long time, including those that followed the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000. But after this incident, Olmert, his cabinet and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had agreed to respond through a large-scale military campaign that included aerial, ground and naval troops. Yet, the ground invasion had started during the last days of the war, leaving the air force responsible for achieving most of the tactical and strategic goals of Israel. As it will be explained in the coming parts of this chapter, this situation has put the success of the operation and fulfillment of its objectives in question.

The problem is not related to the aerial capabilities of Israel—as it is among the most advanced among all armies across the globe—but rather linked to the erroneous understanding of asymmetrical wars and their nature by the Israeli decision-makers .When considering a military action against Hezbollah, Israel was seemingly preoccupied with reducing prospects of future confrontations against the Shiite militant group through increasing the extent of human casualties and destruction in properties and sites of the latter as much as possible. For the government and the military, they had decided to rely fully on air power during most of the war, being pushed by post-heroic motives to reduce casualties and avoid public pressures as much as they can. Perhaps this can be understood in light of the negative historical experiences of engaging in military confrontations against Hezbollah, although other causes will be introduced in the discussion. This situation poses questions on whether

the Saudi and American leaders had the exact motives and mindset when also deciding to put the largest part of the burden on their airmen in the two other wars. (Cordesman 2008)

The Israeli military launched thousands of air sorties and killed hundreds of Hezbollah fighters, causing massive destruction within the Lebanese infrastructure and Hezbollah assets. Such formula of the Israeli military campaign was apparently not enough to prevent Hezbollah from targeting Israeli military sites and civilian areas during the conflict. Such situation raised questions on whether the military action of Israel had managed to achieve any strategic gains beyond the level of destroying tactical targets of Hezbollah, especially that the conflict had ended through diplomacy, and not through a total defeat of the latter. On that basis, if Israeli ground troops—being seen only within the last few days of that war—had existed since the beginning of the operations, Israel could have expanded its military gains on the strategic level of the war, especially as not local groups in Lebanon were backing the air strikes through ground operations amid the support of the local population in southern Lebanon to Hezbollah. (Reynolds 2006).

In terms of the timeframe of this case study, this chapter will analyze events that started in 12 July with the Hezbollah attack on northern border with Israel and ended in 14 August when Israel declared that the IDF "has stopped its offensive operations in Lebanon" following the finalization of a ceasefire agreement. It is somehow challenging, meanwhile, to determine the exact, overall number of Israeli air strikes on Lebanon, which is related to the fact that Israel had declared its sorties only on daily basis in day-to-day official statements. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006) Yet, based on such statements, Israel launched about 180-200 air strikes against Hezbollah during every day of the war. Accordingly, Israel launched at least 3,500 air strikes and 7,000 by maximum.

The Israeli air forces, during this war, had launched air strikes against diverse targets, as some of them are directly related to weakening the military capabilities of Hezbollah—such as weapons storage sites—or creating logistical hardships for Hezbollah while seeking to launch attacks against Israel through targeting civilian assets. For example, Israel attacked the security command in the headquarters of

Hezbollah in the Shiite district in southern Beirut, arguing it is used "by senior Hezbollah members, including Hassan Nasrallah for meetings and for storing weaponry." Israel also attacked several bridges, tunnels, access routes part of the Beirut-Damascus highway, Hezbollah positions along the borders between Israel and Lebanon. Israel justified these tactical moves by also attempting to prevent Hezbollah from using these site as "a waystation for the transfer and shipping of weapons and infrastructure to the Hezbollah terrorist organization." The bases, buildings, command posts, "communication targets"—including Al-Manar TV station—missile launchers, sites through which Hezbollah launches its rockets on Israel territories, members and vehicles of Hezbollah were also attacked by Israeli air strikes. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006)

Postponement of Ground Invasion

It is largely argued among many academic texts that tackled this case study that the Israeli military strategy and "crisis-management" during the war against Hezbollah was impacted by the limited experience of its both top-level political and military figures. Olmert was the former mayor of Jerusalem who gained the premiership of Israel after Ariel Sharon—ex-prime minister and renowned military leader—suffered a coma. Minister of Defence Amir Peretz was the head of the Labor Party being mainly credited for his expertise in the domain of labor unions, specifically as the former chairman of Israel's Histadrut labor federation. For the Chief of Staff, General Dan Halutz, he was the first commander of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) to lead the IDF. On that basis, one can simply argue that both neither Olmert and Peretz nor Halutz were previously involved in wars on the decision-making level. Although some media or briefings by thinks tanks had argued that—at some stages of the war—there has been disagreements between Olmert and Halutz over the military strategy in the war against Hezbollah, comparing the flow of events in this war with the statements of Halutz reveals that his recommendations were hardly disregarded by the government leaders.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the major question did not involve whether or not Israel had the willingness to go to war, for Olmert—as it will be explained—had already emphasized the willingness of his government to take such step, appearing then to be unworried about a new war with Hezbollah, at least on the short run. Instead, a greater focus went to the perspective of the Israeli political and military leaders towards the whole campaign, as well as the best possible way of employing the country's highly-advanced military capabilities to achieve victory in an asymmetrical confrontation. As it will be mentioned below, in this war, Israel had attempted to avoid from combining air power with a ground invasion as long as possible, preferring to postpone such step until the final stages of the war, hoping it will not be in need to resort to such option. Olmert, in his first reaction after Hezbollah kidnapped the two soldiers, said that :

"One thing must be understood: This was an act of war without any provocation on the sovereign territory - about which there is no dispute - of the State of Israel. It is absolutely clear to the international community that Israel will respond and that it will respond in an unequivocal fashion that will cause those who started this act of war to bear a very painful and far-reaching responsibility for their actions." (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006)

In his speech at the Knesset on 17 July, Olmert declared four objectives that Israel will seek to achieve during its military operation in south Lebanon. These objectives include the return of the kidnapped soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, deployment of the Lebanese army in all southern Lebanese territories and "expulsion" of Hezbollah from these areas. In addition to stating that these steps should be followed by "a complete ceasefire", Olmert also called for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 issued on September 2004, which stipulates "disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" and "reaffirming the importance of the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory." (The Knesset 2006, UN Security Council 2004, p. 1) Both Olmert and Peretz, seeking to achieve such goals, depended on the recommendations of Halutz that focused on "intense air bombardments campaign" over southern Lebanon, an advice that is based on the little faith of Halutz in the importance of land power. (Collins 2012, p. 3) In a speech at the National Defense College in January 2001, defining victory as "achieving the strategic goal and not necessarily territory"—Halutz said that:

"Many air operations were generally implemented without a land force, based on a worldview of Western society's sensitivity to losses. A land force is not sent into action as long as there is an effective alternative. Small forces, in commando format, have been utilized. The IAF is a partner in or decides wars." (Schiff 2006)

It is possible to argue that such statement is relatively old, and that it gives no indication that if a military commander with such beliefs will turn them as the pillars of his country's military policy in case he one day became the top-ranking officer in the army. Yet, according to a statement given to the cabinet by Halutz on 12 July, Halutz argued that ground operations were a part of the original military plan, though Israel had hoped to avoid resorting to them if the international community manages to impose a ceasefire during the early phases of the conflict. Halutz said that :

"We presented an operation that would last six to eight weeks: two weeks of counter fire, fire from the air and from the ground, and another four-six weeks of a ground operation. We said that Katyushas would fall on Israel up to the last day. And nonetheless, our assessment was that fighting would stop earlier because of international intervention." (Barnea & Schiffer 2006)

Therefore, strategic bombing was the key military tool that the IDF had planned to count on during most of the 34-day war that involved challenging an enemy that enjoyed strong religious, social and political connections with the Shiite population in southern Lebanon and ability to combine tactics of guerilla warfare with conventional ones. It is crucial, at such point of time, to determine the actual causes that motivated the Israeli government to adopt an air-power-based strategy. The debate about the ability of government officials—mainly Olmert—to handle wars or formulate a military doctrine cannot be ignored by all means, but one can hardly ignore the motives of the latter in terms of achieving its objectives through air strikes. It is possible to underline the absence of organized, large-scale military drills for Israeli land troops, a situation that has been seen starting from the Palestinian intifada in 2000. Accordingly, little attention was directed towards guaranteeing a firm collaboration between land and air forces. (Lambeth 2012, p. 93-95) Speaking to The New York Times in 2009, a senior Israeli military officer said that the post-Hezbollah war saw a "big improvement" in terms of coordination between ground and air forces. This matter had taken the form of "clear instructions to military units and in the way fresh intelligence is communicated to soldiers. The reserves have had far more training in combat tactics aimed at Gaza, have better equipment and were called up

early." He added that military commanders are no longer having "their instructions changed seven times a day", and the "home front defense against rockets has been improved and there has been a much stronger effort to control the message and mask Israeli intentions." (Erlanger 2009)

Despite the importance of such matter, it cannot be separated from the traditional Israeli concern about military casualties. It is true that Halutz—based on the above-mentioned quote—was aware of the fact that Israel will not manage to stop the rockets of Hezbollah throughout the several phases of the conflict, but attempting to reduce rates of casualties has been a key concern for the IDF and the government. Halutz, after the war, was quoted as saying that "when I am taking decisions in war, I take into consideration the Israeli mothers and casualties." According to a media report by The Jerusalem Post—in which an Israeli military officer was interviewed— fear of casualties "was a constant theme throughout the Lebanon conflict, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby fear of casualties prolonged the decision to send in the ground forces that would end the war, and more casualties mounted." In this report, Brigadier general Gal Hirsch pointed out "of course professionally it is our value to minimize our casualties and sure that's what I will do… I would do my best to save lives." (Frantzman 2016)

Perhaps such concern about reducing the number of casualties among the ranks of the IDF is seemingly a traditional consideration for Israeli decision-makers. For example, the director of production for Israeli military intelligence stated that "Hezbollah forces may well penetrate the border and fight within northern Israel" in case of future confrontations between both sides. (White 2015) As a matter of fact, this matter should be examined in light of the previous experiences of asymmetrical wars for Israel against Hezbollah in Lebanon. From 1982 until 2000—the roughly twenty-year period of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon—the IDF lost more 600 military personnel. According to some estimates, this number is close to the casualty rates of Israel during the 1967 war. (Collins 2012, p. 11)

By the end of the war on 14 August 2006, 153 Israelis were killed, including 36 civilians—due to Hezbollah rockets that were launched against Israeli territories— and 119 IDF soldiers. Hence, when comparing the 600 deaths to 153, it becomes clear

that postponing the ground invasion until later stages of the war by Israel had actually resulted in lesser casualties than those seen during the days of its occupation to Lebanon. On the side of Hezbollah, the militant groups said 250 of its members were killed, although Israel said it killed 600 Hezbollah members. According to UN estimates, 500 Hezbollah militants were killed, in addition to the injury of 1500 others. About 1200 Lebanese civilians lost their lives and more than 4000 suffered injuries. (Cohen-Almagor & Haleva-Amir 2008, p. 28-29)

As a matter of fact, one can argue that the asymmetrical experiences of Israeli in the Lebanese territories throughout the past decades had a great impact in formulating the post-heroic tendencies of Olmert's government and its concern about casualties. The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 had even come one month before the announced date, being a key pillar of the electoral campaign of then Premier Ehud Barak, and Hezbollah normally gives credit to itself for this outcome. The post-Israeli withdrawal period saw the expansion of Hezbollah over the territories of south Lebanon, continuing to enjoy the support of the local population and being the only political group in the country that did not engage in a process of disarmament after the end of the civil war. (Tur 2007, p. 111-112) The development of the military capabilities of Hezbollah within roughly the last two decades had apparently caused a degree of concern to the Israelis about encountering a similar experience in 2006. On that basis, a war with a limited time span and based fundamentally on operations of strategic bombing can serve as the most suitable military plan—in light of their concern about casualties within the IDF ranks— in a new war, at least from the standpoint of Olmert and his military commanders.

Perhaps it is vital to explain some of the asymmetrical challenges that Israel had to deal with during its occupation of Lebanon, which will certainly rise again in case of another massive, ground invasion in 2006. Before Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, it suffered from attacks along the borders that were conducted by members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and targeted Israeli civilian areas living in northern Israeli cities. Areas such as Moshav Avivim, Kiryat Shmona and Kibbutz Misgav Am saw attacks on settlements, schools and other assets, as well as the kidnapping of Israeli citizens as it has been the case in several operations. The PLO, moreover, launched rockets against Israeli territories, for they managed to possess

artillery and tanks by the late 1970s. Seeking to "remove this threat", Israel invaded Lebanon and took control of areas that start with southern Lebanese areas and ends with the capital Beirut itself. Such military campaign succeeded eventually in ending the presence of the PLO in Lebanon, which happened through the creation of the so-called "security zone." For advocates of the security zone—such as cabinet ministers Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon, and Moshe Arens—it served as an "insulation layer" between Israel and the non-Christian communities in Lebanon, ensure no guerilla attacks can reach Israeli cities located near the Lebanese borders, and preventing anti-Israeli groups from using southern Lebanese areas as an "arsenal and training ground." (Luft 2000) To a great extent, the security zone—with the support of the South Lebanese Army (SLA) militia that is financed, controlled and trained by Israel—led to stability in the security conditions in northern Israel. Israelis were able to move safely from one place to another throughout the whole day, and the government managed to attract thousands of tourists on annual basis to the border-located settlements, which paved the way for economic development in these areas. (Luft 2000)

Yet, the emergence of Hezbollah raised many questions on the degree of success reached through the imposition of a security zone that separates anti-Israeli Lebanese groups from Israel through ground troops. Hezbollah, as a matter of fact, was formed after the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 1982. Due to the conditions of the civil war, the Shiites—as well as other non-Shiite Lebanese people—in the south suffered from financial, social and political hardships, including problems related to displacement and deteriorated living conditions. If not displaced, they were enforced to leave their neighborhoods and move to Beirut, or even areas that are as much as near to it. (Nakhleh 2007, p. 2-5)

A major difference between the PLO and Hezbollah was the ability of the latter to attract the support of the population, which—as it has been discussed in the conceptual framework of the study—provided them with the locals in its war against Israel. It is true that its success in ending tensions and fighting with the other Shiite Amal group and avoiding a clash with the Lebanese army had allowed Hezbollah to focus on the issue of "resistance." But the withdrawal of Israeli from Lebanon could not have happened unless the Hezbollah guerilla operations were supported by Shiite

peoples in southern Lebanese towns and cities. Benefiting from the Iranian financial support, Hezbollah provided social services that the Lebanese government was too weak and poor to provide in times of civil war. As Iver Gabrielsen puts it:

"The provision of social services played a crucial role for Hezbollah in winning the hearts and minds of the Lebanese Shiite population. Beirut's southern suburbs had been referred to as the belt of misery: Sewage flooded the streets, garbage had not been picked up in years, electricity was considered a luxury, and there was no running water. Filling the vacuum left by the Lebanese state, Hezbollah started to build up a social welfare structure for the Shiites. These efforts were largely financed by Iran, with the former secretary general Tufayli claiming that denying financial aid from Iran was like 'denying that the sun gives light to the earth." (Gabrielsen 2013, p. 2)

By 2000, roughly 400,000 people were benefiting from the healthcare services provided by Hezbollah, and the southern suburbs of Beirut had somehow overcome problems of poverty, although having an average wage of the suburbs that is one fifth to one sixth of that of the general Lebanese one. Hezbollah also was responsible for the reconstruction of houses that Israeli attacks led to their destruction, which reached roughly 18,000 houses. With Lebanese people that are Shiites—aside from non-Shiite communities that were included in the Hezbollah network of services— it was almost impossible for any other Shiite group to compete Hezbollah over getting their political or military backing. (Gabrielsen 2013, p. 2)

On the military level, these actions made it harder for Israel to guarantee the continuity of the effectiveness of the security zone, for the war in Lebanon does not any longer mean confronting Palestinian militants who are actually foreigners for the Lebanese people. The rise of Hezbollah with few thousand fighters and a supportive population indicated that the objectives are now doubled: neutralizing the Shiite population—which is almost impossible to achieve in light of the benefits provided by Hezbollah—and fighting a militia that is backed by Iran through all means. US Army Captain Daniel Isaac Helmer says that Hezbollah's suicide assaults on the Israeli military gave way to:

"sophisticated, coordinated, and timed attacks as [Hezbollah] became more and more effective." Small, quick ambushes became a common, and devastatingly effective, tactic. Hezbollah drafted and disseminated a list of thirteen principles of warfare encapsulating many of the tactics made famous by Mao and other classic guerillas. One principle cautions fighters to "avoid the strong and attack the weak," while others emphasize that "surprise is essential to success" and urge fighters to hit hard and then "slip away like smoke before the enemy can drive home his advantage." These principles served as their new tactical model." (Burdette 2014)

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Until the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, the suicide attacks of Hezbollah against Israeli troops had increased with more than 5000 percent each year, having an average of four attacks on daily basis. The late years of the Israeli occupation saw fear of both its soldiers and those of the SLA to move outside their military basis due to "fear that any object, rock, bush or tree might explode next to them." This situation increased the complexity of finding and capturing militants of Hezbollah. As an alternative, Israel launched massive arrest campaigns against people whom the former believes are providing support for Hezbollah, though such approach had neither ended local support for the Shiite group nor prevented it from launching new attacks on Israeli troops. In the last phases of the Israeli military presence in Lebanon, the so-called "roadside bomb threat" of Hezbollah had reached high levels of competency and sophistication that it became a security threat for not only the Israeli military personnel, but also for their commanders. One of those bombs killed Brigadier General Erez Gerstein, a senior Israeli military commander who was then serving in Lebanon. Furthermore, the flow of events during the war proved that even the SLA could not succeed in protecting itself from the bombs of Hezbollah. Members and leaders of the Christian militant group were also targeted, as it has been the case with their deputy leader Aql Hashim. For SLA personnel who are willing to defect from the group or work as spies for Hezbollah, only those were safe from the attacks of Hezbollah. (Burdette 2014)

The apparent weakness of the sole domestic supporter for Israel and the inability of their bilateral military cooperation to stop the guerilla moves of Hezbollah led to protests against the government due to the rising death toll, which was close to 1000 military personnel during the whole war, though most of the casualties came after Hezbollah rose to the politico-military surface in Lebanon. The protests were calling for accelerating a military withdrawal from Lebanon. (Luft 2000) Schmuel Gordon, former Israeli fighter pilot and commander, argued that Hezbollah aimed at "what Israeli society is most sensitive to- the loss of human life. Hezbollah has explicitly discussed their awareness of Israeli casualty sensitivity and its potential as a lever for undermining support for the war. Hezbollah official Nabil Qawk observed "the more Israelis we kill, the more disputes we'll be sowing among them." (Burdette 2014)

Meanwhile—a problem that Israel also failed to solve its 2006 war against Hezbollah—the latter launched short and medium-range rockets and mortar attacks against Israeli civilian areas. These type of operations enforced Israeli civilians to spend long days in shelters, for it represented the only possible option for preventing loss of lives. Resorting to shelters had coincided with the failure of huge military operations such as the Operation Accountability in 1993 and the Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996 to effectively search and find these rockets, for Hezbollah managed to hide them through taking advantage of the mountainous geographical nature of Lebanon. It is worth mentioning that the rockets of Hezbollah had mostly hit empty lands in Israel, leading to the death of only seven people from 1985 until 2000. But since the major objective behind deploying ground troops in Lebanon had been protecting the Israeli northern cities, the rocket-launching operations of Hezbollah raised questions on the efficiency of the security zone to actually maintain its effectiveness amid the emergence of a highly trained and equipped non-state group as Hezbollah. (Luft 2000)

The harsh Israeli experience during the 1980s and 1990s in Lebanon had undoubtedly affected the willingness of Olmert to use the same old strategy of using land power massively against Hezbollah in 2006. But—as it will be explained—the 2006 war reflected a series of tasks that falls beyond the capacity of air power to achieve, a situation that was reflected in the discourse of cabinet and Knesset members after its end. The academic texts tackling the Israeli war on Lebanon can hardly manage to prove the presence of debates within the Israeli governmental and parliamentary spheres over the way Olmert had handled this military action. Perhaps this situation is related to the fact that the Israeli government and military had severely fought to hide any disagreements on the issue, specifically when the conflict was taking place or during the short period before the beginning of using force in Lebanon. However, after the end of the war, such state of silence about the internal debates about the war on the political level was apparently reversed to a great extent, especially after the issuance of the Winograd report in May 2007, which some of its part on critiquing the management and decisions of the war by the Israeli government will be included in the coming parts of this chapter and the final chapter. At the beginning of an extraordinary cabinet session, Olmert—after the issuance of the

report—stated that "to all those who are in haste in order to take advantage of the report for political profit, I tell them not to be hasty." (BBC 2007)

As a matter of fact, this statement came in response to severe criticisms that Olmert faced from both his own party and from opposition parties in the Knesset, as well as declining popularity rates for the government. A poll held by the *Maariv* daily newspaper estimated that about 73 percent of the Israelis wanted Olmert to resign, while a more optimistic poll by *Yediot Aharanot* had put the number at 65 percent. On a partisan level, Avigdor Yitzhaki—the chairman and co-founder of Olmert's Kadima party—called the prime minister to resign in order to give room for Kadima "to continue his mandate." Yitzhaki said that: "the Kadima party must choose its chief for the three years that remain for the (current) legislature…A leader can only lead a public where he has, firstly, legitimacy and its confidence. The prime minister should act responsibly and resign to allow a new coalition to be formed by Kadima." Cabinet minister Eitan Cabel—member of the Labour Party, which was the key coalition partner of Kadima under Olmert's leadership—said that he "cannot sit in a government headed" by the latter." (BBC 2007) Similar calls for resignation were made by the right-wing opposition Likud. As Yisrael Katz—member of the Likud— said, "the chief of staff's resignation officially confirms the failure of the Lebanon war and compels the prime minister and the defence minister to stop holding on to their positions and resign from their posts." (BBC 2007)

Under all conditions, one can confidently expect the opposition to criticize the policies and acts of the political force in power, at least in the majority of the situations. But a major question involves whether or not Kadima had a similar position as that of Olmert in terms of both going to war and the formula of the military strategy that was followed by the military. It is true that—especially in light of the above-mentioned statement of Kadima's co-founder—that some leading figures of the party were not satisfied with the war decision. Yet, it is hard to determine whether they were originally persuaded—at least to some extent—with the military strategy for war against Hezbollah that was adopted by Olmert and Halutz, or that a similar anti-Olmert would have been adopted by them in case they the political-military outcome of the conflict was satisfying. One can also hardly decide whether the post-war Kadima opposition to Olmert was motivated by maintain their chances in achieving

victory in future elections or based on real rejection of the manner through which the confrontations against Hezbollah were handled. But a safer answer—based on the available data—that Kadima party was divided over the war in Lebanon, as some of its ranks were supporting the decision of Olmert to go to war against Hezbollah, while others had a totally different position. One of those Kadima figures that opposed Olmert over this matter was Tzipi, his foreign minister who later replaced both as party leader and prime minister following a corruption scandal. (The Guardian 2008)

According to a report by the *Spiegel Online*, Livni "expressed her doubts about the planning of the war: she voted against the bombardment of southern Beirut and objected to the ground invasion towards the end of the conflict." (Schult 2007) Livni believed that Israel "should not start a war that it is ill-prepared to launch, successfully prosecute or conclude." (Makovsky & White 2006, p. 13) Yet, in addition to ignoring here viewpoint, the report mentioned that Olmert had decided to "even forbade her [Livni] from attending the deliberations of the United Nations Security Council in New York", which reflects the extent of divisions inside the ruling part in Israel during this period. After the Winograd report was issued, Livni told reporters that "it's nothing personal between us, the prime minister and me." Nevertheless, when asked on her then expected visit to Germany, Livni confirmed that it will take place if "Ehud Olmert hasn't fired me by then." (Schult 2007)

The Military Outcome of the War

A deeper examination of the nature of the Israeli goals in this war leads one to conclude that the Israeli decision-makers had built expectations that are far beyond the capacity of air power to achieve. As the current IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot—referring to the word of a senior IDF official— puts it, the "difference between the next war and 2006 will be the difference between an operation and a war. 2006 was an operation, and we didn't use all of our power. Next time it won't just be planes flying around…We will use all of our power to destroy Hezbollah militarily." (The Tower 2006) Although the war had ended with international diplomatic deal— just as the government and the IDF had hoped—Israel did not manage to coerce Hezbollah to release Goldwasser and Regev. Through a diplomatic settlement, the

German intelligence mediated a deal between Hezbollah and Israel that includes the release of both soldiers in return of handing over five Lebanese people who are imprisoned in Israel. Israel, in stricter terms, received the "dead bodies" of the two soldiers following weeks of uncertainty about whether or not they are still alive. (Putz & Stark 2008)

In fact, seizing—as well as refusing to release—the Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah had given strength to the Shiite militia and its leader Hassan Nasrallah, while allowing them to withstand firepower until the final stages of the war, especially amid their ability to cause a high degree of harm to both Israeli troops and civilian areas that are close to the borders. As days and weeks passed without succeeding to locate and free Goldwasser and Regev, Olmert faced increasing domestic—as well as international—pressures to end the war and accept a ceasefire: diplomacy seemingly became the only possibly way for bringing the soldiers back to Israel. Regarding the objective of putting Lebanese forces in the southern areas of the country, it represents an issue of success for the Israeli military campaign.

The so-called United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were deployed between the Litani river in the north and the Blue Line—the point from which the IDF withdrawal had taken place—after the end of the war. The UNIFIL regularly conducts a series of mission such as "day and night-time patrols, establishment of observation points, monitoring of the Blue Line, and carrying out clearance of unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions." Furthermore, its personnel work in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) which deployed 15,000 troops in south Lebanon. The aim beyond this mission is to ensure the "establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons, other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL." (UNIFIL 2016)

Nevertheless, neither the war nor the post-war arrangements had managed to disarm Hezbollah or exclude its troops from the southern parts of Lebanon. Although—as it will be mentioned below—a huge part of the Hezbollah assets and militants were destroyed by the Israeli bombardment, it remained in place and managed to develop itself against throughout the following years. It is true that no

new confrontations between Hezbollah and Israel were seen in the aftermath of the 2006 conflict, but the nature of Hezbollah as a non-state actor, as well as the IDF air-power-based military plans during the war had reduced the chances of achieving such objective .

For example, media reports say that the weapons arsenal of Hezbollah had grown from 33,000 rockets and missiles ahead of the 2006 war to roughly 150,000 after its end, increasing the number of its members from "few thousand members" in 2006 to more than 20,000 in the aftermath of the conflict. Hezbollah also benefited from the support of the Iranian-backed regime of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, as the latter represents the "weapons supply line" for the militant group. The Syrian regime was responsible for training the Hezbollah militants and making them familiar with Russian military planning. Due to the presence of Shiite, pro-Iran groups in Yemen and Iraq, Hezbollah militants are also receiving training in these countries. In addition to the financial and military backing it receives from Iran, Hezbollah is also reportedly involved in activities of drug trafficking and money laundering in an attempt to survive the impact of international sanctions imposed by Western states. (Estatie 2016)

It is true that no new confrontations between Hezbollah and Israel were not seen in the aftermath of the 2006 conflict, but the nature of Hezbollah as a non-state actor, as well as the IDF air-power-based military plans during the war had reduced the chances of achieving such objective. Perhaps these conditions had pushed some media reports to questions whether or not the Israeli government was actually planning to fully destroy Hezbollah. For supporters of such scenario, claiming that Israel seeks to completely defeat Hezbollah represented only an attempt by Olmert to gather as much public support for the war as possible ahead of launching it, for to give a strong justification for his hidden plans. For instance, a report by the leftist-leaning *Haaretz* newspaper—published in August 2014—claimed that Israel's Operation Protective Edge against Hamas in Gaza Strip that occurred on the same year "saw many weapons systems and other technology that had been under development since the time of the Second Lebanon War in 2006 enter the field of battle, for instance a unique communications system designed to link air, sea and ground forces to the same infrastructure." The same report argued that Israel—in its contemporary, asymmetrical

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wars against non-state groups in the Middle East—focuses generally on determining the points of weakness that the IDF is suffering from, referring to the example of tunnels in Gaza wars and predicting that "there will now be an accelerated process of development for that." Nevertheless, Major General Issac Yisrael—a former director of the Israeli army's Research and Development Directorate—argued that the connection between business interests and wars is not a general rule. He used the example of the Iron Dome—being developed during the Israeli wars against Gaza—as a military technology that "there's no demand for it in the world." (Sadeh 2014)

Yet, the flow of events during this war showed that Israel had committed strategical mistakes that prevented it from turning its tactical gains into a favorable political outcome. By the end of the war, it appeared that Hezbollah was quite satisfied with the final outcome it reached, an impression that did not seem to exist on the Israeli side. Nasrallah described the war as a "divine victory." Nasrallah claims that "victory over Israel in the 2006 war hanged the balance of power in the region. The regime in Tel Aviv was humiliated during the days of the war and senior officials in Israel have admitted it." (The Times of Israel 2015) It is difficult to accept such argument on full basis, especially that the IDF managed to secure a number of tactical victories throughout the days of the conflict. But—as it has been the case with many asymmetrical wars involving conventional militaries fighting against non-state groups—it failed to translate those achievements into political and strategic gains. This leaves the way through which Israel handled the crisis both politically and militarily in question. Chiefly due to the absence of ground forces, Hezbollah managed to launch thousands of rockets against Israeli territories, a situation that led Israel to favour the option of a ceasefire within a month of combat. It is certainly hard to determine the length of the conflict that Israeli political and military commanders were planning to see. But a ground invasion that involves the control of the Israeli troops on south Lebanon—at least for a short period ahead of the imposition of a ceasefire—could have certainly increased their opportunities in stopping the Hezbollah rockets, and consequently expand both the length of the war and military achievements. As no local troops to back the Israeli military campaign on the ground and amid a pro-Hezbollah population near the borders, the presence of deploying land troops becomes a top military priority. This argument was even backed by the

Winograd Commission Report in Israel, which stated that the IDF started a war without achieving a military victory, describing it as a "serious missed opportunity." The report—although being described by Olmert as "harsh and grave"—pointed out that the ground offensive failed to become effective and was incomplete as it started just few days ahead of the UN-imposed ceasefire. The report argues that :

"A semi-military organization [Hezbollah] of a few thousand men resisted, for a few weeks, the strongest army in the Middle East, which enjoyed full air superiority and size and technology advantages. The barrage of rockets aimed at Israel's civilian population lasted throughout the war, and the IDF did not provide an effective response to it. The fabric of life under fire was seriously disrupted, and many civilians either left their home temporarily or spent their time in shelters." (The New York Times 2008)

The first days of the war showed that Israel was depending on the so-called standoff attacks by the IAF airmen—as well as attacking Hezbollah sites through helicopters—being supported by artillery and M270 Multiple-Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS). Such massive amount of firepower was directed towards Hezbollah sites in south of the Litani river. Israel also counted on "hit-and-run" attacks by the Israeli special operations forces in an attempt to compensate the absence of ground forces during most stages of the campaign. The early stages of the operation saw Israel succeeding to destroy Hezbollah sites located throughout the Israeli-Lebanese borders. The morning of 13 July witnessed also the destruction of Hezbollah's locations used for storing medium-range rockets. Most importantly, Israel imposed a blockade on Lebanon by land, sea and air (Lambeth 2012, p. 85-87)

One day later, the Israeli airmen also bombed the Hezbollah headquarters and offices in southern areas of the Lebanese capital Beirut, an area which is considered as a stronghold for the Shiite group. However, neither Nasrallah nor the highest ranking figures in Hezbollah were affected by these operations, for its members are most likely hiding in underground shelters that their locations cannot be easily determined. The airport road—which passes through southern Beirut—was also bombed, as well as two bridges and a stadium in the same area. The Israeli military argued that bombing the airport was related to the fact that it is "a transfer point for weapons and supplies to Hezbollah." The IDF also attacked the broadcast tower of Al-Manar television station, arguing that Hezbollah uses it to "incite and recruit activists." The rationale of the Israeli military commanders in attacking such diverse targets—though

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some of them might not necessarily harm Hezbollah, but rather harm civilians—was to weaken the "capability of the Hezbollah to do what they are doing." (CNN 2006)

Nonetheless, it is important to mention that the rockets of Hezbollah represented a key pillar of the equation, posing a threat to both Israeli troops and civilians living in border areas. This argument does not imply the presence of shortcomings within the Israeli air capabilities, but rather highlights the usefulness of the military moves of Hezbollah, which could have been only stopped—or at least hindered—if Israel had decided to largely deploy ground forces. As a major concern for Israel, the country encountered serious challenges in terms of stopping Hezbollah from launching hundreds of rockets towards northern cities and towns in Israel on daily basis. As a result, about a million of Israeli citizens were obliged to remain in shelters or even face temporary displacement from the areas in which they live in. Hezbollah, at the time of the war, had an estimated number of 13,000 rockets, which represents the only military option through which it can respond to the Israeli aerial operations. By virtue of time, it became clear that destroying the buildings, headquarters and weapons storage sites of Hezbollah was not enough to affect the military capabilities of Hezbollah. (Byford 2010, p. 4)

The reason for this dilemma involves the ability of Hezbollah to function on an underground basis: they can hide their top-level officials, money, and weapons, benefiting from the support of the Shiite population across Lebanon. Hezbollah possess short-range missiles such as Shahins and Katyusha, medium-range missiles—which can reach targets within range of 75 kilometers—and long-range ones such as Scud and Zelzal 2s that are capable of attacking Tel Aviv from southern Lebanon. The IAF airmen were capable of destroying the medium and long-range missiles since the second day of the war. But the major dilemma remained with the short-range missiles, as they are smaller in size, moveable and used on a "shoot and scoot" basis. Hezbollah militants launched them from civilian buildings—such as residential buildings or schools—and then leave their positions as soon as possible. As it is traditionally the case with the Israeli operations in Gaza, responding to militant attacks—involving short-range missiles—by Israel airmen usually result in civilian deaths. (Byford 2010, p. 4-5) Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the rockets of Hezbollah had been accompanied with problems of precision. Hezbollah did not have the capacity to

regulate or create a process of coordination among rockets that are fired from different locations. The outcome, therefore, depended on the frequency of firing rockets, for the more they are used, the more likely Hezbollah had a chance in hitting Israeli targets. In that sense, one can possibly argue that the rockets of Hezbollah can be also credited for carrying a politico-psychological impact on the Israeli side. (Makovsky & White 2006, p. 38)

Chapter 4

Saudi-led Coalition & Intervention in Yemen

Overview of the Conflict

In September 2014, the Houthis managed to take control of the Yemeni capital Sanaa and capture several areas inside and near Aden within a period of roughly six months. The Shiite, pro-Iran group had also given little attention to the political settlements proposed by the Western-backed President Abderrabo Mansour Hadi who fled to Aden and later to Saudi Arabia after the Houthi militants seized different parts of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa. On March 2015, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of Arab states that began launching air strikes on Yemen. According to Saudi statements, Saudi Arabian and Arab air forces launch approximately 80 air strikes on daily basis since the beginning of the operations in March 2015, targeting Houthi-controlled sites and attempting to prevent a Houthi access to military equipment through blocking territorial borders and waterways. Air strikes had also targeted the areas controlled by ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh, the major ally of the Houthis in this conflict. (Yemen Journal 2015, Al-Arabiya 2015)

After one year of the Saudi-led military campaign—which represents the timeframe for this case study—it seems that the coalition did not manage to restore full control over Yemen. The coalition—depending on air power and ground support by pro-Hadi troops, as well as ground invasions by Gulf troops that occurs on frequent basis—had succeeded in regaining control over most of Aden. However, in other areas such as Taiz in the South or Marib, fighting continued without no concrete results, leaving these areas under the control of the Houthis and Saleh troops.

Since the troops of Hadi had originally failed to stop the plans of the Houthis to gradually take control of different Yemeni governorates, it is important to examine their capacity on providing the Saudi-led coalition—which is chiefly counting on its aerial capabilities—with opportunities to achieve victory in this war. Perhaps one can argue that the return of Hadi to Aden last November embodies the sole achievement for the aerial operations, which opened room for deployment of coalition and Hadi

troops in the city. (BBC 2015) But the inability of air power to end the frequent attacks by the Houthis in Aden, regain control over other areas of the country and reduce high death rates among the ranks of the coalition are issues that should be put in consideration while analyzing this case study. Moreover, the extent of local support to the Arab troops—as well as Hadi himself—is a matter of debate, for not all socio-political groups do apparently share the same position on this aspect. (Riedel 2015)

Furthermore, due to the borders shared between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the war witnessed continuous missile attacks by the Houthi-Saleh bloc against Saudi Arabian territories, a situation that caused casualties among Saudi military personnel and civilians, though the numbers are not always openly declared. In the meantime, as it will be explained, the conflict witnessed high rates of collateral damage and civilian casualties, for the Houthi-Saleh forces are allied with a number of local tribes and groups across Yemen that provided them with the backing of the population in many parts of the country. In light of such context, this chapter will analyze the political and military outcome of the conflict, the effectiveness of the air-power-based campaign by the coalition and the political motives of the Saudi leadership that formed the shape and extent of intervention in Yemen.

In terms of the timeframe of this case study, this chapter will examine the air strikes of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen from its beginning in 26 March 2015 until March 2016. As it has been stated in earlier parts of this study, the war is still taking place while this study is being written. Focusing on a specific time framework represents an attempt to deal with such complexity, especially that military and political developments do not stop and the year-long timespan is apparently—as it will be discussed in the coming parts of the chapter—sufficient to evaluate the outcome aerial attacks within a certain conflict.

Pertaining the aggregate number of air strikes by the coalition in the war in Yemen—as it will be discussed in this chapter—there was no constant number of air strikes directed against the Houthi-Saleh bloc on daily basis. However, based on calculations of 300 air strikes—which is the maximum number of sorties taking place on one day—one can conclude that the coalition had conducted more than 3,000 air strikes during the first year of the conflict. These air strikes—as it has been the case

with the Israeli aerial attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon—had targeted diverse positions in Yemen. However, a major problem for these air strikes—which will be tackled in this chapter—involves high civilian casualties. UN estimates suggest that more than 5,000 Yemeni civilians were killed because of the aerial sorties. This outcome had been mainly reached due to inaccurate intelligence information about the exact locations of Houthi personnel. For example, on 15 September 2015, about 20 Yemeni people were killed in air strikes that targeted two houses in Ans in Dhamar province, for it was believed that the they were" belonged to a supporter of the Houthi group." (Reuters 2015) But, aside from the problem of civilian casualties, the Saudi-led air strikes had hit numerous targets with the aim of "hitting on short notice" basis, for to make it harder for the Houthis to rely effectively on its guerrilla warfare techniques. These targets included, runways, bridges, gas stations, camps, Houthi-Saleh-occupied military bases weapons storage sites, commercial, residential and governmental buildings. Even schools, hospitals and mosques were aerially attacked by the coalition, as the latter feared that the Houthi-Saleh bloc could have used them for war-related purposes such as launching missiles on Saudi territories or Saudi-led coalition ground troops and military assets. (Knights 2016)

Coalition-Related Considerations & Domestic Pressures

Following the eruption of the so-called "Houthi rebellion" in June 2004, former president Saleh and his military were engaged in a long conflict against the Houthis that lasted until 2010. Such conflict had examined high levels of intensity and several attempts of external mediation—mainly by Gulf states—for the sake of finalizing a long-lasting ceasefire. The Houthis were then seeking to gain autonomous rights from the central government of Saleh. Fighting increased in 2007 after the killing of the Houthi leader Hussein Al-Houthi and appointment of Abdel Malek Al-Houthi as the new leader. One year later, although a ceasefire has been in place, clashes took place again before Qatar had succeeded in brokering a truce in 2007. The conflict between the Houthis and Saleh's troops resulted in the death of roughly 30,000 people—including military personnel, civilians and Houthis members—in addition to the displacement of 150,000 persons. The ongoing Saudi-led intervention in Yemen

cannot be considered as the first incident of its kind, for Saudi Arabia has always played significant political and military roles in Yemen for long decades. (Henderson 2009, p. 1-2, Salmoni 2010, p. 1-2)

Perhaps the six-year period of fighting between Yemeni government troops and the Houthis was one example for such Saudi military policy, as Saudi troops provided military support for the former on frequent basis. In fact, the rebellion was originally based in the northwestern governorate of Saada, which is geographically near the Saudi borders. It was not difficult, hence, for the Saudi military to conduct quick military campaigns—whether through air or land power—against the Houthis, especially amid coordination with the military forces of Yemen. As the Houthis were preoccupied with fighting against the Yemeni military, they were keen—as much as possible—to avoid getting involved in a second military confrontation against the Saudis, especially amid a Saudi "zero tolerance for intruders [Houthis]" that was adopted by King Abdullah towards them. For instance, in 2008, the Saudi military launched an attack against the Houthis using F-15 and Tornado ground-attack aircraft against Houthis sites after they crossed the borders and killed a number of Saudi civilians. On that basis, the short time span of confrontations against the Houthis, as well as being restricted to border areas, left the Saudi leadership with little concerns about a high levels of casualties among its military personnel or citizens during this period. (Henderson 2009, p. 1-2, Salmoni 2010, p. 1-2) Yet, in regards to the ongoing Saudi-Houthi, conflict, a post-heroic approach adopted by Riyadh—based on preferring air power over other military options through a multilateral action embodied in the formation of a coalition—was related to domestic politics in Saudi Arabia, post-uprising arrangements in Yemen as well as an attempt to reach a common ground among states that showed readiness to join the war.

On the one hand, it is worth mentioning that the Saudi case study is—by all means—different from the other two case studies in the study. This situation is related to the absence of regular, comprehensive announcements that cover key issues related to the war such as the number of casualties, briefings on meetings among members of the coalition, motives of state leaders that led them to determine the shape of their military strategies and others. Hence, it is hard to depend solely on statements of Saudi officials—or even politicians and military commanders of other members of the

coalition—for the sake of understanding the details of specific events related to developments of any politico-military actions in general.

Nevertheless, based on some indicators that will be discussed, one can notice a state of inconsistency among the diverse perspectives of coalition's members, specifically in terms of the nature of the military action that will be used in Yemen. The flow of events during this conflict proved that Saudi Arabia had decided to rely mostly on air power during the early phases of the conflict in an attempt to achieve a balance between the dissimilar views of all members of the coalition, as some of them are apparently enthusiastic about deploying ground troops, while others do not completely share the same stance. It is true that most—if not all—armies in the coalition had sent ground forces in this war, as well as sharing a similar objective, which involves stopping the spread of Houthi-Saleh control over the Yemeni state and putting Hadi back in power. Moreover, in April 2015, Saudi Arabia declared the end of the initial campaign—that is air power-based—and the beginning of a new one that involves higher levels of dependence on ground and naval elements. Yet, disagreements had been in place over the best possible military means through which the war will be handled, a situation that increased with the rise in numbers of military casualties, especially amid the inability of air strikes to solely lead to an absolute defeat of the Houthis and Saleh's force. Air power, on that basis, can serve as the best possible means through which the coalition can remain coherent, while guaranteeing the presence of ground troops to combat the Houthi-Saleh bloc.

As it will be mentioned in later parts of this chapter, the issue of casualties among the ranks of the coalition has been a serious matter within such asymmetrical conflict. About, in September 2015, 45 soldiers from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were killed after a Houthi, Soviet-era Tochka missile hit a weapons storage depot near their position in Maarib province, becoming—according to news reports— "the country's highest number of military casualties" since the establishment of the state in 1971. On the same day, five Bahraini soldiers were killed in southern Saudi Arabia as they were deployed to protect the Saudi borders from Houthi-Saleh attacks. (Al-Jazeera 2015)

By November, news reports unveiled that the UAE had started to decrease the number of its ground forces in Yemen. In June 2016, the UAE declared that the "war is over for its troops in Yemen", though stating that it might maintain its "counterterrorism operations." Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi's crown prince and deputy supreme commander of the UAE armed forces—which lost about 100 soldiers in this war—said on Twitter that "our standpoint today is clear: war is over for our troops; we're monitoring political arrangements, empowering Yemenis in liberated areas." (Al-Jazeera 2016) Moreover, the Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash gave a statement that showed that war was not originally the major preference for his country at the beginning of the crisis, believing that stopping the bloodshed among the ranks of the UAE military is a necessity amid uncertainty about the end of the war—a situation that can reflect the reason behind the coalition's acceptance to initially depend on air power—instead of a large-scale campaign that is massively backed by ground forces—in the Yemeni crisis. Gargash argued that:

"War was never the choice but it was the only solution after exhausting all other outcomes… After 50 discouraging days of Yemeni peace talks in Kuwait, there is no unified vision for the future. There are alarming signs that the south wants to defect and that radicalism is on the rise." (Defense News 2016)

Following this decision, Houthi leading Nasser Mahfouz said that the Shiite group is "very surprised by the news" as it the UAE "declared it unanimously", arguing that it indicates that "conflicts between the UAE and the coalition have begun to surface." (Sputnik 2016) Although this point is outside the timeframe of this chapter—in addition to the fact that the UAE is only coalition member to withdraw its troops from the war—comparing it to other reactions by members of the coalition to the incident of killing Bahraini and Emirati soldiers can indicate why ground forces embodied an issue of controversy among partners of the anti-Houthi military alliance, for it eventually meant high numbers of military casualties. Following the reduction of the Emirati roles in terms of ground missions, Qatar decided to deploy some 1,000 ground troops in Yemen after the killing of Bahraini and Emirati military personnel in September 2015, in addition to backing the operations of the coalition of 200 armored vehicles and 30 Apache combat helicopters, apparently seeking to compensate the expected absence of Emirati soldiers in coming phases of the war.(Doha News 2015)

In October 2015, Sudan sent about 300 soldiers and officers to "help maintain security for the city [Aden] against the Houthis and Saleh", though media reports stated that such step came in return of depositing $3billion in the Sudanese central bank by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. (Cafiero 2015, Mukhashaf 2015)

On the other hand, unlike the case with previous interventions in Yemen, Saudi Arabia is no longer backed by well-structured and trained ground troops as those of Saleh. The Yemeni uprising in 2011 against Saleh—who has been in power since 1978—led to his ouster from power through a power transfer deal that was brokered by the Gulf states. The deal stipulated that Hadi will be the new president within a two-year transitional phase that will include parliamentary elections, a new constitution and reorganization of the army, while providing a safe exit for Saleh. As it will be explained in the next parts of the chapter in details, Saleh found creating an alliance with the Houthis as an opportunity to restore control over the state and society, especially amid attempts by Hadi to implement reform within the Yemeni state security institutions that are mostly controlled by relatives and tribal allies of Saleh. (Zayed & Smith 2016, p. 5-6)

Thus, in addition to air strikes, the expansion of the Houthi-Saleh bloc's control over many Yemeni cities indicated that Saudi Arabia is obliged to either find new domestic allies or resort to a ground invasion through its military in order to achieve a ground military presence in Yemen in times of the combat. Yet, the latter scenario implies the occurrence of high number of military casualties, especially within an asymmetrical war that is mostly being conducted within non-urban—mainly a terrain of mountains and deserts—areas. According to Saudi announcements, the coalition—which now includes 34 states—was formed by nine states other than Saudi Arabia, including Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco and Pakistan. Along with sharing the task of launching air strikes against Houthi-Saleh locations, increasing the number of states involved in the war indicates that ground missions will be divided among them, and eventually the burden of military casualties will be shared as well. (Al-Jazeera Center for Studies 2015, p. 3)

Perhaps the above-mentioned arguments might be considered as indirect evidence that gives no crystal-clear answers on why Saudi Arabia had decided to rely on air power in its war against the Houthis. However, referring to the statements of top-level Saudi officials during the war indicates that they were convinced—to a great extent—that imposing pressures on the Houthi-Saleh bloc to accept putting Hadi back on top of the executive authority can be made through consecutive, heavy waves of air attacks. Although believing that "nobody can predict" how long will the war in Yemen take—unlike the previous case study of Israel—Saudi defense minister Mohamed bin Salman argued that "we will not allow the militia [Houthis] to expand on the ground, they must realise that every day they do not get closer to the political solution they lose on the ground." Such statement—given during an interview with *The Economist*, Mohamed argued that the Saudi-led air strikes are capable of destroying about 90 percent of the Houthi-Saleh "air capabilities", "air defence capabilities" and "missile arsenal", pointing out that Saudi Arabia can now "start a process of a political solution in Yemen." (The Economist 2016)

Describing the objectives of the war as "simple" during its early phases, Adel Al-Jubeir—then Saudi ambassador to the United States and current foreign minister—said that:

"We don't have troops, formal Saudi troops in Aden. The issue of using ground troops is always something that is on the table, but decisions will be made depending on the circumstances and the need…We believe that the coalition activities are achieving their objectives. It will take a little bit more time but we're determined to prevail in Yemen and we're determined to strengthen and restore the legitimate government of Yemen and protect the people of Yemen from this radical group [Houthis]." (Saudi-US Relations Information Service 2015)

Saudi Arabia and its partners in the military coalition—as it will be explained in the next section of this chapter—had adopted massive changes within the formula of their military structure in Yemen, resorting to the deployment of ground forces by virtue of time. The reason for such shift in the military policy and strategy is simple: it was factually proven for them that air power cannot solely manage to overcome the guerilla moves of the Houthis, the mountainous nature of the country's terrain, or the tribal alliances of the Houthi-Saleh bloc that allows them to enjoy the politico-military support of locals in many parts of Yemen. Yet, it was hard for the Saudis to publicly declare these conclusions, insisting that the strategy continues to be air-power-based,

though the Saudi military is not solely bearing the cost of a ground invasion due to the support of other ground troops from the coalition such as the pro-Hadi troops and pro-coalition tribal forces. Thus, the death toll will continue to be less than that if Saudi Arabia had gone to war without these actors, but this was not a sufficient reason for the government and military to announce a change in strategy during the advanced periods of the conflict. In February 2016, Brigadier General Ahmed Asiri—spokesman of the coalition—announced that

"All our ground units are currently deployed within the kingdom's borders …our forces are not taking part in the ground operation in Yemen, only our military advisers are there. The ground campaign is carried out solely by the Yemeni army with the air support provided by the coalition." (Sputnik International 2016)

Perhaps this situation can be linked to some domestic factors that King Salman bin Abd Al-Aziz was concerned about their implications if a ground invasion had taken place on a large scale and only through Saudi troops, which eventually will lead to a high death toll. Representing another motive for King Salman bin Abd Al-Aziz to adopt a military strategy that paves the way for limiting the death toll among the ranks of the military, there is evidence that war was not a favorable option for some branches of the royal family, which is the only establishment that is politically capable of challenging the decisions of the King. Hence, one can argue that an increase in deaths among the Saudi military personnel and civilians could have led to direct clash between Salman and the princes who showed opposition to his policies. Although the public opinion does not traditionally impact the outcome of state policies in Saudi Arabia, but the views of members of the royal family can represent an extent of pressure on the king and his ministers. Salman is the last son of the kingdom's founder to govern the country. In April 2015, Salman—after his rise to power and death of his predecessor Abdullah—removed his youngest half-brother Muqrin from his position as crown prince, replacing him with Mohamed bin Nayef, the nephew of Salman. Salman also selected defense minister Mohamed bin Salman, his son, as the deputy crown prince. Mohamed bin Salman is also the head of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs and Saudi Arabian Oil Company (ARAMCO), the entity which is controlling about 80 percent of the oil revenues in the oil-rich state. The support of Salman to his son—who controls a number of key portfolios in Saudi Arabia—raises

serious questions about the willingness of the 80-year-old king to gradually pave the way for Mohamed to become the next king. (House 2016, p. 3-4)

Moreover, after the beginning of the war in Yemen, Mohamed made a visit to Bahrain in order to invite King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa to visit Riyadh, as well as having talks in Cairo with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Media outlets in Saudi Arabia had also published photographs of Mohamed in talks with the commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) General Lloyd Austin III, US ambassador Joseph Westphal and former British prime minister Tony Blair. (Henderson 2015) In light of such context, a key objective—as well as others that will be mentioned in the coming sections of the chapter—for Saudi Arabia is to improve the public image of Mohamed and gather as much royal support as possible for him through the war in Yemen. Since the beginning of the war, Saudi media outlets had continuously described Mohamed as the "commander in chief" and published his videos and photos while meeting with military commanders, visiting soldiers in war zones and sitting in the cockpit of military aircrafts. (Stenslie 2015, p. 1)

It is widely circulated among reports of think tanks and media outlets that Mohamed managed to increase his political weight within the royal family due to "his close relationship with his father who appears to dote on him.", offering him a "special career path." The 80-year old king is a father for at least twelve sons by three wives, and Mohamed is the oldest son from his thirds wife. In a royal family that age is a key factor that determines the possibility of rising to top posts by its members, Salman had worked extremely hard to avoid declaring the actual age of his son. Some reports say he was born in 1980, others say 1985 and a third groups says 1988. In its listing of the Saudi Council of Ministers, the Saudi embassy in Washington DC does not provide information on that matter. This situation—according to several reports— was seemingly related to the fact that Mohamed's half-brother Prince Faisal bin Salman—a 44-year-old man—was theoretically a better choice for the king as a defence minister as the country is involved in a war. Faisal, in addition to being older that Mohamed in terms of age, wrote a book in 2003 about the influence of Iran in the Gulf region, which was based on his doctoral dissertation at Oxford University. (Henderson 2015)

Even in case Salman was not convinced with Faisal as a statesman, the former had other choices among his sons who are equally well-educated and politically experienced as Mohamed due to their ministerial experiences. For example, Sultan, 58—the older half-brother of Mohamed—was a former astronaut and President of Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage. The same situation can be seen with the case of the 55-year old Abdulaziz bin Salman, for he served previously in ministerial posts in the ministry of petroleum and mineral resources, becoming the deputy minister in early 2015. (Henderson 2015) These two sons of Salman, as well as others, are currently encountering a situation in which their younger brother enjoys more authority than that lying in their hands. As expectations rise about worsening health conditions for the king, Mohamed can possibly serve as the de facto ruler of the country, which will accordingly increase levels of anger among the royal family in general and within the sons of Salman in particular. It is widely argued that Mohamed—as the head of the Economic and Development Affairs Council—had pushed for changing the two ministers of housing and health in early 2015, an example that can reflect the extent of his political weight in the meantime, although still being the deputy crown prince. Such strong relationship between Mohamed and his father is not a new development in Saudi royal politics, for it was reported that the former had strong influence in military affairs when the latter was the defense minister in 2011. Even deputy defense ministers could not manage to challenge such influence. (Henderson 2015)

On that basis, one can conclude that the inability of Saudi Arabia to achieve positive outcomes in the war in Yemen or even limit the number of civilian and military casualties might provide a golden opportunity for the royal family to weaken such father-son control over decision-making and press Salman to gradually exclude his son from politics—or at least reduce his political influence—which will accordingly open the room for the rise of arguably excluded princes to replace Mohamed. There is no doubt that not all members of the royal family—estimated at 7000 persons—are satisfied with the changes that Salman is implementing. As Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz, a son of Saudi Arabia's founder, says: "when Salman appointed his son, this emphasizes the theory that this will be followed by another decision… He is appointing his son and grandsons to be the kings." (House 2016, p. 5) It is

important, meanwhile, to mention that part of the criticism directed to Salman for choosing his son as the defense minister lies in the latter's lacking of the sufficient experience in military affairs that he should enjoy in order to handle the tasks of this post in general and leading the complex war in Yemen in specific. Speaking to *The Guardian* in September 2015 on condition of anonymity for "security concerns", a Saudi price—a grandson of the kingdom's founder Abdulaziz Ibn Saud—wrote two letters to the royal family calling for the removal of King Salman from power. He expressed rejection for many of the policies adopted by Salman—including the decision to go to war in Yemen. (Miles 2015) The prince pointed out that:

"The king is not in a stable condition and in reality the son of the king [Mohammed bin Salman] is ruling the kingdom…So four or possibly five of my uncles will meet soon to discuss the letters. They are making a plan with a lot of nephews and that will open the door. A lot of the second generation is very anxious...They [tribal leaders] say you have to do this or the country will go to disaster." (Miles 2015)

Perhaps a similar view was shared by prominent royal official—speaking on condition of anonymity—as he argued that "given all the problems we face now with Iran and our economy, it is no time for a lack of cohesion in the kingdom." (House 2016) Avoiding, thus, high numbers of casualties serve as a major necessity for both Salman and his son. There is no doubt that leading his country in a war at roughly the age of 29 can provide Mohamed with a prestigious position among the princes of the Saudi royal family. But high death rates among the ranks of the military can probably provide an opposite outcome. (Stenslie 2015, p. 2) Perhaps these considerations had pushed Mohamed to change the public image he was giving for himself as the "architect" of the war in Yemen, especially by early 2016, for an absolute victory for the coalition—or even reducing the frequency of Houthi missile attacks on Saudi Arabia—was gradually becoming an uneasy task to achieve by that time. Mohamed argued that "I'm not the architect of the Yemeni operation", claiming that Saudi Arabia is a "country of institutions" in which decisions of going to wars is commonly taken by the ministry of foreign affairs, the ministry of defense, with the intelligence, the council of ministers, and the council of security and political affairs. (The Economist 2016)

He added that his responsibility as a defense minister involves implementing "whatever decision his majesty [the king] has ordered", report any threats he observes and take the necessary steps for responding to "any threats." Policy recommendations, according to Mohamed, is submitted to Salman who has the final say. (The Economist 2016) Perhaps it is not clear whether or not Mohamed would have given a similar statement in case the coalition had managed to achieve an absolute victory against the Houthi-Saleh bloc in Yemen and succeeded in restoring political and security control in the country under the leadership of Hadi. But attempting to deny the fact that he is politically responsible for handling the defense affairs in the kingdom and claiming that he is not the sole engineer of the military strategy—an issue that Saudi Arabia spent months to emphasize—can highly reflect the impact of royal-family-related considerations on the decision-making in the country, and eventually explain a major driving factor behind a post-heroic approach based on air power within the Yemeni conflict.

War Objectives of the Saudi-led Coalition

It is important, as an initial step, to specify the major objectives that the Saudi-led coalition is seeking to achieve throughout its military operations in Yemen against the politico-military alliance of the Houthis and Saleh. The Saudis, on official basis, generally point out to their willingness to put Hadi back on top of the Yemeni executive branch, certainly through defeating their rivals in asymmetrical war. Al-Jubeir said in March 2015 that the campaign seeks to:

"Defend and support the legitimate government of Yemen and prevent the radical Houthi movement from taking over the country… We will do whatever it takes in order to protect the legitimate government of Yemen from falling and from facing any dangers from outside militia." (Deutsche Welle 2015)

Nonetheless, starting an air campaign—which started with 50 air strikes per day, then increased to 80 and later reached 300—might be questionable, especially amid the presence of other alternatives than resorting to the use of military force. (Hussein2015) Saudi Arabia, for instance, could have given recognition for the new political arrangements in Yemen—even if the Houthis will govern the country—as

they are significantly dependent on the backing of Saleh. In return, Riyadh, can ensure that its territories will not be attacked and citizens living in order areas will lose their lives, which the country has been suffering from since for a while since the coalition started its operations in Yemen. Avoiding such aggressive military policy would have coincided with the unwillingness of the Western governments—mainly that of the United States—to join the coalition, unlike the case with the two ongoing US-led military campaigns against Islamist militants in Syria and Iraq. This situation is historically unprecedented, for Washington had usually handled the military missions—specifically in terms of the Middle East conflicts—in return of financial assistance by the Gulf states. Although it did not oppose the war and publicly accused the Houthis of causing "widespread instability and chaos that threaten the safety of well-being of all Yemeni citizens", the United States refused to take "direct military action in Yemen in support of this effort", providing only "logistical and intelligence support" to the coalition. (The White House 2015)

Perhaps the absence of the required Western military support to the operations can provide one additional reason behind the concern of the Saudi policymakers about the high likelihood of military casualties during this war, which is not announced until now, though being—according to most figures—estimated at tens of coalition soldiers. For example, until September 2015, Saudi, Emirati and Bahraini militaries had lost about 60 soldiers—in addition to losing about 60 Saudi armored vehicles during the first six months of fighting—a number that would have most probably increased by the end of the first year of fighting. (BBC Arabic 2015)

But, for the members of the coalition—mainly Saudi Arabia—dealing with the Yemeni issue cannot be separated from its regional context, mainly attempting to prevent Iran from supporting its several Shiite proxies in the Arab world. The Sunni-Shiite dilemma rose to the surface after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, which its aftermath saw an Iranian interest in establishing and funding Shiite groups in many Sunni-majority or Sunni-governed Arab states. When the Houthis and Saleh's forces began to expand geographically throughout the Yemeni territories, this act indicated that implementing the Gulf-sponsored arrangements for the post-uprising phase will be unreachable. Therefore, continuing to influence the flow of social and political events in Yemen can be considered as an objective for the Saudi-led coalition in itself.

Al-Jubeir, in February 2016, said that Saudi Arabia "had no other option" than launching a war in Yemen, for "there was a radical militia [Houthis] allied with Iran and Hezbollah that took over the country." (Shafy& Zand 2016) Although the degree of Iranian backing to the Houthis is not completely known, many media reports and academic texts had shown that Tehran provided training and weapons for the Houthis. For instance, Iran has been continuously accused of sending arms shipments to the Houthis that include light and medium weaponry. One of those shipments had allegedly reached the Houthis after the issuance of the UN Security Council resolution 2216 in April 2015, which prevented the "direct or indirect supply[of weapons], sale or transfer to, or for the benefit" to Saleh, Abdullah Yahya Al Hakim, Abd Al-Khaliq Al-Houthi and individuals associated with the Houthi-Saleh camp. (Zimmerman 2016) Forming a coalition, accordingly, for a war in Yemen can highly be related to stopping the growth of the Iranian influence in Yemen.

The Military Outcome of the War

At the end of the first year of fighting, the war has apparently reached a stage of deadlock, in which no side can claim absolute victory. Both sides had their gains, as well as losses, leading to a mutual favoring of reducing dependence on using force, while expressing readiness for being engaged in a diplomatic process. The Houthis are currently taking control of Saada, Sanaa and Taiz, while the coalition enjoys control over most of the state—though the Houthis and Saleh did not succeed in controlling or create tribal alliances within them—which is generally estimated at more than 40 percent of the overall Yemeni territory. As it failed in restoring the western parts of the country, achieving the above-mentioned objectives of the military campaign is certainly in question. This situation coincides with the fact that other Islamist militant groups—such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS—still operate within many of the areas that are classified as coalition-controlled, though such issue surpasses the scope of the study. The military operations implemented by the coalitions in Yemen depend on three main pillars. Firstly, the coalition imposes a naval blockade on Yemen that mainly targets ports, aiming to "prevent weapons and fighters from bolstering the Houthi ranks." (Al-Omran & Al-Masmari 2015) The blockade covers Bab Al-Mandab

Strait—connecting the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean—as well as the major ports such as those of Aden and Midi. (Eleiba 2015)

Secondly, the coalition is deploying land forces throughout the Saudi southern borders with Yemen, which witnessed most of the Saudi-Houthi fighting while Saleh was still in power. Ground forces are frequently deployed in other parts of Yemen for combat missions in other parts of Yemen, a situation that represents a challenge for airmen who are not generally backed by ground forces to support their strikes within the battlefield. Thirdly, being the key military tool for the coalition, air power is deeply used by the coalition member-states. During the first days of the war, Saudi air forces attacked a number of military targets for the Houthis in Sanaa and the district of Harf Sufyan in the Amran governorate, including the house of the Houthi leader Abdel Majid Al-Houthi and the leadership center of the militant group. Air strikes, about 150 of them, also targeted the medium and high-altitude surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) and refueling and maintenance support positions—such as supply networks and ammunition sites—of the Houthi-Saleh bloc. But—as it has been the case with the Israeli air strikes in Lebanon—air strikes fell short of destructing the "mobile launch vehicles" that can only be reduced by the presence of well-trained ground forces, which is not available to the maximum limits. During the first week of fighting, the allocation of roughly 170 military aircrafts had taken place, including 100 Saudi F-15S and Tornado IDS aircrafts, 30 Emirati F-16s and Mirage 2000s and others from Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco. (Knights 2015, p. 2)

The major success of the coalition, so far, was restoring Aden and the return of Hadi to the port city. Yet, this outcome is related to a number of factors that might not necessarily be seen in other theaters, which explains the reason behind the inability of the coalition to achieve similar results in other Houthi-Saleh-controlled governorates. Aden is a port city, having access to the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Bab Al-Mandab Strait. The terrain of the city—which is seemingly more urbanized than most of the Yemeni areas—indicated that the naval blockade will be highly effective in Aden, though it is not completely safe from frequent Houthi attacks. But the capacity of the Houthis to attack the coalition forces will be challenged by this geographical factor, which serves the latter to a higher degree. In the meantime, the coalition forces—during the early phases of the war—were reluctant to deploy ground forces. Instead,

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they relied on special operations forces that worked in coordination with tribes that oppose the Houthis and support Hadi, such as the Shabwa, Abyan, the Lahj and Yafe tribes. The deployment of ground forces came after the killing of 60 soldiers in the province of Marib—east of Sanaa—in an ammunition depot. This incident implied that the coalition was not refusing to depend on land power, but rather postponing its implementation until an undeclared stage of fighting. When it came to attempting to gain Aden, the coalition deployed Saudi, Emirati and Bahraini ground troops. The exact number of troops during such battle is estimated at thousands, although some sources say about 1,500 soldiers were in Aden, while others say the number reached 10,000. In addition to the presence of air power, the coalition also depended on an armored brigade including one battalion of BMP-3's, two battalions of the Leclerc tanks, G6 self-propelled howitzers and Agrab mortar carriers. (Mallya 2015, p. 3)

Such combination of ground, land and naval efforts—being supported by the local population embodied in the anti-Houthi tribes—allowed the coalition to recapture Al-Anad military and air base, local airport and other parts of the city, as well as leading hundreds of Houthi militants to move out of Aden. (Gulf News 2015)It has been the absence of these conditions that had mostly prevented the coalition from achieving complete victory in the rest of the battlefields. For most of the member-states in the coalition, the war against the Houthis is seemingly the first asymmetrical military confrontation for them to be engaged in. With few exceptions—such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt—one can hardly recall any involvement in a war against a non-state actor by the Gulf member-states of the coalition. In a terrain that is characterized by either mountainous areas or agricultural lands—which the Houthis will certainly be more aware of its details than conventional militaries—other military successes by the coalition with positive political and strategic implications as that of the case of Aden can barely be seen. (RCSS 2015)

Presenting another dilemma, the coalition is also dividing its efforts between training local forces and fighting at the same time, a task that is even difficult for the most advanced conventional militaries. In April 2015, media reports showed that Saudi Arabia began training hundreds of Yemeni tribesmen in order for them to handle the ground battles against the Houthis. The tribesmen—estimated at 300—had reportedly received training in on "tactical advice knowledge and light weapons."

(Russia Today 2015) According to the *New York Times,* the United Arab Emirates sent about 450 Latin American "mercenaries" to fight in Yemen from Colombia, Panama, Salvador and Chile, a program that was managed by a private company linked to the founder of Blackwater Worldwide, Erik Prince. Emirati officials, according to the same report, believe that those mercenaries—especially the Colombian ones—are "more battle tested in guerrilla warfare, having spent decades battling the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the jungles of Colombia." (Hager & Mazzetti 2015) But these attempts to compensate the lacking of experience in guerrilla warfare showed no significant results, especially amid the numerous non-state and tribal allies of the coalition that coordinating between airmen and the former can be severely challenging. As a UN panel of experts describes the local, pro-coalition forces, "various components within the resistance opened battle against the Houthi-Saleh forces on multiple front, but they were unable—or unwilling—to function as a united national force." The UN document refers to an instance about the rejection of "resistance groups"—the term used to describe pro-coalition local and tribal forces— in Aden and Lahij to deploy north of the former border between the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) to fight in Taiz and Ibb. The reason was their perception that the struggle against the Houthi-Saleh forces should take place "primarily in local terms." (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2016, p. 17)

Perhaps the inability of the coalition to control its local allies—or at least to coordinate effectively between them—is a major cause for the high rates of collateral damage and civilian casualties caused by the coalition's air strikes, for no channels of gathering accurate, quickly gathered and continuously-updated intelligence information about the areas in which Houthi militants are hiding are provided. This situation would most likely also reduce the chances of the coalition to increase local support to its operations. As an example, in 6 July 2015, more than 67 people were killed in Beni Hassan—located in the northwestern Yemeni district of Harad—after air strikes of the coalition targeted a marketplace. During the same week, 23 civilians were injured after air strikes targeted Al-Fayush market in Lahj governorate, while 80 others were injured—including women and children— as "a result of heavy shelling" in a residential neighborhood in Al-Mansoora district in Aden. (Doctors Without

Borders 2015) The continuation of such type of attacks, if not providing further support for the Houthis and Saleh, indicates that the coalition will at least spend longer periods in the war in Yemen without concrete results.

On the contrary, amid the above-mentioned challenges encountering the coalition, the Houthis had taken a series of steps in order to enhance their politico-military position in Yemen. Starting from 2014—even ahead of capturing Sanaa and Aden—the Houthis established alliances with tribes and families that sympathize with them in the central highlands and desert areas, which is based on agreements of mutual benefit. The Houthis are training members of these groups and vowing to secure their financial interests in exchange joining the war against Hadi, and eventually the Saudi-led coalition. These deals allowed the Houthis to deploy their own members throughout massive territories, while depending on the support of tribes that—in addition to combating missions—are responsible for other regular tasks such as handling checkpoints in their native areas, which they know their terrain more than the Houthis themselves. (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2016, p. 16) Thus, one can hardly find the Saudi call for tribes to stop their support to the Houthis. In April 2015, Asiri, called Yemeni tribes not to "welcome the Houthis trying to store some items in their own stores", though such call statement appeared to produce little tribal response. (Saudi Press Agency 2015)

The Houthis are also benefiting from their alliance with Saleh, specifically in military terms. Ahead of the power transfer deal, Saleh ensured his control over the security entities through appointing members of his family in the top-level positions. Saleh's son, Ahmed Ali, was the head of the Republican Guard Special Forces, while Yahya Mohamed—the nephew of Saleh—was the head of the Central Security. The National Security Bureaus was headed by Ammar Mohammed, the brother of Yahya. As Hadi became the president in 2012, he removed some of the relatives and allies of Saleh from the leading positions as part of a "security reform" that aims at ending the influence of Saleh within such institutions, although others managed to remain in power. (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen 2016, p. 17)

Hence, in fighting against Hadi and the Saudi-led coalition, the Saleh-Houthi alliance allows the Shiite militants to take advantage of the social and tribal network of relations that the former president is apparently continuing to enjoy. With several military troops remaining loyal to Saleh, the former president is issuing orders to them to pave the way for the Houthis to take control of the areas they are seeking to govern, which has been the case with the Sanaa operation in September 2014. The Houthis, also with the support of the pro-Saleh troops, had managed to destroy the headquarters of the Islah Party—which backed the post-uprising political arrangements— and reduce the capacity of its military wing to confront them in the north. Even the tribal supporters of Islah in eastern Yemen was no enough for tolerating a military confrontation against the Houthis and the pro-Saleh troops. (Schmitz 2015)

The Houthi-Saleh alliance, depending on their strong military position among the Yemeni tribal and militant groups, managed to pose a threat to the southern borders of Saudi Arabia through "hit-and-run" attacks and cross-border operations. After the coalition restored Aden in July 2015, these attacks began to take on daily basis, resulting in the killing and injury of 400 civilians inside Saudi Arabia. Some estimates argue that another 400 deaths had taken place, but within the ranks of the Saudi military and border guards. In the period between July 2015 and March 2016, around 130 mortars, shells, explosive devices and rockets had hit the Saudi territories every day. The coalition had also argued that the Houthis are hiding weapons in schools and headquarters of embassies that were evacuated, a statement that can—to an extent—provide an explanation for civilian casualties caused by the coalition's air strikes. (McDowall, Stewart & Rohde 2016)

Although Saudi officials mostly seek to hide these events, the Houthis publish footage for these operations on YouTube to show the ability of their members to attack the Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLF), border areas and Saudi neighborhoods. For a short period of time, the Houthis managed to capture Al-Rabu'ah, a Saudi town on the borders with Yemen, ahead of a coalition retaliatory response. The Houthis are additionally attacking Saudi and Emirati military ships in the Red Sea coast. Despite the fact that the coalition is denying such incidents, Yemeni Navy—which is under the control of Saleh—possesses Chinese C-802 anti-ship missiles, and accordingly such attacks can practically take place. These conditions do not indicate that the Houthi-

Saleh alliance can restore their control over Aden, end the war as the victorious side, or even push the coalition to end the war as soon as possible. Instead, it reveals the keenness of the both sides to act within a framework of a guerilla-based framework, which is based on tolerating the tactical victories of the coalition—which are not many in terms of number or scope—while seeking to achieve results on the strategic level of the war. Perhaps a major positive result for the Houthi-Saleh military moves was when the Emirati military decided to reduce the number of its troops fighting in Yemen, though actual figures can hardly be found. (Horton 2015, p. 4)

Chapter 5

US-led Coalition & Kurds: Combating ISIS in Syria

Overview of the Conflict

On June 2014, ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdad declared the establishment of a "caliphate" that its borders begin with the Aleppo governorate in Syria and ends with the eastern Iraqi governorate of Diyala. ISIS—carrying other names such as IS, ISIL, Daesh or Islamic State—was formed by a group of Sunni, jihadist members who formerly took part in Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a branch of AL-Qaeda that was established by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi in 2004 after one year of the US invasion of Iraq. After the US occupation of the country reached its end, followed by the post-Arab Spring political unrest and security vacuum, ISIS took advantage of such developments and managed to attack and impose control over large territories in both Syria and Iraq.

In addition to the issue of deploying its militants throughout territories that can only—as well as traditionally—be covered by conventional, police and military forces, ISIS is considered as an exceptional case among non-state actors for several reasons. On the one hand, many of the ISIS militants were previously members of Al-Qaeda, in Iraq, which presented a military challenge to the US troops during the years of its occupation to the country. Hence, one can argue that this group enjoys an extent of military experience in asymmetrical wars—a situation that has also been seen in the case of Hezbollah—including dealing with the massive firepower provided by the US strategies of using air strikes. (Islamists 2016) Most estimates predict that ISIS contains thousands of militant members. (Glenn 2016) According to EU figures, ISIS members range from 20,000 to 31,500 people, in addition to more than 20,000 foreign fighters that came from different parts of the world. Other estimates say the number had surpassed 100,000. As it will be discussed, the massive number of ISIS militants gave it an advantage over the Kurdish militants who—though hard to determine their exact number—suffered from a problem related to their limited number of militants fighting among their ranks. On the other hand, the flow of events in Syria and Iraq

gave room for ISIS to have access to sites and positions that hardly non-state actors had historically enjoyed. ISIS, for example, is financially supporting its operations through banks, oil fields and antiquities that the group manages to obtain and then smuggle on regular basis. (Cirlig 2015, p. 2)

Some reports had revealed that also a number of Sunni states in the Middle East provided financial and military assistance to ISIS, although some of them—such as some of the Gulf states—are traditionally considered as US allies. (The Islamists 2016) Perhaps these conditions—backed by the support of the population in Sunni-majority areas to the ISIS—made fighting against ISIS a tough task to handle. On the military level, many incidents saw ISIS taking control of weapons following the capture of military basis in Syria and Iraq. ISIS, expanding the scope of its influence, was also responsible for attacks that took place in several countries throughout the last three years such as Egypt, France, Belgium and the United States. (Cirlig 2015, p. 2)

As a response, the United States formed a coalition that launched air strikes against ISIS in Iraq in August 2014 and in Syria during the following month. The United States, during the NATO summit in September 2014, called for the creation of an international coalition to fight ISIS, and nine countries had then expressed their approval to join the war, including France, Britain, Denmark, Canada, Turkey, Italy Poland and Australia. US President Barack Obama—in addition to other war objectives that will be discussed in details throughout the next parts of the chapter—stated that the coalition seeks to develop a "comprehensive strategy to counter ISIL/Da'esh", as well as "defeat ISIL and deny them safe haven." (Cirlig 2015, p. 6)

In terms of the time framework, this chapter will focus on evaluating the first year of aerial attacks of the US-led coalition against ISIS in areas that involved Kurdish population in Syria, and accordingly witnessed military contributions for the anti-ISIS Kurdish militant group. This period starts from September 2014 to September 2015. During this period, the US-led coalition launched roughly 1000 air strikes in areas that are witnessing military confrontations between Kurdish forces and ISIS militants. (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2015, p. 4-9) Yet—within this year-long period—about 2300 air strikes were launched by

the coalition against ISIS in Syria and around 3200 others against the same militant group in Iraq. (Fantz 2015)

As it has been the case with the Saudi-led air strikes on Yemen, the US-led air strikes had resulted in the death of roughly 500 civilians—including more than 100 children—during the first year of the aerial campaign against ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. For example, in 28 December 2014, air strikes by the US-led coalition on an ISIS-controlled facility in Al-Bab in Syria, leading to the death of 58 prisoners who were located in such facility, for it was being used as a temporary prison. These prisoners were arrested by ISIS for violating the rules that were put in place by the latter, such buying cigarettes. The coalition decided to admit the wrong targeting of civilians only after two weeks. Lt. Co Kyle Raines—Spokesman of CENTCOM—argued then that most of the air strikes involves attacking "emerging targets", though stressing that the coalition maintains "careful consideration for each target to ensure we do our best to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage." (Ross 2015) Yet—although sometimes inaccurate information can sometimes lead to civilian casualties as the case with most asymmetrical wars—the coalition is mainly targeting the assets of ISIS such as fighting positions, mortar system, bunkers, staging areas and vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). (Rudaw 2016) The coalition also targets the ISIS-controlled "logistical lines, command and control, weapons manufacturing areas and financial resources" such as oil facilities. (United States Air Force Central Command 2016)

It is worth mentioning that Kurdish militants provided major support to the operations of the coalition in Syria, especially in terms of employing its ground troops within confrontations against ISIS, which attempted to control the Kurdish-majority areas in Syria—and in fact succeeded in capturing them during some stages of the conflict. Whether in Syria or Iraq, it is worth mentioning that the US-led coalition is depending on anti-ISIS non-state actors to support their air strikes on the ground level, in addition to not having the same frequency of aerial strikes in all areas. It is seemingly challenging to determine the number of air strikes in Syria or Iraq alone, or even the actual pro-coalition non-state group that is fighting ISIS in each geographical area. As a consequence—amid the presence of many non-state actors involved in this conflict—focusing on the Kurdish battles against the militants of ISIS aims at

evaluating the outcome of air power in such case study in an effective manner, for not all aerial operations are surrounded by the same conditions. For examples, the frequency of air strikes is not the same in all Syrian territories, while not all pro-coalition non-state supporters enjoy the same military capabilities. Thus, narrowing the scope of research, at such phase, is a value added for this research project.

The Rationale Behind a Multilateral Action

Unlike the case of the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, the conflict in Syria posed no direct, serious threat to the internal security of the United States and most of the countries that agreed to join the coalition. It will be illogical, for instance, to argue that the European—or even states geographically located in the Middle East—are worried about the possibility of being hit by ISIS rockets that can reach their territories, harm their militaries or threaten the security of their civilian neighborhoods. One, nevertheless, can possibly point out to the implications of the expansionist moves of ISIS in Syria—as well as Iraq—that represented a source of concern to Western policymakers about their indirect impact on such states. Based on examining the statements of European and American, there is no doubt that the return of "foreign fighters" to their homeland is their utmost fear, and launching a military campaign against ISIS is accordingly an attempt to weaken the militant group and reduce its chances of attracting further foreign fighters. In December 2014, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, said that 3,000 Europeans left their countries to join ISIS and Al-Nusra Front in Syria and Iraq, arguing that these people are now trained to use weapons and are already involved in "committing crimes."(Aly 2014) US Attorney General Eric Holder, one month earlier, said that "we are seeing, I would say, an alarming rise in the number of American and European Union nationals who have been going to Syria to help extremist groups...this represents a grave threat to our security." (Calabresi 2014)

Yet, as the anti-ISIS response is a military one, there is no surprise that the United States will solely be entitled to determine its nature, extent and scope. As Obama argues, "when trouble comes up anywhere in the world, they don't call Beijing, they don't call Moscow. They call us." (Garamone 2014) The United States

decided to adopt a military strategy that is based on air strikes against ISIS positions in Syria, being backed by thousands—or at least hundreds—of pro-Western non-state actors such as the Kurdish groups, which will be responsible for handling the ground operations. It might be challenging to understand the rationale of the United States in avoiding a full-fledged military intervention, especially amid the previous experience of the US army in fighting wars against non-state groups in countries such as Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. However, this situation can largely be related to the so-called "Obama's Doctrine", which showed no enthusiasm towards engaging in military confrontations that will certainly produce high levels of casualties among the ranks of the army. The Bush administration had launched two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that led to the death of 2 million military servicemen and women, including 6,000 Americans. About 40,000 Americans had suffered injuries during these wars as well. (Krieg 2016, p. 103-105)

The success of Obama in winning re-election in 2012 is highly linked to his emphasis on his willingness to withdraw all US troops in Iraq and end the war, a situation that most likely leaves air power as the only possible military tool to depend on in wars that will require US intervention in the post-withdrawal phase, at least in the viewpoint of Obama's administration. Representing a widely-circulated quote for Obama on the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, he stresses that: "We cannot do this for them, because it's not just a military problem, it is a political problem," Obama said. He added that:

"And if we make the mistake of simply sending U.S. troops back in, we can maintain peace for a while. But unless there is a change in not just Iraq, but countries like Syria and some of the other countries in the region, think about what political accommodation means [and] think about what tolerance means." (Garamone 2014)

As a result, acting in multilateral terms that are embodied in the formation of a coalition of 60 states under the leadership of the United States implies similar US military rationale as that of Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni war: distributing missions and casualties among all armies. Perhaps this orientation can be noticed in the 2015 US National Security Strategy, which accentuated that the United States will "seek to mobilize allies and partners to share the burden and achieve lasting outcomes" when the "threshold for military action is higher when our interests are not directly

threatened." (US National Security Strategy 2015, p. 8) This approach does not imply that the Obama administration is against launching wars, for the factual evidence provided by such case study can easily prove the invalidity of such argument. Instead, it shows that the US decision-makers are attempting to shift the traditional extent of military involvement, chiefly due to the high rates of military casualties that the United States suffered in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ex-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta was quoted once as saying that the United States will "increase our investments in special operations forces, new technologies like unmanned systems, space and in particular cyberspace capabilities and in the capacity to quickly mobilize" as tools that can serve the post-heroic orientations of the US administration. (Krieg 2016, p. 103-105)

It might be thought that the above-mentioned arguments are solely focusing on issues of multilateral action, while giving little attention towards the rationale behind acting in Syria through an air-power-based military approach. The parts that were highlighted from the US National Security Strategy and the quotes of Obama can easily imply that the United States is ready to act only in terms of air strikes, for it is restricted by the mindset of its political leaders. But understanding the factors that shaped such military thinking is a key component of the equation that should not be ignored. Reaching an answer for this dilemma is apparently uncomplicated: the American public opinion is no longer supportive of large-scale military interventions. In a poll published by *Gallup* in 2013, the support of the American citizens for a US military action in Syria is "on track to be among the lowest for any intervention Gallup has asked about in the last 20 years." The poll compared the numbers of supporters and opponents of military intervention in Syria with those of previous interventions—which was measured in polls held from 1991 to 2003—in other parts of the world during the 1990s. As 36 percent of the Americans showed acceptance for using force in Syria, 64 were in favour of a military action in Iraq in 2003, 82 percent backed intervening in Afghanistan in 2001, 43 percent wanted the US to be involved in Kosovo/The Balkans and 55 percent had the same position towards the Gulf War in 1991. (Dugan 2013)

This poll was mainly asking questions about whether or not the Americans want a military action against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, coinciding with reports about the use of chemical weapons by the latter amid the ongoing civil war in Syria. Yet, when the same institution conducted another poll in November 2015 about whether or not Americans support sending US ground troops to Iraq and Syria to fight militant groups, the outcome was not different at all. This poll was conducted twice: the first time was in 20-21 September 2014, while the second time occurred in 4-8 November 2015. The September 2014 poll showed that 54 percent of the American opposed this matter and 40 percent accepted it. For the November 2015 poll, 53 percent refused sending ground troops, while 43 percent showed support to this step. (McCarthy 2015) As a result, one can indicate that acting multilaterally and through air strikes serves as an attempt by the administration of Obama to ensure playing a military role that targets ISIS in Syria while avoiding a clash with US voters on a domestic level.

It is possible to argue that a non-interventionist political attitude cannot be considered as a general rule among the whole American society, especially that the Republican Party and its supporters are mostly supportive of ground-based, military actions. For example—according to a poll held by the Brookings Institution on the American public attitudes toward ISIS in Syria in 2015— about 53 percent of the Republicans were in favour of sending US ground troops in Syria "if air strikes fail to stop ISIS", while 36 percent of the Democrats and 31 percent of independents had opposite views. (Telhami 2015, p. 3) But—as it has been the case with Obama—any president that is elected twice on basis of non-interventionist military agenda will most probably avoid taking the risk of challenging the public opinion, especially that actual electoral races—mainly the presidential elections that Obama had won— showed that the majority of the voters have a political attitude that contradicts with the Republican thinking on military and security affairs.

<u>The Military Outcome of the War</u>

The US-led coalition started its air strikes on ISIS in Syria in September 2014, coming one month after launching a parallel aerial campaign on the same group in Iraq. According to the figures of media outlets and research centers, the number of air strikes conducted by the coalition against the militant group in both Syria and Iraq range from 6,000 to 8,000. But since the study will focus on the Syrian case, it is important to mention that Syria saw roughly 3,000 air strikes by the coalition's airmen on ISIS buildings, tanks, vehicles and sites. (Martinez 2015) It is worth mentioning that Syria is in a civil war, which sees continuous fighting between the troops of President Bashar Al-Assad against anti-regime militant groups, which are large in number, ideologically dissimilar and do not seemingly sharing high degree of politico-military coordination. Being involved in another war against ISIS represented a military burden for these groups, for they cannot fight in two battlefields at the same time .

On that basis, not every round of air strikes against ISIS was likely met with ground support by pro-coalition militant groups, for achieving such target surpasses the scope of their military capabilities. For example, some media and academic reports pointed out that the Free Syrian Army (FSA)—representing the largest anti-Assad militant bloc that emerged after the uprising turned into a civil war—is losing many of its fighters—not due to deaths in the battlefield—because of losing faith in the military effectiveness of the FSA. According to Abo Hasan, leader of Al-Abrar group in Hama who joined the FSA in 2011, "fighters start losing hope in the war and are leaving their brigades in large numbers." In fact, some of them who left the FSA had decided to join Islamist extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra Front or even ISIS, for they believe these groups are much more organized and well-structured and less influenced by issues of family relations and tribal affiliations than the FSA. (Mironova, Mrie & White 2014, p. 14-15)

Representing an attempt to deal with such challenge, The United States and Turkey—which shares borders with Syria—had signed a deal to train and equip more than 400 Syrian opposition fighters who will lead the ground fight against ISIS, though expecting a positive outcome from them reflects considerable shortcomings in

the process of defining objectives that can be reachable. The reason is simple: as ISIS includes thousands of armed men who are well-equipped and trained, it is difficult for the so-called, "moderate rebels" to represent a threat for the expansionist plans of the former. (Aly 2015) Perhaps such factors can provide an explanation for the ability of ISIS to control more than one third of the Syria territory, a figure that might have increased as the war remains ongoing.(Mironova, Mrie & White 2014, p. 14-15) In the meantime, as the United States refused to coordinate its air strikes in Syria with the Syrian military troops of Al-Assad, the issue of having "boots on the ground" to support the aerial operations remained a serious question in terms of this war, as their absence—in many cases—left ISIS unaffected by air strikes. (Gearan 2014) These complexities had apparently harmed the humanitarian conditions in Syria, which ending the suffering of the Syrian people was one of the war objectives stated by the coalition .

According to a report by Human Rights Watch in 2015, the death toll of the conflict reached more than 191,000 people, adding that "the spread and intensification of fighting have led to a dire humanitarian crisis with millions internally displaced or seeking refuge in neighboring countries." About 8 million Syrians are internally displaced and roughly 13 million others need humanitarian support. The report argued that "humanitarian aid agencies experienced significant challenges in getting assistance to the displaced civilian population and others badly affected by the conflict because of sieges imposed by both government and non-state armed groups" in 2014. Concerning the Kurdish aspect of the conflict, Human Rights Watch accused ISIS of committing "systemic rights abuses, including the intentional targeting and abduction of civilians", including kidnapping of around 200 Kurdish children, although they were released later. (Human Rights Watch 2015)

In light of such context, the objectives of the coalition were not met in the majority of the territories in Syria and Iraq, and ISIS ultimately succeeded in maintaining its interventionist, expansionist approaches in both states. Yet, concerning the battles of ISIS against Kurdish militants, the outcome was extremely different due to a number of considerations that will be tackled in the coming parts of this chapter. Through air strikes, the US-led coalition believed it can achieve its key objectives, which include "supporting military operations, capacity building and training",

"stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters" and "cutting off ISIL/Daesh's access to financing and funding." The operations also aimed at "addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises" and "exposing ISIL/Daesh's true nature (ideological legitimization)." The United States, based on concerns from other member-states of the coalition and domestic Republican criticism, declared that it will depend on "moderate opposition forces" fighting against ISIS in Syria to act as "effective ground forces." (US Department of State 2014)

Representing an arguably different scene than the rest of Syria, it can be argued that the military and organizational capabilities of the Kurdish militants in Syria had allowed them to benefit from the air support provided by the coalition's airmen. Kurds represent about ten percent of the overall population in Syria. They are located in the northern areas of the country, which carries military and strategic significance for the borders they share with Iraq and Turkey. (The CIA World Factbook 2016) Accordingly, one can easily conclude that these geographical facts allowed the Kurds in Syria to benefit from the political and military support of other minority Kurdish groups in Turkey and Iraq. The Kurdish Democratic Union (PYD) was, in fact, established as an offshoot of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)in 2003.As Al-Assad has eventually become less capable of imposing a grip over Syria following the eruption of the civil war, the PYD became growingly involved in negotiations with other Kurdish groups in Syria for the sake of strengthening political and military relations. For example—despite a historical state of enmity—an agreement for cooperation was signed in June 2012 between the People's Council of Western Kurdistan and the Kurdish National Council, leading to the creation of the so-called joint Kurdish Supreme Council. The following month saw the signing of another agreement between the two sides that involves the establishment of security committees and civilian defense forces to safeguard Kurdish territories. (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012) These developments portrayed the PYD as a viable ground supporter for the coalition in Syria, for it enjoys a series of geographical, political and military advantages that cannot be seen in other cases of pro-coalition groups in the country .

However, the experience of the PYD in combating ISIS showed that the above-mentioned considerations are not sufficient for defeating the latter when air power does not exist. In January 2014, ISIS captured Al-Raqqa, Hasakah and parts of Aleppo, moving afterwards to the northeastern areas in Syria where Kurdish regions are close the Turkish borders. Although the military wing of the PYD—People's Defense Unites (YPG)—managed then to stop ISIS from seizing Manajir town and Tel Brak, which was achieved through the support of the Arab tribes. Being, yet, familiar with the local urban terrain did not allow the YPG from maintain their tactical successes for longer periods. In fact, ISIS had always managed to provide itself with reinforcements as battles are ongoing, backing itself with massive amounts of tanks and fighting trucks in order to increase its impact in terms of firepower, a situation that remained in place even after the US-led coalition had started its missions. (Flood 2014) In March 2014, ISIS succeeded in controlling large parts of Tel Abyad and Ayn Al-Arab (Kobani) after defeating the YPG. In April, ISIS captured three areas that surround Kobani, including Jarablus in the north, Sarrain in the south, in addition to Tel Abyad in the east. The PYD, as a result, called on all Kurdish forces to join the war against ISIS. In September, the YPG lost 64 villages that fell under the control of ISIS. (Acun& Oner 2014, p. 4-7)

The military outcome of the YPG-ISIS confrontations had only changed due to two major factors. Firstly, the YPG managed to attract more fighters through developing military alliances on several fronts. The YPG allied itself with the FSA in an operative command structure named "Burqan Al-Firat." This deal represented a reversal to previous enmity between both parties that fought against each other in northern Syria, in addition to previous accusations directed to the YPG about cooperating with the regime of Al-Assad. Such deal coincided with a US decision by the US administration to arrange programs of military training for the Syrian opposition forces. It will be challenging to assume that the FSA militants are capable of defeating ISIS, for they failed to achieve these results in dozens of incidents since the emergence of the latter. But the presence of more pro-coalition fighters in ground battles implied a higher possibility for providing airmen with accurate and uninterruptedly-updated intelligence information until the YPG manages to restore the ISIS-captured areas and towns. (Rojan & Malmvig 2014, p. 3-4)

Moreover, the YPG received backing from the Peshmerga—the military troops of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan—in October 2014 as their convoys arrived in southeastern Turkey ahead of entering Kobani to fight with the Syrian Kurds. Salem Mosalem, co-chair of the PYD, announced then that the Peshmerga will bring "mainly artillery, or anti-armor, anti-tank weapons" in order to manage fighting against the armored vehicles and tanks of ISIS, as the light weapons of the Syrian Kurds proved to be insufficient for achieving victory. (Asharq Al-Awsat 2014) The Kurdistan's Minister of Peshmerga, Mustafa Sayyid Qader, had also declared that the presence of his troops is not restricted to any time limit. Hence, the YPG guaranteed the presence of external support as long as fighting continues, for any other scenario could have most likely led to the repetition of military defeats. (Afanasieva & Dziadosz 2014)

Secondly, the role of the coalition's air strikes had influentially contributed to the positive outcome in terms of the military confrontations between militants of Kurdish groups and those of ISIS. The coalition carried out more than 600 air strikes in Kobani and the regions surrounding it, though reportedly leading to a negative impact on the frequency of air sorties in others parts of Syria during this period, which involves an overall estimate of 900 air strikes in all Syrian territories. These strikes targeted the supply lines, weapons, vehicles and personnel affiliated with ISIS. The coalition also airdropped weapons, ammunitions and medical supplies for the Kurdish militants. In some incidents, these supplies had fallen into the hands of ISIS militants, though their presence was generally important to ensure meeting the logistical needs of the YPG and the Peshmerga troops. (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2015, p. 4-9)

Despite the expansion of the anti-ISIS ground troops, ISIS published a video through the pro-ISIS Aamaq News Agency in which it had admitted that air strikes of the coalition "were the main reason" behind the withdrawal of the militant group from Kobani, which took place on 26 January 2015. Capturing Kobani by the Kurdish troops was followed by a number of military victories against ISIS, such as seizing a military base in Raqqa, Ain Issa—a town located 50 km (30 miles) north of this province—and Tal Abyad. (Perry 2015, Hubbard 2015) Speaking anonymously to the Associated Press, one ISIS militant said that the "warplanes were bombing us night

and day, as they bombarded everything, even motorcycles." (Mroue 2015) It was largely expected that the announcement made by ISIS aims at underestimating the impact of the Kurdish ground operations for "propaganda reasons", for the media outlets linked to the group attempted to avoid reporting the Kurdish military advancements in Kobani until the defeat was clear to all parties of the conflict, as well as trying to take attention away from the battles through highlighting executions of Asian and Jordanian hostages .

These developments, as a consequence, gave room for the US-led coalition and the Kurdish militant groups to achieve the objectives of the war. Perhaps a major difference between this case study and the previous ones involved the presence of a strong non-state actor that is backed by the majority of the local population within areas under its control. This situation is totally different from the Israel-Hezbollah case in which the Israeli military personnel were fully counting on the outcome produced by air strikes due to the absence of supportive ground troops that can challenge the socio-political and military weight of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Even the Christian militias were no longer in place during the war in 2006, and hence destroying Hezbollah was an objective that is beyond the reach of air power. Even with the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, the high number of domestic actors and various tribal alliances increase the difficulty of defeating the Houthis. As changes in the post-uprising internal alliances in Yemen had taken place, the Saudis were inevitably required to depend on disorganized, relatively weak and numerous non-state groups that have different interests. While some members of the coalition were pushed to send their ground troops to Yemen, having no experience in terms of the country's sophisticated, mountainous terrain and asymmetrical wars in general could not make the situation any better .

On the contrary, the presence of all required conditions for successfully finalizing an asymmetrical confrontation had eventually pushed for a positive outcome. Good coordination between air strikes and the Kurdish militants, the reinforcements provided by the Iraqi Kurdish groups, the Kurdish deep knowledge of the battlefields' terrain—which ISIS lacked to some extent—and the intensification of aerial attacks within a specific geographical areas are reasons for the success of the campaign. It is possible, therefore, to start discussing the positive implications of

defeating ISIS in Kurdish areas. On the one hand—unlike the case with most of the geographical parts in Syrian that receives aid on frequent basis—the success of Kurdish militants and US-led air strikes in defeating ISIS and pushing it away from areas under the control of the former was the major cause that pushed for solving many of the humanitarian problems. Borders, as one indicator, between the Kurdish areas in Syria and those located on the borders with Iraq and Turkey were reopened after the end of the battles. As an example, the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) managed to send humanitarian aid to Kobani, which included a thousand of water bottles, five thousand cartons of milk, food, medicine, tents, clothing, cleaning supplies and hygiene supplies worth 700 million Turkish liras, arranging shelter for more than 180.000 Kurdish people who took refuge in Turkey during times of clashes. People in Kobani had finally managed to receive "three meals every day", which benefited at least 50 thousand people. (Yeni Şafak 2015)

It is worth mentioning that—since the military loss of ISIS against the Kurds—the latter managed to triple the size of the territory under their control, restoring control over areas such as Kobani, Tal Abyad, Hasakah and Qamishli. This meant that the overall ISIS-ruled areas had decreased by 14 percent. (Schapiro 2015) One can possibly reach two preliminary conclusions for this matter. Losing control over a certain territory indicated that ISIS can no longer have a "flow of foreign terrorist fighters" or maintain access to its "financing and funding" after the Kurds regained control over the above-mentioned cities and towns. Such condition comes in contradiction with the situation when battles were still ongoing, for ISIS—as it has been mentioned—had succeeded in receiving military reinforcements, weapons, money and other sorts of logistical support from outside Kobani.

Although—at such point of time—air strikes had stopped and re-directed to other cities in Syria, ISIS militants became now aware of the fact that they can be resumed at any point of time in case they decided to have a new attempt of invading the Kurdish areas in Syria. This situation coincided with the return of about 100,000 people—mostly Kurdish citizens—to their neighborhoods in Kobani and the surrounding areas. It is true that about 70 percent of Kobani was destructed after the end of the Kurdish-ISIS battles, but it indicated that ISIS can hardly manage to spread

its ideas and ideological beliefs—aside from the military aspect of the issue—within such population in the future. These Kurdish civilians can hardly forget that ISIS caused the death of more than 560 Kurdish militants in battles against them or that they were enforced to leave their houses and stay in camps on the Turkish borders, for it provides the only possible option for avoiding losing their lives and that of their families. On that basis, winning the support of the population is almost impossible to achieve by ISIS in case it carries future military plans. (Associated Press 2015)

Despite the fact that it surpasses the timeframe of the study, it is worth mentioning that the post-conflict periods in Kurdish regions saw a series of escalatory steps by the PYD that aims at stressing their control over their territories. In March 2016—during a press conference held in the Kurdish town of Rmeilan—the PYD declared a combination of three Kurdish-controlled areas in northern Syria in order to serve as autonomous ones under a system of "democratic federalism." This system involves "areas of democratic self-administration" that will handle its economic, security and defence issues. Such step received support from other Kurdish groups—especially in Iraq, while was did not manage to receive a similar recognition from Al-Assad's regime and Turkey, which views the Kurds as a threat for its internal security and has fought hard to prevent the Kurdish groups in Turkey from militarily backing the operations against ISIS. (Reuters 2016) Aside from the expected of such process and the rise of "Kurdish nationalism" in the Middle East—for it surpasses the scope of the study—the ability of the Kurds to take new steps in this issue amid expected anger by many regional actors reflects the extent of the success achieved by the military campaign against ISIS that involved both land and air means of combat. The Kurds in Syria—unlike their counterparts in Turkey, Iran and Iraq—could not have thought about declaring a federal region unless their control over their territories is almost absolute. As a result—in light of the above-mentioned arguments—the capability of the US-led, Kurdish-backed military campaign to push for significant political and strategic outcomes can barely be denied.

Chapter 6

<u>Conclusion</u>

This study examined the issue of asymmetrical wars in which conventional militaries mainly depend on strategic bombing when fighting non-state actors. Such formula has been widely seen in the Middle East region nearly throughout the last decade. Studying its dynamics and end results, therefore, is an issue that deserves to be investigated, especially with an increasing pool of empirical evidence that covers several states within such region. One can possibly argue that the topic and conclusions of this study are significant for research in terms of both security studies and strategic studies. While the former—to a great extent—focuses on issues such as causes and nature of warfare, the latter is related to ways and mechanisms of carrying out the combating processes.

The study represented an attempt to determine the motives of states to rely on strategic bombing against non-state actors in the Middle East, the limitations of such approach, in addition to the ability of strategic bombing in general to turn tactical successes into actual, strategic gains on basis of the political objectives of military campaigns. In the meantime, there is no doubt that the academic literature on warfare includes traditional explanations for the topic of the study. For example—which was presented in earlier parts of the study—Marxist scholars focus on the relationship between going to war and the willingness of states to achieve economic gains, such as testing new weapons. But since the contemporary, asymmetrical conflicts in the region—as the three included in this study—reflected the insistence of states to reduce the extent of military involvement as much as possible, it is highly challenging to depend on Marxist framework of analysis in understanding these cases.

On these bases, concerning the findings, one can argue that this study has offered three key conclusions in relation to the topic. Firstly, states are concerned about casualties among the ranks of their armed forces in the meantime. Pushing for a change in military policies in order to achieve this objective is seen as practical, especially if military operations extend their reliance on air power, while decrease

levels of deploying ground troops as much as possible. As it has been witnessed throughout the three case studies of this study, some military campaigns launched by external forces involve the backing of ground troops from local or tribal groups, which leaves the latter responsible of handling the burden of ground combats. In the meantime, it is no secret that targeting and killing military personnel of conventional militaries becomes more difficult to be achieved by non-state actors when the former is attacking the latter from the airspace. At such point of time, the risk of losing military lives is less likely to happen, although—in some occasions—it is possible to find non-state actors possessing anti-aircraft weaponry. Although it is possible to argue that it is challenging to assume that all states do have the same motives when it comes to adopting a post-heroic military policy, for policymakers cannot logically share the same set of motives in war decision-making. But—regardless of the political and military results—the three case studies showed that decision-makers are generally skeptical about the deployment of ground troops, specifically in light of the complexities of fighting non-state groups that were discussed throughout the study.

For the Israelis, as an example, launching an air-power-based military campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon was linked to attempts by government leaders and military commanders to avoid repeating the negative, experiences of fighting against Hezbollah when the country was under Israeli occupation. The death of roughly 1,000 Israeli soldiers during this period of time—mostly due to Hezbollah guerilla operations against Israeli troops—had a massive impact on the military plan that was approved by Olmert in the 2006 war. As it has been stated in the discussion about such case study, Israel suffered the death of only about 160 citizens—including both military personnel and civilians—and hence the huge gap between the death toll in both cases of war clarifies the logic behind the post-heroic approach of the Israeli political and military leaderships. Even other indicators—such as the presence of the ex-air force key commander as the top-level military leader in Israel or absence of large-scale military drills between land and air troops—can lead one to conclude that the post-heroic leanings have been part of the Israeli military thinking for many years ahead of the war against Hezbollah.

On another level, the Saudi decision to form an Arab coalition ahead of intervening in Yemen was impacted by the fact that the Houthis were not fighting alone in this battle. The Houthis—who are militarily, financially and politically backed by Iran as the case with Hezbollah—managed to establish an alliance with segments of the military that remained loyal to ex-president Saleh. As a matter of fact, the Saudis were never reluctant to invade the Yemeni territories against the Houthis, which they did in more than one incident in past years when Saleh was in power. But losing the support of the Saleh and his troops—due to changes in domestic politics in Yemen—raised fears about high rates of military casualties.

Although the Saudis—as well as other members of the coalition—had suffered considerable casualties in this war, the numbers would have been higher on the side of the coalition if Saudi Arabia had taken the responsibility of the military action on unilateral basis. Furthermore, as the Saudi leadership is aware of the strong social and tribal relations of the Houthi-Saleh bloc, a post-heroic approach—based on air power and pro-coalition tribal support on the ground, as well as frequent deployment of Gulf ground forces—is a highly suitable option to choose in light of the military-political conditions in Yemen. Giving a statement that reflected the Saudi concern about deaths rates, it is worth mentioning that Asiri said in February 2016 that mortars and rockets fired at Saudi Arabian towns and villages had led to the killing 375 civilians, including 63 children since the beginning of the Saudi-led operations in Yemen in March 2015. The spokesman of the coalition added that the Houthis and forces loyal to Saleh launched more than 40,000 projectiles across the border as well. In one day, Saudi border areas are attacked by about 130 mortars and 15 missiles by the Houthi-Saleh bloc. Accordingly, the Saudi Arabian military decided that "now our rules of engagement are: you are close to the border, you are killed." (Maclean & Mcdowall 2016)

The formation of a coalition by the United States to launch aerial operations against ISIS in Syria was apparently influenced by motives similar to those of Saudi Arabia, which is dividing the burdens of war—including casualties—among the parties of the military alliance. Despite the fact that the United States, as the case with Israel, has been engaged in several asymmetrical conflicts throughout history, the Obama administration showed no willingness to take its coalition-based military

action beyond the stage of air strikes in Syria. Hence, the presence of Kurdish militants Syria—being supported with other Kurdish groups in Turkey and Iraq—represented a golden opportunity for Washington to justify its absolute dependence on air power. Perhaps this is the only case study in which one can hardly find death tolls among the troops of the coalition, simply because they have no presence on the ground. In this war, casualties are either civilian casualties, casualties related to ISIS, or casualties among militants of pro-coalition non-state groups that are fighting against ISIS. Ironically, this situation comes in great contradiction with the two late wars of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, which saw the death of more than 6,000 US soldiers and more than 8,000 among the troops of all states that joined the military coalitions formed by Washington. (icasualties.org 2009)

Secondly, the study concludes that air power cannot lead to military victories if not backed by ground and naval troops. It is important to emphasize the relationship between such finding and the topic of the study, which is preoccupied with asymmetrical wars involving fighting between conventional militaries and non-state actors. The reason is that—as it has been mentioned in the hypothesis section—campaigns of strategic bombing are seen as successful, specifically in terms of some examples such as Kuwait, Bosnia and Kosovo. Yet, based on the empirical evidence provided by this study, depending on air power as the major tool of combating militant groups appeared to be problematic. In some incidents—as the case with the Israeli air strikes against Hezbollah—it was not clear why Israel postponed the ground invasion until the last two days of the war just ahead of the ceasefire.

Although—in terms of the analytical framework of the study—one can relate this situation to the post-heroic factors, for the majority of the Israeli military deaths had taken place after the beginning of the ground invasion. Nevertheless, the absence of ground troops in southern Lebanese areas had allowed Hezbollah to maintain its rocket attacks on Israel through "hit-and-run" attacks. Additionally, as the Israeli military did not enjoy the backing of the local population in these areas—for most of them are Shiites—the whole Israeli military campaign is only credited for the series of tactical targets against Hezbollah sites that were successfully destructed. In other incidents, such as that of the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis in Yemen, it was sometimes unclear who is performing the ground missions, a situation that even puts

air power under more pressure, for this state of uncertainty in military planning is not a value added for the aerial campaign.

Thirdly, in regards to evaluating military campaigns, their success or failure should be considered in light of their ability to produce political and strategic results. It is possible to argue that a major component of the three case studies has been the absence of a connection between the types and extent of firepower and the expected military outcome within the war's military plan. In other words, although stopping reliance on land power—or at least imposing restraints on such process—is a sufficient guarantee that military personnel and civilians will be less likely exposed to killing by the enemy. However, it does not imply that a favorable political outcome will be achieved on a full scale. In some situations, such as the case with Israel's war against Hezbollah, some of the objectives appeared to be unreachable, such as that related to the full destruction of the Shiite militant group. This situation can be reflected in the Winograd report on the Israeli war in Lebanon, the report concluded that:

"We found severe failings and flaws in the defence of the civilian population and in coping with its being attacked by rockets…After a long period of using only standoff fire power and limited ground activities, Israel initiated a large scale ground offensive, very close to the Security Council resolution imposing a cease fire. This offensive did not result in military gains and was not completed. These facts had far-reaching implications for us, as well as for our enemies, our neighbors, and our friends in the region and around the world." (Winograd Commission 2008)

One can conclude—based on the conclusions of the Winograd commission that producing outcomes is not only related to the presence of ground forces, but rather based on a strong coordination between land and air power since the beginning of a military campaign, and in a continuous manner. The Israeli case study, hence, contradicts with the case of the US-led air strikes against ISIS in Syria, as well as with the Saudi Arabian case, though to a lesser extent. The presence of Kurdish ground troops, backed by the air strikes of the coalition, paved the way for the re-capturing of ISIS-controlled areas, a situation that Saudi Arabia and its partners in the coalition had partially succeeded to achieve. As a Kurdish citizen from the Kobani had put it while speaking to the *Los Angeles Times,* "Without the air strikes, Kobani would be completely under the control of Daesh now…We would have lost everything. Now, at least, maybe we can think about going home someday." (McDonnell 2014) Saudi

Arabia, on the contrary, did not enjoy the support of local communities in all Yemeni areas amid the inability of the coalition to cover the disputed territories in terms of this issue. Thus, the outcome was a "static war"—as Asiri described it—in which neither side is capable of securing a complete victory and ensuring the accomplishment of his objectives.

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