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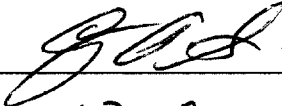
TITLE: The Al-Quds Force: Implications for Stability in The Middle East

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Executive Summary

Title: The Al-Quds Force: Implications for Stability in The Middle East

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Thesis: The Islamic Republic of Iran’s efforts to propel the Houthi rebels to victory in the ongoing civil war in Yemen will undermine American efforts to bring lasting peace to the region and will sway the regional balance of power in favor of Iran. In order to prevent this outcome, the United States must invest in an unconventional warfare capability in the Saudi Arabian defense forces, must acknowledge that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is the center of gravity in Iranian foreign policy, and must hold Iran accountable for their blatant violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement.

Discussion: Since it was established in the wake of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Al-Quds Force has been the primary proponent of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy strategy. With a stated goal of exporting the revolution, the Al-Quds Force has been at the forefront of many of Iran’s regional interventions, to include in Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, Iraq, and Yemen. The Al-Quds Force has aligned itself with and supported groups who share their anti status-quo agenda, with the goal of altering the traditional balance of power in the Middle East, typically dominated by Sunni Muslim countries, namely Saudi Arabia. In Yemen, the Islamic Republic of Iran is exploiting the turmoil that exists as a result of the “Arab Spring” and the ongoing civil war, to support the Houthi rebel group with weapons, training, and funding in order to propel them to victory against the central government. This conflict serves as one of many proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia and is vital to maintaining the traditional balance of power in the Middle East.

Conclusion: The Al-Quds force is present in Yemen and is helping propel the Houthi rebels to victory in the civil war against the central government. In order to prevent a Houthi victory, and to ultimately hinder Iran’s hegemonic aspirations, the United States must understand the importance of the conflict in Yemen and must develop a policy that will thwart the regional influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Preface

I am dedicating this paper to the victims of the heinous plot planned and perpetrated by the Al-Quds Force in Karbala, Iraq on 20 January 2007. Captain Brian Freeman, First Lieutenant Jacob Fritz, Private First Class Jonathan Millican, Specialist Johnathan Chism, and Private First Class Shawn Falter served as my inspiration for this paper and will always be in my thoughts. For those who read this paper and who may not have known the details about the murders of these American heroes, I hope that this paper provides insight on the violent nature of the Al-Quds Force and about how they, along with the Islamic Republic of Iran, are undermining the sacrifices made by so many Americans in Iraq. Furthermore, in a time when the United States military is focused on Sunni Muslim extremists, most notably the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and Al-Qaeda, I hope that this paper provides my fellow military members with insight on the threat posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran and their proxy forces worldwide.

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Introduction: The Al-Quds Force in Action

In the early evening of 20 January 2007, a large group of heavily armed combatants stormed the Provincial Joint Coordination Center (PJCC) in Karbala, Iraq, immediately killing one American Soldier and kidnapping and subsequently murdering four others. Although such a brazen attack was not uncommon during this phase of the American war in Iraq, the details of this attack were troubling to many observers.¹ The attackers drove American style Chevrolet Suburban's into the PJCC and bypassed initial security measures, wore American military uniforms, and carried American M4 rifles, complete with American style optics and lasers.² Observers indicated that the attackers had clearly rehearsed the operation, as they were very familiar with the layout of the compound and were able to swiftly kidnap their intended targets.³ At the time, America was heavily engaged in a fight to defeat Sunni Islamic terrorist groups in Iraq, most notably Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). However, after thorough investigation, this deadly attack was determined to have been perpetrated by the Iranian backed Shia militia group, Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of Righteous), led by Qais al-Khazali.⁴ Perhaps even more troubling, was the extent to which the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) may have assisted in the attack on the PJCC in Karbala. To many experts, this attack had all the trademarks of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), or more specifically, their unconventional warfare component, the Al-Quds Force (AQF), or "Jerusalem Force."⁵ American Brigadier General Kevin Bergner stated that "the Quds Force knew of and supported planning for the eventual

¹ Bill Roggi, "The Karbala Attack and the IRGC." *FDD's Long War Journal* (2007): http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/01/the_karbala_attack_a.php.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Steven O'Hern, *Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 100.

⁵ Ibid, 4.

Karbala attack that killed five coalition soldiers.”⁶ The subsequent investigation revealed that a known Iranian AQF officer, Abdul Reza Shalai, planned the attack.⁷

In an attempt to use proxy Iraqi Shia militia groups to execute their policy in Iraq, the AQF established a training camp in Iran for the perpetrators of the 20 January 2007 attack, complete with a mock compound of the PJCC in Karbala.⁸ American leaders, including the Commander of the Iraq mission, General David Petraeus, finally publically acknowledged the extent of Iran’s involvement in Iraq. In a response, the leader of the AQF, Major General Qasem Soleimani, sent a text message to General Petraeus stating that “I, Qasem Soleimani, control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. And indeed, the Ambassador in Baghdad is a Quds Force member. The individual who is going to replace him is a Quds Force member.”⁹ This troubling rhetoric signifies the tense relationship between the U.S. and the IRI, with no end in sight.

Since its inception in 1981, the AQF has been the primary tool of the IRI in its efforts to export its revolutionary ideology and to execute its foreign policy through the use of proxy forces worldwide.¹⁰ The IRI has consistently sought to disrupt the status quo agenda of the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Israel, and has repeatedly employed their AQF trained proxies to shape the

⁶ Dexter Filkins, “The Shadow Commander” *The New Yorker*, September 2013, 13, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>.

⁷ Steven O’Hern, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 101.

⁸ Roggio, Bill “U.S. Finds Karbala PJCC Mockup Inside Iran.” *FDD’s Long War Journal* (2007): http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/06/us_finds_karbala_pjc.php.

⁹ Dexter Filkins, “The Shadow Commander” *The New Yorker*, September 2013, 14, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>.

¹⁰ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 216.

regional and global geopolitical environment in its favor.¹¹ Similarly, the IRI leadership believes that they are the “standard bearers of revolutionary Islam,” and that they are the guardians of oppressed Muslims (Shia and Sunni) worldwide.¹² This ideology has been the basis for their support of radical Islamic movements throughout the Middle East.

In an all too familiar fashion, the AQF was again responsible for killing Americans, as they had previously done in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan. Today, the AQF is known to operate in the Middle East, in the United States, through its contacts with their Lebanese Proxy group, Hezbollah, and in Africa and South America.¹³ The AQF is heavily involved in Syria, where they train and fight alongside the government forces of Syria’s leader, Bashar Al-Assad, to reestablish government control of the entire country. Similarly, the AQF has a prominent role in Iraq, where the Shia dominated government allows them to train and fight alongside Iraqi Shia militia groups in the government’s attempt to recapture territory from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Similarly, the AQF supports the Houthi rebel group in Yemen in an attempt to overthrow the Saudi aligned government, continuing a troubling trend of the AQF meddling in neighboring countries on behalf of the IRI’s foreign policy goals. Although the AQF’s influence is widespread, this paper will focus on their activities in Yemen, the Middle East’s poorest country that is in the midst of a destabilizing civil war. Yemen serves as a viable

¹¹ Eisenstadt, Michael. “The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” *Middle East Studies Monograph, Marine Corp University*, no. 7 (November 2015): 1-50.

¹² Ibid, 6.

¹³ Michael Winnington, Robert Burton, Carl Jensen, David McElreath, Stephen Mallory & Daniel A. Doss. “Al-Quds Force: Iran's weapon of choice to export Terrorism” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (22 November 2015): <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/18335330.2015.1090053?needAccess=true>.

case study because it mirrors the region's broader cold war, between the Iranian affiliated Houthi rebels and the Saudi aligned reform party within the existing Yemeni government.¹⁴

The IRI is using the experienced unconventional warfare component of the influential IRGC, the AQF, to train and equip Houthi rebel fighters in Yemen in an attempt to export the ideology of the IRI, to undermine Saudi Arabian efforts to stabilize the existing Yemeni government in the wake of the civil war, to undermine American counter terrorism efforts in Yemen, and to further alter the traditional balance of power in the Middle East in favor of the IRI. Although the government in Yemen, led by Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, is by no means a model institution, and has teetered on the status of a "failed state" for years, increased Iranian influence, culminating with the removal of the Saudi supported government, will have disastrous repercussions, ultimately leading to a failed state environment where groups like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS can thrive. Furthermore, if the IRI, primarily through the use of their reliable AQF, is able to propel the Houthi rebels to victory, the balance of power in the Middle East will further swing in favor of Iran, a daunting yet realistic outcome that will undermine American efforts to bring long term stability and peace to the region. In order to counter Iranian efforts to gain influence and standing in Yemen, and to prevent the traditional balance of power from shifting in favor of the IRI, the U.S. must acknowledge that the IRGC is the prominent character in Iranian domestic and foreign policy, must train and advise our Saudi allies on the use of unconventional warfare techniques, and must take measures to further impede the IRGC and AQF from operating globally.

¹⁴ Mahjoob Zweiri, "Iran and Political Dynamism in the Arab World: the Case of Yemen." *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Volume 25, Number 1, (2016): <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dome.12078/full#references>.

This paper will provide contextual background on the IRI, the IRGC, and the AQF with the goal of providing historical precedence for their contemporary ideology and operations. Subsequently, this paper will address the ongoing regional balance of power struggle between The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and will also focus on the AQF's operations in contemporary Yemen. To conclude, this paper will provide policy recommendations for the United States in its efforts to thwart the hegemonic aspirations of the IRI.

Chapter 1: The Violent History of the Al-Quds Force

The Iranian Revolution occurred in 1979 and resulted in the abdication of the pro-western government of Shah Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. In his place, the author of the Iranian Revolution's ideology, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had been exiled to Iraq, returned to Iran and led the revolution, leading to the creation of the IRI. Grand Ayatollah Khomeini quickly implemented his own authoritarian government, legitimized by his concept of Islamic jurisprudence, known as Velayat-e-Faqih, where the religious leader is entrusted as the social, political, economic, and military authority in Iran.¹⁵ Under this philosophy, the Grand Ayatollah espoused that the IRI is always in a state of conflict, with both its neighboring countries who seek to weaken the Islamic Republic, and internally, where dissidents will seek to undermine the legitimacy of the Supreme Leader. With this philosophy as his basis, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini created the IRGC, which is allowed to exert enormous power and influence in order to protect the IRI and to export its ideology, creating a buffer between Iran and countries who seek to destroy the regime. Grand Ayatollah Khomeini envisioned that the revolution would extend beyond Iran's boundaries, and he sought to export the revolution in order to destroy

¹⁵ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 204.

“those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves and also entail the corruption of others, and to overthrow all treacherous, corrupt, oppressive, and criminal regimes.”¹⁶ Grand Ayatollah Khomeini attempted to rally Muslims worldwide, by writing that “this is the duty that all Muslims must fulfill, in every one of the Muslim countries, in order to achieve the triumphant political revolution of Islam.”¹⁷ In fact, this theory is so prevalent in Iranian political and military culture, it is written in the constitution: Article 154 of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Constitution states that “while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the oppressed against the oppressors in every corner of the globe.”¹⁸ Not only does this law allow for the expansive power of the IRGC and the AQF internationally, but it also paves the way for the IRGC’s involvement in domestic politics, a role that the IRGC has relished in recent years.¹⁹ While the IRGC has many responsibilities, including Iran’s nuclear weapons program and inter-continental ballistic missile program, internal security, and homeland defense, the AQF has one sole responsibility: exporting the ideology of the Islamic revolution and projecting Iran’s power beyond its borders.²⁰ To achieve that goal, the AQF is divided into branches responsible for intelligence, finance, politics, sabotage, and special operations, all elements that make them a viable adversary on the world stage.²¹

In 1981, during the early years of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the IRI formalized the mechanisms designed to export the revolution, when the Congress for Liberation of the Quds (Jerusalem) was established and the Chairman of the Iranian Parliament, Akhbar Hashemi

¹⁶ Ibid, 205.

¹⁷ Ibid, 205.

¹⁸ Ibid, 205.

¹⁹ Ibid, 204.

²⁰ Steven O’Hern, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 85.

²¹ Dexter Filkins, “The Shadow Commander” *The New Yorker*, September 2013, 13, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>.

Rafsanjani, declared that “until the victory of the revolution of Palestine and until Israel has left the occupied territories, our revolution will not have reached its total victory.”²² Taking it a step farther, the IRGC formally created the AQF on 12 December 1981.²³

The Islamic Revolution in Iran resonated with many disaffected Muslims worldwide and served as a catalyst for the export of the revolution by the AQF. In their early years, the AQF was responsible for training, equipping, and fighting alongside Shia Muslim militants in Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain. In Lebanon, the AQF helped form Shia militant groups, to include Hezbollah (Party of God), to defeat Israeli forces in southern Lebanon and to attack western targets.²⁴ Hezbollah, with immense contributions from the AQF, successfully attacked the American Embassy in Beirut on 17 April 1983, resulting in the deaths of 63 people, to include 17 Americans.²⁵ In perhaps their most successful operation to date, the AQF assisted Hezbollah in their attack on the Marine Barracks in Beirut on 23 October 1983, resulting in the devastating loss of 241 American service members.²⁶

While the AQF established and maintained a mentorship relationship with Lebanese Hezbollah in the early 1980’s, a relationship that still exists today, the majority of the Guards, to include its current Commander, Major General Qasim Soleimani, earned their stripes during the nearly decade long war with the Baathist regime in neighboring Iraq, commonly referred to as the “Sacred Defense” by IRGC members.²⁷ Fearful that the Iranian Revolution would spill across its border and incite the oppressed Iraqi Shia, Iraq invaded Iran on 22 September 1980.

²² Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 216.

²³ Ibid, 216.

²⁴ Steven O’Hern, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 55.

²⁵ Ibid, 52.

²⁶ Ibid, 52.

²⁷ Dexter Filkins, “The Shadow Commander” *The New Yorker*, September 2013, 13, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>.

Throughout the war, the AQF supported Iraqi Shia militant groups and assisted the larger IRGC in several key battles. The Iran-Iraq war gave the IRGC a platform to consolidate power and to control the majority of military and political decisions throughout the duration of the war. In fact, the IRGC was responsible for the continuation of the war and invasion of mainland Iraq, even after the liberation of the Iranian city of Khorramshahr.²⁸ The IRI learned two important lessons from their experiences fighting Iraq. First, they learned that its enemies surround Iran, both regionally and internationally, and secondly, that it was not in their favor to fight these enemies in a conventional manner. Perhaps most importantly, the IRGC (and AQF) emerged as an experienced and sophisticated force that wielded great influence in Iran and who were capable of turning their attention elsewhere at the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988.

The AQF expanded its operations globally during the 1990's, and relied heavily on an international network of assets, many of whom were drawn from the Iranian diaspora worldwide.²⁹ The AQF trained and equipped Bosnian Muslims during the war in Bosnia and was also responsible for the bombing of the Israeli Embassy (1992) and a Jewish Community Center (1994) in Argentina.³⁰ Perhaps most notably, the AQF participated in the attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, which housed American servicemen participating in the enforcement of the no fly zone in Iraq. The Saudi Hezbollah members who perpetrated the attack were trained in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, a known Hezbollah and AQF Stronghold, and were responsible for the bombing which resulted in the deaths of 19 American Service members.³¹ Although their operations in the 1990's were widespread and deadly, the emergence of Major General Qasim

²⁸ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 219.

²⁹ Dexter Filkins, "The Shadow Commander" *The New Yorker*, September 2013, 5, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>.

³⁰ Steven O'Hern, *Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 74.

³¹ Steven O'Hern, *Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 76.

Soleimani as its commander in 1997 ushered in a new era of AQF activity that would lead to their head on collision with American forces and their emergence as a dominant player in Middle East politics. Today, Soleimani is known as “the single most powerful operative in the Middle East,” and his leadership is contributing to the rampant success of the AQF as they undermine American efforts to bring lasting peace and stability to the region.³²

By March of 2003, its sworn enemy, the United States of America, surrounded the IRI on both its Western and Eastern border. The American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the quick toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq, spread fear in the IRI, where leaders worried that they would certainly be the next target of the United States, whose President had recently labeled them as members of the “Axis of Evil.”³³ After initial attempts to appease the Americans, The IRGC and AQF quickly reacted to the threat and assumed an offensive posture.³⁴ In Iraq, by 2007, Iranian backed forces, under the tutelage of the AQF, were responsible for roughly half the attacks on coalition forces.³⁵ In addition to the previously described attack on the PJCC in Karbala in 2007, the AQF is known to have provided Iraqi Shia militant groups, most notably the Iraqi Badr Corps, with weapons, training, funding, and the dreaded Explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) technology, which were likely responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans, although the exact number remains classified.³⁶ The AQF was very experienced in smuggling weapons into Iraq, as they had mastered the technique during the Iran-Iraq War, and was likely to have supplied the “special groups” of Shia militias with between \$750,000 and \$3

³² Dexter Filkins, “The Shadow Commander” *The New Yorker*, September 2013, 2, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>.

³³ Ibid, 10.

³⁴ Ibid, 10.

³⁵ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 231.

³⁶ Steven O’Hern, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 105.

million in U.S. dollars a month since the beginning of American involvement in Iraq in 2003.³⁷ Since the outset of the American led war in Iraq, the AQF has been the leading element of the IRI's foreign policy, and have to a great extent, altered the political landscape in Iraq, where the Shia dominated government and security forces are closely aligned with the IRI, further swaying the regional balance of power in favor of Tehran.

The IRI (and AQF) was not always aligned with the Afghan Taliban. In fact, for much of the 1990's, the Afghan Taliban was viewed as a surrogate of two of Iran's most vaunted regional adversaries, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Additionally, the Taliban were enemies of two of Iran's only allies in Afghanistan, the Shia Hazarra peoples and the Persian speaking Tajiks of Northern Afghanistan.³⁸ However, with the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the IRI and the Afghan Taliban now shared a common enemy. The AQF trained and equipped the Afghan Taliban, even hosting the Taliban Supreme Leader, Mullah Maktur Mansour, in Iran prior to his death in 2016.³⁹ Although the United States' presence in Afghanistan was less daunting than their presence in Iraq, the AQF seized the opportunity to spill American blood and to regain influence in the Region. This pragmatic approach and opportunism is an important characteristic of the AQF, and of the IRI in general. While the majority of Iranians are Shia Muslims, and they have historically supported Shia enclaves throughout the Middle East, they are also opportunists who understand that their alliances must go beyond ideological similarities.⁴⁰ This reasoning has led them to support Hamas in the Palestinian territory, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and now, the Houthi

³⁷ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 233.

³⁸ Steven O'Hern, *Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012) 110.

³⁹ Levitt, Mathew. "Iran's Support for Terrorism Under the JCPOA" *The Washington Institute For Near East Policy* (July 2016): <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-support-for-terrorism-under-the-jcpoa>.

⁴⁰ Thomas Juneau, "Iran's policy towards the Houthi's in Yemen: A limited return on a modest investment." *Journal of International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 649, <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

rebels in Yemen, who are Shia Muslims, but align more closely with the Sunni tribes in Yemen than they do with the Iranian clerics in Qom or Tehran.⁴¹

Since its inception in 1981, the AQF has repeatedly proven that it can successfully orchestrate and execute the IRI's foreign policy in the Middle East. While the military, economic, and diplomatic power of the IRI is no match for many of its adversaries, through the successful operations of the AQF, the IRI has exported its ideology, has created a buffer between themselves and potential adversaries, and has challenged the traditional balance of power in the Middle East.

Chapter 2: The Arab Cold War: The Regional Balance of Power

The ongoing proxy wars between The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the IRI have deep rooted causes and have widened the sectarian divide throughout the Middle East. While the IRI is indeed an Islamic theocracy, its foreign policy is driven by the desire to dominate geographically in the Persian Gulf region, and less on ideological considerations.⁴² The IRI's leadership is concerned with the "expediency of the regime," and has proven to be pragmatic in its application of force, with the alliances it forms, and in its rhetoric against its regional rivals.⁴³ The IRI's leadership has always viewed Iran as the dominant power in the Gulf because of its geography, resources, and because of a self-actualized sense of Iranian "manifest destiny."⁴⁴ In the last six years, in the wake of the "Arab Spring," the IRI has gone from a strategically isolated and defeated country, to an increasingly confident and assertive one, who is exploiting turmoil in

⁴¹ Ibid, 651.

⁴² Michael Eisenstadt, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Middle East Studies Monograph, Marine Corp University*, no. 7 (November 2015): 2.

⁴³ Ibid, Introduction.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 7.

the region to expand its influence.⁴⁵ Although most experts agree that the center of gravity for this “cold war” between Saudi Arabia and Iran is currently in Syria, the less publicized conflict in Yemen is further altering the balance of power in the Middle East and has troubling implications for American policies in the region.

The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 threatened the religious and political legitimacy of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and started a series of conflicts between the regions’ two primary powers. As stated in Chapter One, the Islamic revolution’s ideology encouraged Muslims to overthrow their rulers.⁴⁶ As a result of this revolutionary rhetoric from their neighbors across the Persian Gulf, the Saudi’s viewed Iran as an intolerable threat from the very beginning of Iran’s existence, and sought to undermine their growing influence in the region⁴⁷. The first proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia was the Iran-Iraq. Similar to Saddam Hussein’s motives described in Chapter One, Saudi Arabia was fearful that the Iranian Islamic revolution would galvanize their own Shia population, and therefore, supported Iraq with weapons and funding throughout the duration of the war.⁴⁸ While the war ended in a stalemate after incomprehensible casualty rates, it also provided the Islamic Republic with new motivations, namely, to alter the Saudi-led, American-backed regional order.⁴⁹

After the successful repulsion of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991, the U.S. established military bases in Saudi Arabia to defend its allies in the Persian Gulf from further Iraqi violence. This act, tilted the regional balance of power in favor of Saudi Arabia and was

⁴⁵ Ibid, Introduction.

⁴⁶ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 216.

⁴⁷ Max Fisher, “How the Iranian-Saudi Proxy Struggle Tore Apart the Middle East,” *The New York Times*, November 19, 2016, 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/world/middleeast/iran-saudi-proxy-war.html>.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

viewed as a threat by Iran.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Saddam Hussein widened the sectarian divide in his country, a move that Iran exploited to develop valuable relationships with Shia opposition groups, political parties, and militias, much to their benefit in the coming years.⁵¹

The American led invasion of Iraq in 2003 toppled the Iraqi regime and upended the existing balance of power in the region. Iran became convinced that the U.S. would install a government that would benefit American interests, and therefore, leveraged the relationships they developed in the preceding decade, many by the AQF, and used their position to both influence politics in Baghdad and to undermine the American led occupation.⁵² As mentioned in Chapter One, the results of this Iranian incursion in Iraq were extremely detrimental to American interests.

Leading up to the “Arab Spring” in 2011, Iran and Saudi Arabia engaged in yet another proxy war, this time in Lebanon. The Iranian’s came to the aid of their long time proxy group, Syrian supported Hezbollah, in their fight against the Saudi supported Lebanese Army. The events in Lebanon served as a dress rehearsal for the subsequent Syrian Civil War that is ongoing today.

The implosion caused by the “Arab Spring” revolts finally upended the regional balance of power, and as a result, several key Sunni allies of Saudi Arabia were removed from power.⁵³ While it may be easy to assume that Iran was fearful that protests and unrest throughout the Middle East would ultimately threaten the regime in Tehran, the truth is quite to the contrary. In fact, the Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, and the regime as a whole, viewed the unrest in the Middle

⁵⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁵¹ Ibid, 4.

⁵² Ibid, 4.

⁵³ Suzanne Maloney, *The Bogeyman, The Arab Awakening: American and the Transformation of the Middle East*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 258.

East as an extension of their own Islamic revolution and welcomed the toppling of several of their primary rivals throughout the region.⁵⁴ Iran exploited the vulnerability of their neighbors and covertly supported Shia minorities in Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. While former U.S. President Barack Obama urged Iran and Saudi Arabia to “find an effective way to share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace,” the reality remains that the ongoing proxy wars between these two belligerents are widening the sectarian divide in the Middle East, are igniting Islamic fundamentalist and jihadi sentiments, and are undermining the U.S.’s efforts to bring stability to the region.⁵⁵

The U.S. must implement a strategy to thwart Iran’s increasing influence in the region. While Iraq and Syria have clearly tilted in favor of Tehran, the civil war in Yemen serves as an opportunity for Saudi Arabia and the U.S. to undermine Iranian efforts to propel the Houthi rebels to power, and in a wider context, to prevent the spread of Iran’s influence in the Middle East. While the conflict in Yemen receives far less international attention than the conflict in Syria, it is an important battleground in the Saudi-Iranian proxy wars and for the U.S.’s foreign policy in the Middle East. Iranian influence for the preceding decade has been minimal in Yemen, but has increased substantially since the Saudi Arabian intervention in 2015, an indication that the IRI understands the importance that Yemen plays in their hegemonic aspirations.⁵⁶ The United States must understand the importance of Yemen, as well.

Chapter 3: The Al-Quds Force and Ansar Allah in Yemen

⁵⁴ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁵ Max Fisher, “How the Iranian-Saudi Proxy Struggle Tore Apart the Middle East,” *The New York Times*, November 19, 2016, 6, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/world/middleeast/iran-saudi-proxy-war.html>.

⁵⁶ Thomas Juneau, “Iran’s policy towards the Houthi’s in Yemen: A limited return on a modest investment.” *Journal of International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 648, <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

In the wake of the ongoing civil war in Yemen, the IRI is yet again exerting its influence in a neighboring Middle Eastern country through its existing relationship with the Ansar Allah militant organization, comprised primarily of Houthi tribesmen. As they have done previously, the IRI has inserted itself into the affairs of a neighboring country where two conditions exist, instability and disaffected actors, both prevalent elements in Yemeni current affairs.⁵⁷ If the AQF successfully assists the Houthi rebels to victory over the Saudi and American backed government, the balance of power in the Middle East will continue to gravitate in favor of the IRI, American counter terrorism efforts will be undermined, and Yemen will remain a turbulent country, with little hope for stability.

Yemen has endured episodic periods of turbulence and violence throughout its history. In 1962, a military Coup resulted in the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), which after a period of continued internal strife was subsequently recognized by Saudi Arabia in 1970. In 1978, Colonel Ali Abdullah Saleh violently assumed power in YAR, and after several years of war with southern Yemen, finally reached a peaceful solution in 1994, unifying north and south Yemen. Numerous opposition movements to President Saleh's power emerged, most notably among the northern Shia Houthi tribesman, who launched an insurgency against the government in 2004.⁵⁸ The insurgency was (and still is) fueled by the Houthi's desire to address economic underdevelopment in northern Yemen, political marginalization by the central government, and discrimination in Zaydi areas of Yemen. The Houthi's also desire a greater say in national affairs, and notably, to end proselytizing by Saudi backed mosques in northern Yemen.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid, 648.

⁵⁸ Ibrahim Sharqieh, *Yemen: The Search for Stability and Development, The Arab Awakening: American and the Transformation of the Middle East*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 222.

⁵⁹ Thomas Juneau, "Iran's policy towards the Houthi's in Yemen: A limited return on a modest investment." *Journal of International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 651, <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

Following the relatively peaceful Arab Spring uprisings in Yemen in 2011, President Saleh abdicated and his Vice President, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, assumed power. In 2015, the Shia Houthi rebels, who make up approximately 40% of Yemen's population, launched an attack on Hadi's government. After being placed under house arrest, President Hadi eventually fled to Aden, where he led the opposition to the Houthi incursion. In a departure from Saudi Arabian defense policy, which is generally inward looking, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), launched a several month long air campaign to defeat the Houthi rebels. The motives for Saudi involvement were extensive. The Saudi's sought to prevent the Yemeni civil war from spilling over their border, they wanted to prevent the removal of yet another Arab leader in the wake of the Arab Spring movements, and because they feared that a Houthi victory would inspire their own Shia population.⁶⁰ Perhaps most importantly, Saudi Arabia framed the intervention as an attempt to counter Iranian influence in Yemen. Former president Salah used the same tactic, perhaps in an attempt to solicit Saudi and American support.⁶¹

Authors such as Thomas Juneau and Mahjoob Zweiri, however, argue that the Houthi rebels in Yemen have their own aspirations, and to date, have determined their own future, independent of Iranian influence. Furthermore, the same experts argue that the Houthi tribesmen, who have more in common with their Yemeni tribal brethren, than they do with Iran, are not at all an Iranian proxy.⁶² While there may be truth to this argument, the IRI has proven throughout its history that it is an opportunist regime that will intervene in neighboring countries, even when the disaffected groups they support do not share their ideology or religious beliefs. To receive

⁶⁰ Ibid, 647.

⁶¹ Ibid, 652.

⁶² Ibid, 647.

Iranian support, actors must merely oppose the status quo, as they have proven with their support to Hamas, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the Afghan Taliban.⁶³ The author Ali Alfoneh, who has more extremist views on the IRI than many of his contemporaries, would argue that the IRGC and AQF indeed have a vested interest in Yemen, regardless of sectarian issues, primarily because they view the export of their revolutionary ideology as a key element to the regime's survival.

In the case of Yemen, the IRI acknowledges that Yemen is a major source of concern for their archrival, Saudi Arabia, and therefore, have calculated that overt support to the Houthi's would risk drawing Saudi Arabia (and its allies) into a direct confrontation.⁶⁴ The establishment of a minimal footprint in Yemen is part of the IRI's long-term strategy, which gives them options for future intensification of a conflict, if needed.⁶⁵ Hence, the IRI has employed the IRGC and AQF in Yemen to achieve its goal of undermining Saudi Arabian and American influence.

Regardless of reasoning or motive, it is evident that this period of instability in Yemen created an opportunity for the IRI and the AQF to exploit. With only a minimal investment, the AQF and the IRI have undermined their most notable regional rival, Saudi Arabia. The AQF again serves as the perfect medium to export their foreign policy into a neighboring country in order to achieve their foreign policy goals.

Although the AQF has maintained a relationship with the Houthi tribesmen, who are members of the moderate Zaydi segment of Shia Islam, since at least 2004, their efforts to train and equip the Houthi's since the outset of the current civil war in 2015 have only intensified.⁶⁶ While the AQFs' efforts in Yemen are over-shadowed by their efforts in Iraq and Syria, a recent

⁶³ Ibid, 649.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 648.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 650.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 656.

missile attack by the Houthi rebels on U.S. Navy ships brought Iranian involvement in Yemen to the forefront.⁶⁷ The IRI has a long history of denying military involvement in other countries, to include in Lebanon and Iraq, and their stance on Yemen is no different.⁶⁸ While the Islamic Republic denies any involvement in training or equipping the Houthi's, evidence suggests otherwise. The Iranian state affiliated media has recently publicized the Houthi movement's use of a model Zelzal-3 Iranian rocket.⁶⁹ The regime maintains that the weapons are produced internally in Yemen, a claim that is highly unlikely due to the meager state of the Yemeni economy. However, the AQF Deputy Commander, Esmail Gha'ani, recently claimed, perhaps to the displeasure of the regime, that Houthi rebels have been "trained under the flag of the Islamic Republic," perhaps, as some reports suggest, through Hezbollah's train and equip program.⁷⁰ A recent UN Security Council committee on Iranian sanctions indicated that Iran started shipping weapons to the Houthi's in 2009, or earlier.⁷¹ Similarly, U.S. Navy and Yemeni Coast Guard ships intercepted the Iranian ship, *Jihan I*, in 2013, and confiscated ammunition, weapons, rocket propelled grenades, C-4 plastic explosives, and man portable air defense systems, all likely destined for Houthi rebels.⁷² The IRI may not overtly support the Houthi cause, but they certainly have a vested interest in the outcome of the Yemeni civil war and have taken full advantage of the opportunity to amplify the turmoil on the southern border of their most notable regional rival.

⁶⁷ Rosenberg, Matthew and Mark Mazzetti, "U.S. Ship Off Yemen Fires Missiles at Houthi Rebel Sites," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/world/middleeast/yemen-rebels-missile-warship.html>

⁶⁸ Benham Taleblu and Amir Toumaj. "Analysis: IRGC implicated in arming Yemeni Houthi's with rockets." *FDDs Long War Journal* (21 August 2016): <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/08/analysis-irgc-implicated-in-arming-yemeni-houthis-with-missiles.php>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Thomas Juneau, "Iran's policy towards the Houthi's in Yemen: A limited return on a modest investment." *Journal of International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 656, <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

⁷² Ibid, 657.

U.S. and Saudi officials have indicated that they are concerned about the IRGC presence in Yemen, as well. The Saudi ambassador to the U.S. stated in March, 2015, that “we see Iran playing a large role in supporting the Houthi’s,” a sentiment that was echoed by former White House spokesman Josh Earnest when he noted that “[the administration] has expressed our concerns about the destabilizing impact that Iran is having on [Yemen].”⁷³ In perhaps another indication of Iranian involvement and long term interests in Yemen, the current leader of the Houthi’s, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, along with his brother Hussein, the groups former leader, studied the tenets of Shia Islam in Qom, Iran, ground zero for the IRI’s Islamic theology.⁷⁴ It is likely that the AQF is present in Yemen, and that they are having a destabilizing effect. This turmoil is leading to the emergence and growth of both AQAP and ISIS in Yemen and is detrimental to U.S. efforts to defeat them.⁷⁵ If the AQF is able to propel the Houthi’s to victory in Yemen, resulting in an increased Houthi presence in the Yemeni government, groups like AQAP and ISIS will be able to thrive in Yemen. This instability and terrorist activity benefits the IRI, who will seek to weaken Saudi Arabia’s southern border and force the Saudi’s into a quagmire in Yemen.

Chapter 4: Reversing Iranian Gains: U.S. Policy Recommendations

The hegemonic aspirations of the IRI are coming to fruition. The early American withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 created a power vacuum that the IRI gladly filled. Similarly, the failure of the U.S. to mediate a solution to the ongoing civil war in Syria gave rise to Iranian influence. The “Arab Spring,” which removed several American aligned Sunni Arab leaders in

⁷³ Warren Strobel and Mark Hoosenball, “Elite Iranian Guards Training Yemen’s Houthi’s,” *Reuters.com*, March 27, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-houthis-iran-idUSKBN0MN2M120150327>.

⁷⁴ Thomas Juneau, “Iran’s policy towards the Houthi’s in Yemen: A limited return on a modest investment.” *Journal of International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 656, <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 654.

the region, paved the path for Iran to exert its influence. American policy makers and leaders must acknowledge that the IRI is an unconventional adversary and that an unconventional approach is needed to defeat them.⁷⁶ American officials tend to revert to “hard power” approaches to strategy and diplomacy that ignores the importance of “soft power,” or more importantly, the role that Iran’s unconventional warfare component plays in their foreign policy and national strategy.⁷⁷ In terms of Iran, U.S. military planners and policy makers tend to focus on Iran’s hard power assets such as its fledgling nuclear capability, its missile program, and its naval anti-access capabilities, rather than the moral, spiritual, and psychological dimensions, several of which are propagated by the AQF.⁷⁸ In order to thwart the IRI’s growing influence in the Middle East, the U.S must acknowledge that the IRGC is the primary broker in Iranian policy, must enact measures to counter the growing influence of the IRGC and the AQF, to include its leader, Major General Soleimani, and must develop an asymmetric warfare capability within the Saudi Arabian defense forces.

The recent signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by the U.S and the Islamic Republic of Iran was designed to deter Iranian nuclear weapons ambitions. While the agreement likely will delay Iranian nuclear weapons ambitions for 10-15 years, the signatories of the agreement are not the real power brokers within the IRI. With increased economic, military, and diplomatic influence, the IRGC is transforming the Islamic Republic’s theocracy into a military dictatorship.⁷⁹ The rise of the IRGC has been deliberate and has increased throughout the last thirty years. The Grand Ayatollahs, Khomeini first, and later Khamenei, have repeatedly

⁷⁶ Michael Eisenstadt, “The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” *Middle East Studies Monograph, Marine Corp University*, no. 7 (November 2015): Introduction.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

⁷⁹ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guard is Turning Theocracy Into Military Dictatorship* (Washington D.C.: The AEI Press, 2013) 204.

used the IRGC to suppress domestic challenges, to subdue calls for reform, and to reel in wayward Iranian politicians, to include the President.⁸⁰ In short, this dependence on the IRGC has empowered them and has made them an indispensable player within Iranian domestic and foreign politics. As author Ali Alfoneh stated, “the [IRGC] is a state within a state, and civilian leaders, including Khamenei, find themselves hostages in the hands of the regime’s own praetorian guard.”⁸¹ The IRGC wields tremendous influence over the president, the Supreme Leader, who owes his lengthy stay in power to the IRGC, and over the economy, as the IRGC controls many of Iran’s businesses, as well as the illicit drug trade.⁸² In order to reverse Iranian hegemonic gains, the U.S. must realize that the IRGC, not President Rouhani, or even the Supreme Leader, is the center of gravity in the IRI.

The JCPOA was signed in the summer of 2015 and was enacted in October 2015. Under the agreement, the IRI would receive eventual sanction relief in exchange for assurances that they would not pursue a nuclear weapons program for at least 10 years. Since that time, the IRI and the AQF have shown no sign of adhering to the agreement, and in many cases, have ramped up their efforts to unravel the status quo in the Middle East.⁸³ In a blatant violation of the U.N. travel ban placed on him, Major General Soleimani traveled to Moscow in July 2015 and met with President Vladimir Putin.⁸⁴ As evidence of further violations, the AQF has continued its

⁸⁰ Ibid, 16.

⁸¹ Ibid, 17.

⁸² Ibid, 165.

⁸³ Levitt, Mathew. “Iran’s Support for Terrorism under the JCPOA” *The Washington Institute For Near East Policy* (July 2016): <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-support-for-terrorism-under-the-jcpoa>.

⁸⁴ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Iran Nuclear Agreement,” News Release, https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/files/06_%20IRAN%20-%20Why%20it%20matters%20IRGC%20and%20Sanctions%20Relief.FINAL_.pdf.

support of proxies in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.⁸⁵ Former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, recently stated that “Iran, the foremost state sponsor of terrorism, continues to exert its influence in regional crises in the Middle East.”⁸⁶ While the results of the JCPOA are still unknown, and the benefits will likely not come to fruition for at least a decade, American leaders must acknowledge that the IRI is very adept at playing the long game and at practicing strategic patience. The IRI stands to benefit immensely, both economically and militarily, if it exercises this strategic patience and is able to thrive under reduced sanctions. If the U.S. wants to diminish the IRI’s role in the Middle East, it must hold the IRI responsible for their blatant violations of the JCPOA by labeling the entire IRGC as a terrorist organization, a course of action that is currently being deliberated by President Trump, and by increasing the economic sanctions on the IRI. Furthermore, the U.S. must not lift the current sanctions on Qasem Soleimani or his associates, as planned during Phase II of the JCPOA.

Since its inception in 1979, The IRI has excelled at unconventional warfare, primarily executed by the legendary AQF. Their principal adversary in the region, Saudi Arabia, has no such capability. In fact, Saudi Arabia views the military as a force required to defend its borders, not as an offensive force, and has spent the last 35 years looking inward.⁸⁷ Conversely, the Islamic regime in Tehran is aware that their economic and conventional military capacity prevents them from achieving their regional hegemonic goals, so they have invested in and excelled at unconventional warfare in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The United States has had a long-standing diplomatic and military relationship with The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and

⁸⁵ Levitt, Mathew. “Iran’s Support for Terrorism under the JCPOA” *The Washington Institute For Near East Policy* (July 2016): <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-support-for-terrorism-under-the-jcpoa>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Justin McCauley, "The Future of Asymmetric Warfare in Middle East." *Defence Journal* 19 (May 2016) 64, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1790518468?accountid=14746>.

has trained and equipped units of the Saudi Defense Forces for decades. The U.S. Army's Office of the Program Manager-Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG), for instance, prepares elements of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) for conventional warfare, with a focus on protecting its borders, rather than an offensive mindset. The published mission of OPM-SANG is to "manage the Saudi Arabian National Guard modernization program," in accordance with a memorandum of agreement between the two countries. Additionally, the mission statement of the SANG states that they are an armed force "capable of conducting conventional operations throughout the kingdom."⁸⁸ While the SANG Task Organization includes mechanized infantry units, light infantry units, and military police units, it does not include any unconventional warfare component that could properly counter the AQF in Yemen, Bahrain, or even Syria.

In order to defeat the IRI in the many regional proxy wars and to thwart Iranian hegemonic gains, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with assistance from the U.S., must develop an unconventional warfare component that rivals its Iranian counterparts. This force must focus on "strategically indispensable expeditionary operations," as the AQF has done in many conflicts.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Saudi Arabia should abandon their "fire and forget" military intervention policies and must be on the ground with their allies, particularly in Yemen, building rapport and offering tutelage.⁹⁰ The U.S. Army must augment the OP-SANG with military professionals versed in unconventional warfare, and must develop that capability within the SANG. The Gulf states, to include Saudi Arabia, have extensive experience in funding and arming their proxies in foreign wars, to include their support of the Jihad in Afghanistan and the North Yemen civil war in the

⁸⁸ U.S. Army Office of Project Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG), website, <http://www.usasac.army.mil/OPMSang/about.html>.

⁸⁹ Justin McCauley, "The Future of Asymmetric Warfare in Middle East." *Defence Journal* 19 (May 2016) 63, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1790518468?accountid=14746>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 64.

1990's.⁹¹ The Saudi's must take this support a step further, and must conduct both Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and unconventional warfare, spearheaded by a special unit within the SANG, if they ever want to compete regionally with the AQF and the IRI.

Conclusion

The brazen murder of five American Soldiers at the Karbala, Iraq PJCC in 2007 was one of many plots by the AQF to use violence to undermine their adversaries and to challenge the traditional status quo in the Middle East. If left unchecked, the IRI, the IRGC, and their unconventional warfare component, the skilled AQF, will continue to exploit opportunities to spread their revolutionary ideology and to use violence to achieve their foreign policy goals. While the U.S. is focused on threats to our national interests posed by ISIS, North Korea, and the re-emergence of Russia as a global power, it must not forget that the IRI is recently invigorated, motivated, and as capable as ever of causing devastating setbacks to American foreign policy interests in the Middle East, often through violent methods. While the apparatus within the U.S. government to counter AQF and IRGC likely already exists, the U.S. must continue to prioritize efforts to defeat the AQF at their own game. In order to thwart the AQF's success, and in a greater context, to restore the balance of power in the Middle East in favor of our ally, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the U.S. must first acknowledge that the IRGC is the center of gravity in Iranian foreign policy. The U.S. must also hold the IRI accountable for breaches of the recently signed JCPOA by increasing economic sanctions and by labeling the IRGC as a terrorist organization. Finally, the U.S should re-organize the OPM-SANG and add an unconventional or

⁹¹ Michael Knights, "Could the Gulf States Intervene in Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, April 17, 2012, 1, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/could-the-gulf-states-intervene-in-syria>.

asymmetric warfare component within the Saudi Arabian defense forces so that they have an organic organization that is capable of undermining the AQF in Bahrain, Yemen, and elsewhere. If these measures are enacted and the desired results are achieved, the U.S, and its regional allies, will be better suited to defeat the AQF in Yemen, preventing future turmoil in that country and allowing for a restoration of the traditional balance of power in the region.

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