The Endurance of an Asymmetrical Alliance

A Case Study of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance

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Abstract

Despite that alliance formation commonly happen when states share mutual interests and like-mindedness, it is possible to find alliances, where the states promote radically different political, normative, and cultural characteristics. Such an alliance is observed in the case of Saudi Arabia and the United States, which subsequently have endured. The following research will thus elaborate on how the Saudi-American alliance have endured throughout, despite their radical differences. To examine the endurance of the Saudi-American alliance, this research has conducted a case study and used Walter Carlsnaes Foreign Policy model. The research has concludingly found that the alliance has endured due to a variety of factors such as economic trade, regional instability, and security, that consistently has persisted throughout. Despite the American role as a hegemon and the changing administrations throughout the endurance, it has been argued that the longevity of the relation has contributed to the consistency of the factors mentioned above. This is evident in the unpredictability in terms of the region, instability, and insecurity that opposes threats to the U.S., and economic trade relations which have discouraged the U.S. from leaving the alliance.

Key Words
Alliance Formation, Asymmetrical Alliances, Foreign Policy Analysis, Security, Stability, Path Dependency, The United States of America, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East

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1. List of Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>FPA</td>
<td>Foreign Policy Analysis</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<td>RAM</td>
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<td>U.S.</td>
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<td>USTR</td>
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<td>WMDs</td>
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2. Introduction

Throughout times, nation-states have formed alliances in various constellations to mutually benefit or achieve a common goal. This field of research has been a significant part of International Relations (IR), as the dynamics of transnational relations discloses different debates. Although scholars argue that both countries must share values, such as shared interests and like-mindedness (Snyder, 1984), it is possible to observe alliances in contemporary times that distinguish themselves radically. These alliances typically change over time, given different systemic polarities or change in government, yet some alliances endure, despite the fundamental difference in shared characteristics and change in systemic and personal conditions. Given previously conducted literature, it is clear that a variety of aspects such as security, balance of threat and path tendency that affect different alliances, yet there is little research on fundamental different countries forming long-term relations. It is, therefore, apparent to explore such alliance formation and the reasons why these endure.

The following research will elaborate upon why an asymmetrical alliance with radical political, normative, and cultural differences can endure throughout times. This research will, therefore, conduct a case study on the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States (U.S.). Given the variety of different aspects where the two counties do not align, such as values, traditions, religious belief and type of government, it becomes puzzling to see how this alliance have endured since the middle of the 20th century. The alliance becomes somewhat further puzzling in light of various events, that generally could jeopardize such a relation. These events cover the state-support for extremist Islamic movements, 9 of the 11 hijackers in 9/11 being of Saudi citizenship, the continuing criticism of human rights violations and the recent killing of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi (Pipes, 2011; Alyas, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019; ALQST, 2019).

In order to construct such research, this paper will focus on how the American foreign policy is directed towards the alliance, despite the many aspects that otherwise could have jeopardized the alliance. In order to do so, this study will be using Walter Carlsnaes’ model of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to investigate the will to engage in the alliance based of the structural, intentional and dispositional dimensions (Carlsnaes, 1992). It is useful to combine FPA with studies of alliance formation, as it allows for an empirically rich analysis, given its multifactorial and multilevel framework. The study will use these findings and engage it with the literature of alliance formation to argue for the alliance’s endurance and how such knowledge can be prospectively useful.

This research will argue that the endurance of the alliance is caused by a variety of different factors, which subsequently have manifested themselves due to the longevity of the relation.
Primarily the alliance has been profitable and consistently significant due to economic relations, strategic importance, and regional instability emphasised by the U.S.’ role as world hegemon. Despite the changing strategies of different American administrations, it is evident to find that the U.S. needs the Saudi regime’s support. The research, therefore, finds that due to the longevity of the alliance, these factors, alongside the American involvement in the region, have been so embedded characteristics, that the dissolution seems inconceivable. Overall, this research argues that the radical differences between the countries are insignificant, as the endurance’s longevity has manifested the two countries ties, making them mutually depended.

This paper will consist of an elaborated literature review within the field of alliance formation. The review will consist of four parts, those being; alliance and security, alliances and the balance of threat and power, alliances and path dependence theory, and asymmetrical alliances. These four sections are an outline to understand the previous literature given the complexity of alliances, and how such literature leave out areas unexplored, based on the Saudi-American case. Furthermore, the four sections can be useful in terms of methodological approach and how such is beneficial in the following analysis.

Secondly, this paper will provide a methodological section which will be divided into six sections, being case study, foreign policy analysis, the use of Carlsnaes’ model, the data selection, the subsequent validity and reliability of the analysis, and the limitations of the method. This methodological section will engage consciously in the considerations behind the method and critically reflect on the use of it. Moreover, thoughts of data will support the analysis, and why different types of data are suitable in different constellations.

Afterward, this research will present its analysis, where the different dimensions and factors presented by Carlsnaes will be analysed based on the Saudi-American case. The data will be analysed and related to the literature of alliance formation. This section will thus be divided into the structural, dispositional, and intentional dimension. Subsequently, the analysis will move into a summary and discussion of the findings to explain for the endurance of the alliance.

Lastly, this paper will conclude its findings, where it will be argued for the complexity within the alliance given the multiple factors and how the longevity of the alliance has played a vital role in the endurance.
3. Literature review

In order to study the Saudi-American relationship, it is necessary to look into previous studies of alliance formation, as studies of alliance formation vary significantly in terms of the level of analysis and subsequent vital aspects. These studies can be divided into four camps being; alliances and security, alliance and the balance of power and threat, alliances and path dependency theory and asymmetrical alliances. By elaborating on these four aspects within alliance studies, it becomes apparent to see the complexity of the Saudi-American relationship and how this alliance opens up a gap within the literature.

3.1. Alliances and Security

In terms of describing alliance formation related to security, Snyder uses the greater security game in order to argue for alliances being part of the area of security. Here he identifies three ‘subgames’ being; the armaments game, the adversary game, and the alliance game. The alliance game can be helpful to understand the dynamics in contemporary security studies because the interest of a given state can affect the alliances it engages in. Snyder thus argues for bargaining within alliance formation as it is in a state’s interest to be in the most powerful coalition and maximize its own benefits (1984).

Although Snyder argues that all types of alliances are possible, he notes that states are affected by ‘general’ and ‘particular’ interests, which subsequently mean that states form alliances with like-minded states, that have the same particular interest (ethical, ideological and prestige values). He, therefore, does not explain alliances such as the Saudi-American where particular interest differs, but general interests align (Snyder, 1984).

Regarding this view of alliances and security, it is useful to elaborate on Walt’s theory of alliance formation. Like Snyder, Walt uses categories to explain alliances’ development but explains it in relation to structural aspects. These structural aspects are rationalized as alliances of balancing and bandwagoning. Whereas the first explains an alliance in which a state ally with the weaker one to balance out the power, the latter is used for states that ally with the strongest state. Walt expresses how both types encompass strengths and weaknesses, depending on different situations (Walt, 1985).

Furthermore, the study elaborates on the multiplicity of these varieties of alliances, due to the complexity of international affairs. Here Walt argues that a state can ally balancing with another powerful state if there is another existential threat. It is, therefore, more important to look at alliances in terms of balancing and bandwagoning in response to a threat, than isolated (Walt, 1985).
perspective is useful as the complexity of alliance formation is explained in terms of international affairs. Although the focus is on great power politics, these two types of alliance formation are not limited to great power politics and can thus be helpful to explain some of the reasons why the U.S. engages with Saudi Arabia despite their radical differences.

An additional field within the study of alliance formations revolves around the costs of security. Here Morgan and Palmer as well as Johnson, argue that allying due to security measures makes a state more prone to engage further in such relation, in terms of increasing military capabilities, capital intensiveness, and defence spending. This is explained by states' inclination to fully commit to the alliance, thus needing to make political and security concessions within the alliance. Johnson furthermore argues that all types of alliances, given that relative power capabilities, can be affected by an external threat. Such type of external threat would, therefore, highlight how major powers also need to make foreign policy concessions (Johnson, 2015; Morgan & Palmer, 2003).

This study underlines why many political concessions in the case of the Saudi-American alliance can be observed. Moreover, the reasons behind relative power capabilities can be observed, given that the U.S. acquires hegemonic status, which subsequently has led to perceived large external threats from the region. This argument would support the idea that the U.S. makes political concessions despite its hegemonic status.

3.2. Balance of Power and Balance of Threat

In light of the previous description of alliances as a security measure, it is essential to elaborate upon the balance of power and the balance of threat. As argued by Walt, it is necessary to investigate the differences between the balance of threat theory and the balance of power theory, at it will ultimately produce two different argumentations (Walt, 1985).

Based on his theory of balancing and bandwagoning, Walt elaborates on how the balance of threat and the balance of power is the essential aspect of why states engage in alliances. He argues for the need to study the threat(s) rather than the alliance isolated. He disregards values and ideology as the main effect of alliance formation and instead focuses on states' pursuit of security as the main reason for alliances. Walt disregards that alliance formation in contemporary times is based on the balance of power theory, as the theory is solely defined structurally given military capabilities. Walt thus uses the balance of power theory to develop on the balance of threat theory, which subsequently argues that alliance formation happens to balance out any existential threat. The theory should thus be used
as a refinement, which can explain the distribution of threat and therefore uses categories such as “capabilities, proximity, offensive power and intentions” (Walt, 1988:281).

This perspective is primarily essential, as they can explain how a perceived threat can determine alliance formation. Given the U.S.-Saudi case, this theory would argue that due to existential threats within the region, the U.S. would develop such an alliance. This perspective can be seen in the case as American foreign policy as guided by the perceived threat of Iran’s nuclear program, and thus try to balance out the threat of Iran. Despite this explanatory factor of the alliance, the theory still lacks, as the threat of Iran previously have not been as visible, as it is of today. The alliance must, therefore, have been based on different intentions previously.

In line with the balance of threat theory, Johnson moreover argues that military alliances are formed based on external threats, yet he argues that studies of alliance formations should be directed at future militarized disputes rather than past disputes. By using crisis bargaining theory, Johnson study finds that a target for an external threat is more likely to engage in an alliance, as it increases the state’s chances of winning in a war if such threat should become present. Moreover, the study finds that it is difficult to find any peace-making effects of alliance formation, as such relations typically is formed in periods and areas of conflicts (Johnson, 2017).

This study could, therefore, explain the gap within Walt’s literature, as it supports why the U.S. engage in and continue their alliance with Saudi Arabia. This is evident as American foreign policy has been directed towards external threats in the Middle East. Moreover, this study highlights a valid point in its argument of pacifying effects in areas and times of conflicts. This aspect is significant given the case of Saudi-American relations as it can be hard to find reasons to why the U.S. still engage in the alliance, despite some of these reasons could be peace-making.

The aspect of a balance of threat is further elaborated upon by He in a study of a potential Asian NATO. Here He uses a prospect threat-alliance model to elaborated upon how states balance through alliances. By using ‘threat’ as the essence of an actor’s prospect for gains and losses, He describes how high threats will put a state in a domain of losses, as they would prefer to constrain their freedom, rather than to risk the threat escalating (He, 2011).

Likewise, it is noticeable to look at the methodological use in He’s article. By using prospect theory as an approach within FPA, He engages with the reasons behind an alliance formation. The methodological use of combining FPA with the field of alliance formation is furthermore helpful to the methodological section.
Lastly, literature within the field of alliance formation and balance of threat deals with the deterrence of external threats. Within this area of research, there are vast contradictions. Primarily, Kenwick, Vasquez, and Powers outline that alliance formation generally does not reduce the likelihood of conflicts. This historical research design proposes a clear difference in the pre and post-nuclear era, outlining that nuclear weapons are the reason for deterrence. It underlines that despite the difference in the post-nuclear era, alliance formation does not seem to deter states from engaging in conflict (Kenwick et al., 2015).

As a response to this study, Leeds & Johnson argues that such study is flawed and that alliances do deter aggressive behaviour. This study is produced by using the theoretical assumption that conflicts occur when states fail to bargain and applying empirical data to the case. The study finds that there is a great difference between Kenwick et al., study and their own, in terms of deterrence of external threats in the long and short run. Whereas Kenwick et al., arguably only study the effects of deterrence within the first couple of years, Leeds and Johnson argue that deterrence should be seen in a more complex way and that states could form new alliances as a response to other alliances (Leeds & Johnson, 2016).

This contradiction is studied by Morrow, who outlines a new model for examining deterrence and alliances. By using ‘a game tree of the alliance game’, Morrow arguably can distinguish between when alliances deter and aggravate. The study concludingly finds that alliances only provoke in cases where the two sides do not have a recent history of conflict. It is, therefore, imperative to understand the political complexity of the two sides to subsequently understand alliances and its effects (Morrow, 2016).

Given the literature of deterrence and alliance formation, it becomes apparent that alliances can have different effects on surrounding states and vice versa. In the Saudi-American case, it could be observed that the effects of surrounding states, such as Iran, could have an influence on why the alliance is still so strong and thus endure. The alliance should therefore not be studied in a vacuum but in light of surrounding dynamics.

3.3. Asymmetrical Alliances

In alignment with the previously mentioned studies by Snyder, categorizations of alliances are further supported by Morrow, who argues for the variation in types of alliances, focusing on asymmetrical and symmetrical. Morrow argues that an alliance becomes asymmetrical when one state ensures security by losing autonomy or vice versa. To this argument, Morrow develops the research by
investigating which type of alliance is most profitable, concluding that an asymmetrical alliance will be more stable, as the diversity in states will support more dependency and less suspicion. He furthermore argues, that due to the dominant nature of the U.S., it is more beneficial to aggregate its military capabilities instead of forming alliances. In doing so, Morrow states that increasing military means is a slower and more expensive process, but the outcome will be more stable and reliable (Morrow, 1991; 1993).

This categorization can help support how the Saudi-American alliance have been so stable throughout, based on Morrow’s notion that it is an asymmetrical alliance. This argument is evident, as Saudi Arabia and the U.S. vis-à-vis can ensure security by engaging in the alliance. Despite the great categorization, the literature does not further elaborate upon how power dynamics within the alliance can change. The latter aspect of Morrow’s findings supports the very nature of the puzzling alliance, as the U.S. is dealing with weaponry and military training to the Saudi regime, which would suggest that they support the Saudi-Arabian aggregation of military capabilities.

The notion of asymmetrical alliances becomes further apparent in the study by Shin et al., where there is argued for ‘an asymmetry of needs’. This concept refers to what extent each ally needs the other at a given point in time. Here it is argued that it is less important to look at the relative capabilities because an ally can have a vital need for the other part that surpasses the initial power relation. Due to the asymmetry of needs, Shin et al., argue that there are various aspects of non-power asymmetries, based on a variety of aspects such as needs, interests, and preferences. These non-power asymmetries are explained as preferences that the stronger ally can have within the alliances, which the other part can use as bargaining to affect the power dynamics. It is thus the central argument that the weaker state can have a great ability to influence the alliance, thus changing the power dynamics, if the strong ally has particular interests in the alliance (Shin et al., 2016).

This study is helpful, as it can explain how an asymmetrical alliance such as the Saudi-American case, can have a different balance of power than usual, due to American interests within the Saudi Arabian control and in the region. Asymmetrical power dynamics could, therefore, explain the power dynamics within the alliance, yet there is still problematic in understanding the continuation of alliances throughout times.

3.4. Alliances and Path Dependency Theory

As argued throughout the last three sections, one problematic effect of analysing the U.S.-Saudi alliance has been the continuation throughout times, despite the change in various aspects such as
security and threat. It thus becomes necessary to investigate path dependency theory as part of the historical institutional perspective (Parsons, 2007:66-67).

Parsons argues for path dependence as “the choice of institutions at one point has the unintended consequence of steering subsequent actions along a particular historical path” (Parsons, 2007:68). Here he argues that actors are meeting unambiguous constrictions, they (intentionally or unintentionally) orient them according to. The theory thus distances itself from the structural perspective, as it will explain causes based on an actor-based decision, and not use material structures in its explanation. Parsons makes the argument that the actors rationalize any given action and presumably make the same calculation being, that the conditions or events that occur outside the institution still makes the institution desirable overall. Only a drastic change happening outside the institution would make the framework less desirable, which subsequently would deflate the institution (Parsons, 2007).

Mahoney and Thelen furthermore argue for the use of path dependence in explaining institutions such as alliances. They stress the challenges of explaining change within the perspective of historical institutionalism, due to rules, norms, and institutions not being able to comprehend the complexity of real-world events fully. This argument is evident in how rules and regulations often are made based on a particular event. This can furthermore be seen in actors’ abilities or limitations to process information. Given that actors establish norms or regulations within the institutional framework, it is impossible to process the effects of such regulations (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009).

This perspective can support the U.S.-Saudi alliance, as the agreements within the alliance is more treasured despite the various events, which could jeopardize the alliance. Despite this explanatory factor, the study by Mahoney and Thelen highlight some challenges within the theory. These are found within the process limitation of rules, regulations, and actors’ abilities, given the long-standing alliance between the two countries. The challenges proposed would, therefore, suggest that an alliance that has been ongoing for as long as the Saudi-American, cannot be explained solely on Parsons perspective, as actors cannot fully comprehend the institutional framework in the future.

In alignment with path dependency, Thelen argues for the necessity of understanding the mechanisms which reinforce the initial choice of an institution – the mechanism of reproduction. Here she argues that the mechanism of reproduction is the main factor in explaining institutional evolution. In order to construct such an argument, Thelen describes the difference between the literature, highlighting how diversity in the literature of critical junctures and development pathways can distinguish how studies analyse institutional continuity and change contrarily. By analysing the
intersection and interaction of political processes, she concludes that understanding institutional evolution lies within specifying the mechanism of reproduction (Thelen, 1999).

Sarigil furthermore focuses on the mechanism of reproduction, by highlighting the logic of habits as the key variable in investigating path dependence. Through a study of the logic of appropriateness and logic of consequence, Sarigil investigates how a habitual path can be useful as a different model within path dependency. By investigating the utilitarian appropriateness of consequences and the normative appropriateness of logic, the study shows that the two models have the same perspective of human agency being; deliberative, teleological, and reflective. This perception of agency is the same, as actors in both models are concerned with the outcome of one’s actions, therefore seek to maximize their outcome (Sarigil, 2015).

Sarigil, therefore, uses ‘logic of habit’ to describe a new type of path dependency within the global system. Using features of habitual path dependence, such as unpredictability, inflexibility, non-ergodicity, and potential inefficiency, he argues that actors tend to follow paths based on habitual lock-in. Here it is argued that actors tend to act non-deliberative and unreflective in situations where original events or conditions are absent (Sarigil, 2015).

The mechanism of reproduction in alignment with the logic of habit could, therefore, help to explain the challenges exposed by Mahoney and Thelen, as it proposes that the Saudi-American alliance act according to a logic of habit and therefore act within the framework of the alliance’s initial conditions. Furthermore, the studies of the mechanism of reproduction highlight an area within alliance formation where continuity can be explained.

3.5. Summary

The literature shows that alliance formation is distinctively important to investigate given the case of the U.S.-Saudi alliance, as it stands out from the usual circumstances. Based on previous literature, it is argued that alliances studies are complex and that many variables can have an effect on how and why an alliance is formed. Within the literature, it has been showed that the field of Alliances and Security deals with a structural approach to explain alliance formation while incorporating domestic factors. The field of Balance of Power and Threat contributes with a discussion of whether alliances should be explained in terms of structural or institutional factors. Within the literature of asymmetrical alliances, it is possible to observe structural features when explaining alliances formation and furthermore elaborate upon a domestic level, given various interest groups and corporations that can affect policy-making. Lastly, the field of alliances and path dependency elaborates on institutional
and normative factors given the study of habits. Given the four divisions of the literature, it is apparent that the field is a multifaceted debated within the field of IR.

As given in the previous literature, it is apparent that the alliance between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia cannot be placed entirely within the academic field. Given that each section of the literature is helpful to explain specific factors of the alliance, it is necessary to find a framework, that explains the alliance multifacetedly. It is, therefore, necessary to find another perspective from where the relation can be analysed. Such a framework can be found in Walter Carlsnaes’ foreign policy model, which broadly incorporates both structural, dispositional, and intentional levels of a given foreign policy.

4. Methodology

In light of the literature, it is evident to see that there is vast diversity in how alliances are explained. This can be highlighted through the different levels which are explained, as both structural, domestic, and institutional factors affect alliance formation. It is, therefore, necessary to use a framework that incorporates the multifaceted of all levels in order to understand the case of the Saudi-American alliance’s endurance.

The following methodological section will start with a brief argumentation of the use of case study as a methodological approach and its usefulness in contributing with knowledge within the field. Secondly, this research will move into a discussion of various foreign policy models to argue for the use of Walter Carlsnaes’ model. The following part will move into a discussion of the data which will be used in Carlsnaes’ framework to analyse the case. The data selection process will be discussed in order to show the consciousness of sources through reliability and validity. Lastly, this section will discuss the limitations of the method.

4.1. Case Study

When using case study, it is necessary to clearly define what is meant with the concept, as it has been used broadly within IR. The research’s case study will, therefore, be defined as a qualitative single N study understood as research that investigate a single phenomenon (Lamont, 2015:126-127). This definition is essential, as it highlights various considerations within the method.

Primarily, it is apparent to conduct a single N study, and not multiple cases, as the research is focused on the endurance of the specific relation between Saudi-Arabia and the U.S. Using other cases, would therefore not help understand the alliance, but only explore where the cases would differ or align (Lamont, 2015:126-127).
Secondly, it is important to understand that the research investigates a single phenomenon as crucial to the research. Given that the U.S.-Saudi case radically stands out from previously conducted research of the field, the case is chosen to explore gaps within the previous literature. This case can, therefore, not explain parsimonious relations of alliance formation but highlight gaps within the literature. This aspect is essential, as the research shall not overgeneralize the study’s findings. This point will be further elaborated upon in the limitations of the method (Lamont, 2015:127-128).

When defining case study, Yin elaborates upon whether the study consists of holistic or embedded characteristics. Defined as a case study that solely examines the global nature of the case, thus not involves more units of analysis, the holistic single case study is useful given this research. This is clear as the research will not analyse several subunits within the alliance, such as different actors or corporations, but rather focus on the alliance as the single unit of analysis. The analysis will, therefore, consider several aspects to expand on the nature of the alliance, thus making it a holistic case study (Yin, 2003:40-45).

Based on the aspects highlighted, it is apparent to further understand the case study as interpretive. This can be seen as the research aims to deepen the understanding of the relation, by analysing the variety of mechanisms that could affect the relation. This type of research could, therefore, expand the understanding of this particular case, yet it does not say anything about other alliances within the global system (Lamont, 2015:129-130).

Lastly, the selection of the case is vital to discuss. Since this research aims to enhance new areas of alliance formation in the 21st century, the case chosen is deviant. This means that the case is disconfirmatory, as it stands out from the theoretical assumptions highlighted in the literature review. By selecting a deviant case, the study becomes a powerful tool to address gaps within the literature and explore the complexity within the field. The use of deviant cases usually is conducted to provide new explanations concerning the abnormality, which this research is not able to do. Despite this, the usefulness of using a deviant case is still present, as the case can help underline various dynamics, that can support further research within the field (Lamont, 2015:132-135).

### 4.2. Foreign Policy Analysis

In light of the literature review, it is possible to see many studies being constructed as a combination of foreign policy analysis and alliance formation (He, 2011; Shin et al., 2016; Johnson, 2017). Using FPA in contradiction to an IR theory’s framework is vital due to the multidisciplinary nature. Whereas IR theories often expand parsimoniously of global characteristics, FPA allows for an analysis that
can expand on multiple levels and multifactorial aspects of a given case. FPA thus can support an empirically rich analysis, which will highlight various aspects, factors, and actors that can affect the alliance’s dynamics (Hudson, 2014:6-8). The use of FPA will, therefore, withstand in the research, yet the framework will differ. In order to argue for the use of Carlsnaes’ model, other models need to be elaborated upon briefly.

Within the field of FPA, the two of the most present theoretical models is the Rational Actor Model (RAM) and Prospect Theory. As both models use rationality based on human nature, the framework primarily focuses on the specific actor, thus leaving out other influential factors. The two theories would, therefore, support a study, where the reasons behind alliance formation could be explained based on rationality. Both theories would outline a great framework for analysing specific decision-making process, yet the theories do not comprehensively incorporate external factors. The theories, therefore, lack the multiplicity of levels, which could include factors that affect foreign policy (Beach, 2012:98-100, 121-122).

Secondly, it is possible to use Hudson’s model of foreign policy analysis. As argued by Hudson, FPA is based on an actor-specific perspective, because it is grounded in human decision-making. Based on the actor-specific perspective, Hudson outlines a method, which incorporates multiple levels, multifactorial aspects, and multidisciplinary views. Despite the various aspects that Hudson incorporates, the framework does not take into account the structural dimension, which could affect the stability of the alliance (Hudson, 2005).

4.3. Carlsnaes’ Foreign Policy Model

These varieties of perspective lead up to Walter Carlsnaes’ model of foreign policy analysis, as it incorporates the various dimensions that could affect foreign policy. As argued by Carlsnaes, the essential point of understanding foreign policy lies within the structure-agency debate. Due to the lack of continuity within either structure or agency over time, Carlsnaes argues that both need to be examined as independent variables within a tangled process of foreign policy. He constructs his argument by clarifying the ontological and epistemological problem within the structure-agency debate and by linking it to FPA. Carlsnaes argues that when analysing the ontological and epistemological assumptions of structure and agency, it becomes impossible to analyse foreign policy isolated in each category “as actions are explained with reference to structure, or vice versa [which would suggest that] the independent variable, in each case remains unavailable for problematization in its own right” (Carlsnaes, 1992:250).
Carlsnaes, therefore, proposes a framework that can incorporate both aspects of structure and agency to analyse a foreign policy change. This framework is a three-folded approach, consisting of a structural, dispositional, and intentional level. Carlsnaes notes that a foreign policy action sometimes can be explained solely using the intentional level, as it explains the conditions and parameters of a ‘rationalistic’ analysis such as RAM and Prospect Theory. He argues that the three dimensions help provide the causal explanation for the reasons behind a foreign policy action, thus deepen the analysis. This type of framework will, therefore, move the analysis from explanatory to an interpretative study (Carlsnaes, 1992:254-255).

Each dimension consists of different factors which will help interpret the foreign policy action. The structural dimension encompasses the objective conditions and institutional settings. These factors provide the analysis with the structural element, which can have a causal effect on the foreign policy that is pursued. Within the dispositional level is perception and values located. These features reflect a state’s self-identity and can also expose a leader’s role in the country’s foreign policy. It is thus important to analyse the identity of a state (possibly the leader) in relation to the country’s foreign policy. Lastly, the intentional level deals with the choice and preference an actor has given the circumstances. This dimension, as explained above, expands on the explanatory factors which are available for the actor. Subsequently, this will lead to a foreign policy action, which in the following case study will be the endurance of the Saudi-American alliance.
4.3.1. The Unorthodox Use of Carlsnaes’ Foreign Policy Model

Carlsnaes often uses this model to explain foreign policy change, which is clear, as it explains and interprets the new dimensions, that an actor stands before, and the subsequent teleological foreign policy action. Despite that the case which will be analysed is not a foreign policy change as such, the model is still purposeful as a methodological framework, due to the heuristic character. The model will, therefore, serve as a practical method, as it aids the analysis to provide clarification of the alliance.

Primarily, this is due to the comprehensive framework of both structure and agency, which other models do not provide. By using this framework, it is possible to incorporate levels and factors, that given the complexity of the U.S.-Saudi relation, is necessary in order to comprehend the alliance fully. The framework furthermore works as a great tool to structure and identify the different levels and factors.

Secondly, I would argue that the alliance is as much of a foreign policy move, given the stability and durability. Since both parts maintain the alliance and thus still are interested in cooperating, I would argue that Carlsnaes’ model is useful for the research’s purpose, as it can interpret the lack of change as the outcome of the foreign policy analysis.

The usefulness of Carlsnaes’ model is relevant due to the characteristics of the different dimensions and the incorporation of different factors. Despite the initial aim of Carlsnaes to analyse and investigate foreign policy change, it is evident to use the framework in this case study as a heuristic device, that can assist in the exploration of the social phenomenon.

4.4. Data Selection

In order to analyse the case based on the framework of Carlsnaes’ model, it is necessary also to discuss the data selection. This aspect is essential, as the data sources which are chosen can affect the outcome of the analysis. In the data selection process, it is therefore important to argue for the diversity of sources chosen. As explained in Carlsnaes’ model, there is a great variety in the different levels which needs to be explained. In order to provide data for these different levels, the sources will therefore also differ. The data can be divided into qualitative and quantitative data.

4.4.1. Qualitative Data

Given the method chosen, and the aim to explore the alliance’s endurance, the majority of the sources will be qualitative. Qualitative data is useful as it can provide in-depth insight into different arguments
and characteristics. Qualitative data can be divided into primary and secondary sources. These categories will support different perspectives.

The usefulness of primary data lies within the first-hand evidence, which they provide. This type of data typically refers to material that has been written or performed by an actor. It, therefore, provides evidence to an actor’s perception of a given event or object. This type of data does not necessarily provide the most accurate description of the object or event, but it is a great tool to understand the perception of the actor. Based on Carlsnaes’ framework, this type of data is necessary, because the perception and values of the dispositional dimension need to be analysed. It is, therefore, essential to look at primary sources such as speeches and statements (Halperin & Heath, 2017:252-253).

Opposite, secondary sources are data which contain interpreted and processed information, based on other materials. Such material can therefore also be produced after the occurrence of an event and enlighten new perspectives of a given case. This type of data is useful to analyse aspects within the other two dimensions, as it will broadly explain the structural and intentional dimension, based on previously performed analysis. This type of documents will include peer-reviewed articles, special report, and other types of analytical work (Halperin & Heath, 2017:252-253).

The importance with both types of sources is that it to some extent, always will be biased, and they must therefore always be assessed critically. Within the primary data, the bias will be definite, as the source only will be viewing one perspective. It is therefore always essential to evaluate the source’s credibility by determining their authenticity and reliability. The data should, hence, be evaluated by its external characteristics, which would allow the reader to evaluate the bias and context of a source. Secondly, it is important to study the source for its internal characteristics. This means that the sources are evaluated as to whether the data can be seen as trustworthy, given the author’s connection to the field that is discussed (Halperin & Heath, 2017:254-255).

4.4.2. Quantitative Data

The analysis will also need a variety of quantitative data to support the analysis within the framework. Given alliance formation, statistics can be particularly helpful, in order to enlighten the strong relation. The advantages of using quantitative data are, among others, its ability to make sense of large amounts of data. Statistics can thus be helpful to grasp the various transnational trade relations, as part of the alliance (Lamont, 2015:96-100).
Statistics within the field of political science can be, as described, beneficial, yet it is important still to study the quantitative data critically. Similar to qualitative data, it is essential to look at the accuracy of the source. This is clear in the source’s origins and how the author has conducted the statistics. In order to provide the most accurate image of the alliance, the quantitative data used will be from official governmental organisations (King et al., 1994:75-77; Halperin & Heath, 201:394-395).

4.5. Validity and Reliability

An important common aspect within data selection lies in the reliability and validity of the sources. Validity can further be divided into external and internal. Generally speaking, the internal validity of the data explains the extent our sources measures the circumstance that is being studied. This understanding can further be divided into three categories, being; face validity, content validity, and construct validity. These factors are good indicators for the accuracy of the sources and are considerations that are applied when selecting and using data. In order to construct good research, it is apparent that the data must reflect the puzzle which the study investigates. (Halperin & Heath, 2017:171-172; Gagnon, 2010:30-32).

External validity deals with how far the study’s findings can be generalized. Given the study, it is essential to consider whether the findings can be applied to other cases, thus being generalized. Since the chosen case is considered deviant, it is often hard to generalize the findings into other cases. Despite this fact, the case chosen could be used as a tool to enlighten new areas of alliance formation, which could be studied in order to make such findings general (Halperin & Heath, 2017:171-172; Gagnon, 2010:33-36).

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the study’s reliability. This concept mainly describes how accurately a study is conducted and can furthermore be divided into internal and external reliability. Internal reliability implies a study where other researchers could interpret the data similarly and therefore, find the same conclusions as this study. In relation, external reliability conveys if other researchers would have picked essentiality the same data, given the puzzle and methodology (Gagnon, 2010:22-29). Within this concept lies the ability for a study to be replicated and produce the same results. This aspect is an important methodological consideration, given that the analysis will be conducted as an interpretation of the data. It is thus necessary to keep the analysis as objective and reflective as possible in order to make it reliable (Halperin & Heath, 2017:173-174).
4.6. Methodological Limitations

Within each methodological approach, there will be various limitations, which the study needs to address. These limitations are an expression of the methodological approach chosen, and how such address issues within the findings.

Primarily it is crucial to discuss the issue of overgeneralization. Based on the fact that the study is conducted as a deviant single N case study, the ability to generalize the finding into universal truth related to alliance formation is unattainable. This paper will, therefore, not suggest that the findings of this paper are parsimonious, but rather a contribution to the overall debate, where it can outline gaps within the literature. The following analysis will thus not elaborate on a singular explanation to the alliance’s endurance but focus on the complexity of the case and highlight various justifications (King et al., 1994:212; Willis, 2014).

Secondly, it is also relevant to address the reliability and replicability as problematic due to the case’s framework. As previously described, the case chosen is of unique character, which subsequently will outline gaps within the literature. In order to replicate such studies, it would be necessary to find other cases, which obtained the same characteristics as the U.S.-Saudi relation. Furthermore, it should be assessed, that since the analysis of the case will be interpretative nature, it is not indisputable that other researchers might find different results based on the same data, or even other results based on another data selection (Willis, 2014).

These reflections are addressed as part of the methodological considerations, due to the importance given the following analysis’ findings. As argued, there are many limitations and reflections, which the researcher needs to be aware of, given the conduction of the study. These limitations are important in the consequent conclusion and will be aspects that are considered throughout the analysis.

4.7. Summary

Based on the research question, which is provided by the gap within the existing literature, this section has argued for a deviant case study, using Walter Carlsnaes foreign policy model. The model’s usefulness is apparent as it incorporates the structure-agency debate, thus features the structural dimension as effecting a foreign policy change. Despite that the endurance of the alliance is not specifically a change, the framework is useful as it apprehends the complexity of the relation through structure and agency. The data selection of the analysis is subsequently important, as both quantitative and qualitative sources will be used. The variety of sources is necessary given the extended framework, which allows for both structural discussion and actors’ perceptions. Despite the many
methodological advantages outlined, it is important also to acknowledge the method’s limitations. Here it is crucial to mention the study’s lack of ability to overgeneralize, as the study is a unique phenomenon. Lastly, it is essential to mention the brief discussion of reliability and validity, which acknowledge the bias given the framework. Here it is important to state the awareness since the interpretative study cannot be entirely objective.

5. Analysis
In order to study the endurance of the asymmetrical alliance of Saudi Arabia and the U.S., the following analysis will provide an in-depth analysis of the foreign policy mechanisms that can affect the phenomenon. This section will, therefore, be divided into Carlsnaes’ three different dimensions being; the structural dimension, the dispositional dimension, and the intentional dimension. Within all of the dimensions, each factor of the foreign policy model will be analysed in terms of the alliance chosen. Afterward, the findings will be summarized and discussed.

5.1. Structural Dimension
Within this dimension, it is obsolete to investigate the structural characters of the international world and its affairs. As argued throughout the foreign policy section and by Carlsnaes himself, the key aspect that makes the model useful is its incorporation of the structural element. This importance can be explained based on the agency-structure debate, as a foreign policy action is not only conditioned on structural aspects but also affect the following new structure that postdates the foreign policy (Carlsnaes, 1992:259-260). Within the structural dimension, Carlsnaes outlines two frames of reference, that grasps the entity being, the objective conditions, and the institutional settings.

5.1.1. Objective Conditions
The objective conditions of the alliance entail a variety of different aspects. This analysis will argue for two aspects, which are of great importance to the structural dimensions, given the uniqueness of the alliance. This section will, therefore, start by outlining the importance of different systemic polarity throughout history and the geographical location of Saudi Arabia. Both sections will, therefore, be used in locating the alliance within its historical basis and support how the alliance endures based on the original premise.
5.1.1.1. Structural Polarity

Primarily it is essential to study the polarity of the international system in light of alliance. This aspect is highly relevant due to the power relations which occur given different polarities throughout history. As described in the literature review, a great deal of scholarly work deals with the power relations of alliances, which also can be based on the power dynamics of different international systems. The aspect of systematic polarity is hence essential, as it can change how states form alliances, given the existential threat or need of cooperation based on mutual enemies or friends (Johnson, 2017; Walt, 1985; Walt, 1988).

In terms of the U.S.-Saudi alliance, it becomes interesting to study the aspect of polarity, since the relation has been ongoing throughout the bipolar and unipolar system. Despite the lack of official agreement, it is often contested that the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. initiated with American businesses involved in the Saudi oil industry in 1933, and subsequently with President Roosevelt’s recognition of the strategic importance of Saudi oil in 1945. The alliance, therefore, occurred in the midst of World War II (WWII), where Saudi Arabia obtained neutral, despite its provision of airspace to the Allies. Given that WWII was the first war, where oil was a strategic commodity, it can be argued that the alliance became vigorous due to the recent cooperation regarding Saudi oil. (Alyas, 2018; Gause, 2016:116).

During the Cold War, the alliance further advanced, as the two parts engaged in relations concerning security. Given the American need to constrain the spread of Communism, a good relation within the Arab World was vital. This can furthermore be seen in the condition of the Saudi Kingdom at the time, which had a small population and a large production of oil. These conditions would make them a strategic good state to invade, and it was, therefore, crucial for the U.S. to provide security for the state (Long, 2004:24-27). This aspect is significant, as it relies heavily on the literature provided on asymmetrical alliances, which outlines how states can form alliances based on distinguishing desires for security and strategy (Morrow, 1991; Shin et al., 2016).

Subsequently to the fall of the Soviet Union, the dynamics of world polarity changed into a unipolar system, with the U.S. as world hegemon. This change in the world system, would in light of alliance formation literature change the dynamics of different relations, yet the Saudi-American relation endured. Long explains this aspect based on the cooperation and communication which the two states conducted throughout the bipolar system. Given the dynamic nature of the alliance, the financial cooperation which the alliance incorporated was extremely beneficial for both parts. Moreover, the existential threats and cooperative dynamics produced a significant amount of goodwill between the
countries. Long describes this aspect as vital to the mutual trust, which the states have perceived since, and furthermore argues that American and Saudi diplomacy has contributed to the extension of this goodwill (Long, 2014:31-32).

5.1.1.2. Geographical Position

Secondly it is necessary to investigate the geographical location of the state. In light of the polarity systems, which have been investigated, it is necessary to analyse how the position of the two states can affect the endurance. As argued in the last paragraph, the importance of maintaining relations with the Middle East for American foreign policy during the Cold War, was vital to deter Communism.

The importance of the geographical position can hence be pinned into other areas of interest following the fall of the Soviet Union. A study by RAND Corporation shows that the U.S. indeed had a clear interest in keeping the Middle East stable and secure, for numerous reasons. Some of these include deterring terrorism, limiting the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), ensuring security for Israel, and maintaining and stabilising the oil industry (RAND Project Air Force, 2004). It can, therefore, be argued that a great deal of interest was in keeping a good relationship with Saudi Arabia to maintain these interests. This is evident as an alliance with countries in the region can help combat terrorism and ensure the security of Israel. The alliance can furthermore deter Saudi Arabia from developing WMDs as the perceived threat from the U.S. would be inferior.

This perspective is closely related to the aspects of ‘balance of threat’ as it can explain how states act internationally according to existential threats. The alliance can thus include areas of the strategic corporation outside the normal sphere of security such as proximity, capabilities, and intentions. An alliance within the Middle East would, therefore, promote peace, as the existential threat of the superpower is limited (Walt, 1988; Kenwick et al., 2015).

5.1.2. Institutional Setting

In light of the objective conditions, in which the alliance is situated in, the framework of the institutional setting needs to be analysed. Here it is necessary to study various agreements and corporations, which can lead to the alliance persisting. By comparing it to the field of path dependency theory, this section will provide a clear argumentation for the endurance of the alliance.
5.1.2.1. Trade Agreements

Primarily it is indispensable to investigate the trade agreements which the two states shared. These agreements can be argued to have vital importance in the alliance’s endurance due to the economic benefits which both states obtain, and furthermore highlight how private and governmental interests can affect foreign policymaking.

As previously mentioned, Saudi Arabia provides oil for the U.S. in exchange for military supply and training. Data provided by the United States Trade Representative (USTR) show that the goods and service trade within the alliance reach an estimated US$45.6 billion, which the majority of U.S. import coming from mineral fuels (US$18 billion). In return, the U.S. exported arms and ammunition to the Saudi government worth US$1.4 billion (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018). These numbers are a good indicator of the close trade agreements between the countries and for the economic benefits which the states mutually gain. It is evident here to view the governments as the front runner for establishing trade agreements.

Despite the massive trade deal with oil, the U.S. has become less depended on Saudi oil, given new technologies, which allow for American cooperation to extract oil from domestic shares. The oil in which the U.S. produces has drastically increased, allowing the country to become majorly oil exporting, thus being less dependent on imports from the Middle East, hence its dependence from Saudi Arabia. It is, therefore, possible to argue that the oil does not have the same influence as previously within the alliance (Young, 2018).

Despite this, the U.S. continues trading oil with Saudi Arabia. This aspect can be closely related to the literature on path dependency, which argues that because there has been no substantial crisis in the alliance¹, the actors tend to follow the same paths as previously. This is done as institutions is not reflected upon, if they work probably, thus only being deliberated given conflicts. Furthermore, it can be combined with Sarigil’s concept of habitual path, which would outline that states act according to habits. Here it is argued that as an actor chooses a path, it creates inflexibility, thus making it harder to change the institutional path over time. Given the explanation of path dependency, it is therefore evident to argue that the trade agreements are vital in explaining the alliance’s endurance, as governmental trade interests still can affect foreign policy (Sarigil, 2015).

¹ The 9/11 attack which have been seen as the most dramatic conflict since the oil embargo cannot be seen as a substantial crisis, as it did not affect the alliance.
5.1.2.2. Investment Agreements

Furthermore, the investments which can be explained as a product of the alliance needs to be analysed. As described by the USTR, the majority of investment from both sides of the alliance is located in the private sector. Here the data shows investment in wholesale and retail trade, nonbank holding companies, real estate, mining, and information services (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018). These investments show the involvement of private actors within the complexity of the alliance. Ultimately, this involvement can affect the direction of American foreign policy within the alliance, given lobbying and interest organisations that can influence the policymaking. Since the ties between Saudi Arabian and American cooperation displays as vigorous, these investments could influence how the American government manages the alliance.

Based on Sarigil’s notion of habitual path, as seen in the previous section, it is possible also to argue that private actors that have economic interests can influence the American foreign policy. This could contribute to the alliance’s endurance, as both official organs and private actors are interested in keeping the alliance, despite that the U.S. is no longer depended on the oil trade.

The aspect of Saudi and American investment furthermore correlates significantly with Sarigil’s concept of non-ergodicity. This notion would explain how relatively small occurrences in the past have substantial influence in the path lock-in. This is evident based on the investments, as the corporation which started the goodwill in the alliance now can have a substantial importance in choosing the following path, given private interests. The path dependency theory is therefore useful, as it provides insight into how institutions and other domestic factors can have an influence given the structural debate.

5.2. Dispositional Dimension

This dimension is commonly grasping the nature and mentality of the states given its characteristics, outlook, and the prevailing tendency. Here Carlsnaes argues that a state’s perceptions and values can affect a given foreign policy action. Concerning the agency-structure debate, Carlsnaes argues that the dispositional dimension is essential, as a state’s nature and characteristics, alongside the perceptions and recognition of the surrounding world changes over time. Subsequently, he states that this element is important as these characteristics “cannot be treated as given, static, or equally applicable to all foreign policy actors” (Carlsnaes, 1992:261). It is, therefore, necessary to investigate these factors as linked to the historical context and as significant within the alliance.
5.2.1. Perceptions

Primarily it is essential to investigate the diversity in perceptions in terms of self-perception and the perceptions of Saudi Arabia and the surrounding region. In doing so, this section will elaborate and analyse upon a variety of different speeches made by American presidents throughout the alliance’s duration. The perception of a given country is necessary to analyse as it can change over time, which subsequently can affect a foreign policy. By doing so, it is possible to argue for different perspectives within the American perception, yet with similar outcomes in relation to Saudi Arabian alliance.

5.2.1.1. Self-Perception

Based on the objective condition of changing polarity, the American self-perception has changed over time. Since the end of the Cold War, the American self-perception has changed from a strategic actor balancing the threat of the Soviet Union to a hegemonic superpower, spreading the values of freedom, democracy and human rights on a global scene.

Within the bipolar era, it is apparent to perceive the U.S. as a great power, yet a country that acts strategically cautious in its foreign policy due to the threat of the Soviet Union. This is evident in cases, where the U.S. otherwise would have engaged one-sided, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the American’s close association with Israel, the discourse by President Roosevelt indicates that the U.S. act cautiously within the conflict, as he expresses great appreciation for the Saudi relation, while outlining the importance of engaging both the Arab world and Israel in the peace discussion before the U.S. would interfere in the conflict (Roosevelt, 1945). This discourse is essential, as it underlines how the U.S.’ foreign policy is directed towards keeping the Arab world’s support against Communism.

This particular communication links closely to the literature concerning alliances and the balance of threat. Given that the existential threat at the time primarily was the Soviet Union and the spread of Communism, less focus was given to other problematic areas. In order to maintain a strong front against the Soviet Union, the American perception was, therefore, to ensure as much support globally, despite the need to disregard or compromise on other vital issues (Walt, 1988; Johnson, 2017).

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. has often been perceived as the hegemonic world leader, which have led to a change in self-perception. Here the American self-perception can be seen as a hegemonic power which protects the world and its allies from the threat of terrorism. Concerning the previous point of changing existential threat, the following speech was given based on the perceived threat of Saddam Hussein. Here President Bush states that the dictator is misguided in thinking that
targeting civilians within the American alliances of Israel and Saudi Arabia will give him advantage. He continues by outlining that “only the United States of America has both the moral standing and the means to back it up” (Bush, 1991). It is, therefore, possible to argue that the self-perception of the country is based on the moral compass concerning the American values and the means of being the hegemonic world leader.

The change in self-perception can, therefore, be seen as to how the country and its president deal with existential threats. It is shown that during the Cold War it was more likely to accommodate its allies’ interests based on mutual support, whereas the latter period shows a hegemonic state, which rules as a moral compass with according means to deter any possible threat.

5.2.1.2. Perception of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East

In order to understand the American perception of Saudi Arabia, it is necessary also to investigate the American perception of the surrounding region. As expressed by President Eisenhower, the region was somewhat unstable during the beginning of the 20th century due to newly drawn sovereign borders and territorial disputes, which led to regional rivalry and mistrust. The president here outlines that the Middle East required protection against Communism and the Soviet Union. In order to do so, the U.S. should engage in order to preserve a region with significant instability (Eisenhower, 1957).

The perception of regional instability has continued throughout the alliance, especially in the post 9/11 era, with the continuation of terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State (ISIL). Throughout the thriving period of this organisation, President Obama spoke of the region and the instability which subsequently could cause insecurity for the American population. Here he expressed that the American foreign policy should be focused on combatting the organisation and furthermore voiced that “even without ISIL, even without Al Qaeda, instability will continue for decades (…) in the Middle East” (Obama, 2016).

This argument by Obama outlines how alliances, to a great extent, correlates with the literature of security. As the perception of the region is discussed as something that could potentially threaten the U.S., the importance throughout the discourse highlights how keeping allies within the areas is a definite foreign policy decision to combat security threats. Here it is evident to argue that the U.S. in the bipolar system sought security based on the threat of the Soviet Union, whereas they sought security for the domestic population in the unipolar system.

The perception of Saudi Arabia correlates significantly with the American self-perception of a global leader. As expressed by President Bush, it was of the essence to promote Western values in
the Middle East alongside their regional allies. Here Bush refers to the Saudi government and encourages the leadership within the country to work as a role model. Despite the criticism of Saudi Arabia given its human rights violations, the perception of Saudi Arabia has thus changed to be the regional leader based on the alliance and work as an example for the surrounding states (Bush, 2005). This statement would thus highlight how a hegemonic power like the U.S. promote its allies to become regional leaders, as it will advance the American position in the region.

Despite the relatively good perception of Saudi Arabia, complications within the alliance are apparent. Here it is evident to argue that the U.S., despite its changing strategic position, ultimately will receive the same outcome from Saudi Arabia. This is observed given the Obama administration, aiming to better the relation with Iran, the rival of Saudi Arabia, through its Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Here the U.S. agreed to lift all sanctions on Iran in return of the reduction and conversion of all nuclear facilities. This agreement was not well accepted by the Saudi regime, as it signalled that their ally was working closely with its enemy, thus neglecting the strong alliance. Despite the controversy, the disagreement between the Obama administration and the Saudi monarchy did not resolve any further. Sources show that despite the dissatisfaction and threats from Saudi Arabia to end the oil trade, the tendency within the Saudi government was in briefs to “wait for the next administration” (Gaouette et al., 2016).

In light of this perspective, it is evident to argue that despite conflicts and changing wills to engage with the Saudi government, the consequences are limited. This notion can be explained by a variety of reasons, among others the path dependency and through the asymmetrical alliances’ literature in correlation with the system of the American Presidency. Given that the alliance is of asymmetrical characteristics, the Saudi regime can simply wait for a president that desire to preserve the relation and its agreements, and the urge to withdraw from the alliance, therefore, becomes less inclining. Opposite, the American perception can change over time given different actors, yet the agreements within the alliance become so comprehensive, that breaking with the alliance is complicated. This perspective will be further visible in the following section.

### 5.2.2. Values

In terms of discussing values, Kendall outlines the debate, as he states that the U.S. previously and in relation to its values, always has “been prepared to sacrifice self-interest to sustain and support them [which] have enabled a vibrant democratic political system, a free economy […] and a military that is second to none” (2018). The values, therefore, become essential to analyse, due to the radical
differences between the values of the two countries, which has not inclined the U.S. to sacrifice the alliance. This section will provide an analyse of the American (Western) values of freedom, democracy, and human rights and oppose it to the values of security and stability. Here it will be argued that the U.S., despite changing strategies in light of their hegemonic status, subsequently end up with the same need of Saudi Arabia. In order to do so, the three sections will highlight three different strategies in American foreign policy, that subsequently cause the same position towards Saudi Arabia.

5.2.2.1. Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights
In relation to the American self-perception, it is apparent to find the American dispositional characteristics throughout history to be based on freedom, democracy, and human rights. These values are, as previously mentioned, a significant part of the American political discourse and its subsequent foreign policy. This perspective can, among other things, be seen in the wars led by the U.S. following the 9/11 attack. Concerning the Iraqi War, President Bush expresses how “the first to benefit from a free Iraq is the Iraqi people [as] they live in scarcity and fear, under a dictator that has brought them nothing but war, and misery, and torture” (2003). Here it is evident to find the American argumentation for saving the invading country’s people, providing them with freedom and democracy, while considering the rights and the well-being of the civilization. This discourse of ‘saving’ the invading country is highly related to the U.S.’ unipolar power status, which would promote western values regardless of the disagreement from the Saudi alliance.

5.2.2.2. Security and Stability
It is apparent to find situations where they did not act according to their values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, as in the case of their alliance with Saudi Arabia. The alliance in terms of values, therefore, needs to be explained differently.

Given the geographical position of the country, much of the argumentation in American foreign policy deals with stabilizing and securing the Middle East. It, therefore, becomes vital to keep a close and influential ally in the region. As a study by Gause shows, much of the alliance occupies with the surrounding countries. Based on the revolution in Iran, with its subsequent production of WMDs, and a ruined Iraq past the American led war, the U.S. needed a reliable regional power in the region to corporate with, in order to have a role and influence in securing and stabilizing the region. Here it is
thus apparent to see the U.S.’s hegemonic role changing from promoting Western values to strategic interference given the need to securitize and stabilize the region (Gause, 2010:144-148).

5.2.2.3. “America First”
Despite the perspective of stabilizing the region for domestic security, it is apparent to see how there is a difference in President Trump set of values. Based on comments from Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, it is possible to argue for a change in position moving away from securing the region to domestic interests in alignment with the policy of ‘America First’. This aspect is apparent as the Secretary of State expresses how the U.S. should not reconcile adversaries, but instead chose sides and direct its foreign policy to its allies. Here it is evident that the U.S.’ neither promote human rights nor attempts to stabilize the region, but rather focus its strategy on domestic interests. By directing its focus on trade agreements with Saudi Arabia that can benefit the economic prosperity of the country, it is possible to argue that the administration follows the trend outlined in the section of trade agreements and path dependency. It, therefore, becomes apparent that despite the change in foreign policy through the new administration, the change does not affect the Saudi-American alliance, yet just redirect the focus from stabilizing the region to domestic interest (Takeyh, 2019).

5.3. Intentional Dimension
The intentional dimension is vital to analyse as it provides the rationalistic analysis of the foreign policy. In this section, the choices and preferences of the U.S. become apparent based on the previously conducted analysis of the two dimensions (Carlsnaes, 1992:254-255). As argued in the literature review, an asymmetrical alliance has the highest possible to endure, due to the stability and the security which the alliance provides. Moreover, the literature of path dependency shows that only given a radical change in the global system allows for stable alliances to break, as the institutional framework leave actors to follow the current path rather than pursuing new ones (Parsons, 2007; Sargil, 2015). These aspects are essential to consider when discussing the choices and preferences that the U.S. acquire.

5.3.1. Choice
The choice in terms of the alliance boils down to whether or not to further engage with Saudi Arabia. Given that the aspect analysed does not deal with a change, rather the lack thereof, the following
section will analyse the factors, which makes the alliance prosperous. The following points will incorporate the findings from the previous dimensions.

As discussed throughout the analysis, the alliance was mainly built on a mutually beneficial arrangement of security and trade. As argued previously, the U.S. has evolved new technologies to extract domestic oil reserves, which would make them independent of trading oil with the Saudis, subsequently making them less inclined to continue the alliance. Despite this, the trade agreements still play a vital role given path dependency. Due to the various relations which have been produced by the trade agreements, American foreign policy is still motivated to work with Saudi Arabia due to private and governmental economic interests, which have evolved and become a priority to the U.S.

Another trade arrangement, which has been highlighted, is the trade of military equipment, that the Saudis have received. These agreements have not only benefited the Saudi regime, but furthermore created a vast amount of jobs in the U.S. and secured massive economic profit. The last arrangement from 2017 measured US$110 billion over the subsequent decade (Diamond & Cohen, 2017). This aspect is vital due to the Trump administration’s wish to prioritize America and the American population’s opportunity for jobs. Despite this fact, it is impossible to think that this argument should be the primary objective for continuing the alliance, as the trade deal could be conducted with a vast majority of other states, with less radical views than Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, the concern of regional stability and security should be elaborated upon as part of the aspects which influence the alliance. In terms of the American values and perceptions, it is evident to find that these have changed over time based on the different administrations, which correspondingly have changed American foreign policy. A study furthermore shows that the U.S. either way was as much depended on the Saudi regime as an ally, despite the change in administration and subsequent foreign policy strategies. This is apparent as Saudi Arabia would portray as a regional power that could support the stabilization of the Middle East and secure the friendly relations with the U.S. Whether the country decides to engage militarily to secure the region, or withdraw its troops from the area, the study shows that Saudi support is crucial in both strategies. Given the long-time support from the U.S., the Saudi regime has achieved a status as a regional leader, which subsequently mean that the country can influence the region in alignment with the chosen American strategy (Indyk, 2011).

In alignment with securing and stabilizing the region, it is furthermore significant to mention the ongoing conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran as part of the alliance’s justification. Here it will be evident to argue that the alliance moves beyond the transnational nature, given the importance of the
surrounding region. As provided by the Council of Foreign Relations’ Special Report, the regional conflict has a definite influence on the strategic interest of maintaining order and stability. Given a choice to balancing out the power in the region by opposing Iran, Saudi Arabia seeks to restrain the Iranian influence in the region, thus creating making the regional dynamic tense. Given the longevity of the alliance and the asymmetrical nature, Saudi Arabia is not inclined to achieve more power, as long as they have the support from the U.S. The alliance, therefore, becomes rationalized based on the possibility that leaving the alliance could cause more instability in the region (Gause, 2011).

5.3.2. Preferences
As described above, a variety of different aspects needs to be considered, when discussing the endurance of the Saudi-American alliance. These different concerns should be discussed following as to what motivates the U.S. and its subsequent foreign policy given the diffraction of political, normative, and cultural aspects.

Primarily, it is apparent to mention the institutional agreements between the two countries. Based on the previous sections, it has been argued that both governmental and private actors have a distinct influence in maintaining the alliance. Despite the discovery of domestic oil shares, which would suggest that the alliance cannot solely be explained due to trade, it can be argued that the trade agreements still are a vital preference, given path dependency. As the involvement of both private and public agreements, it is apparent that the alliance’s endurance is affected by both types of actors, which seek to maintain the relations, as breaking with them would lead to a loss of profit.

Secondly, it is essential to mention the aspect of national security as discussed in opposition to the promotion of human rights. As studied in the report from the Centre for Human Rights & Global Justice, the research finds that many dominant states such as the U.S. prevailing prioritize the pursuit for national security, despite their discourse of promoting Western values (Goodman et al., 2018). It can, therefore, be argued, that the U.S. defends the promotion of human rights, as long as it does not interfere with any aspect of national security. In the Saudi-American case, the consensus must, therefore, be that leaving the alliance due to the Saudi human right violations would decrease national security, thus leaving the U.S. to prefer the alliance’s continuation.

Moreover, it is possible to discuss the unpredictability of the Middle East in relation to stability as part of the argumentation for the U.S. continuing involvement with Saudi Arabia. As previously described, a great variety of discourses concerning the region deals with the instability and the complexity of different conflicts. Here a Special Report from the Centre of Strategic and International
Studies outlines that the instability is caused by too many variables, for which the level of importance changes from each actor. The prediction of or a framework for stability in the region is therefore not easy if even possible. Moreover, the report outlines how changing leaders, personal tensions, and outside intervention can affect instability almost instantly. Based on the report, the hypothetical outcome from withdrawing from the alliance cannot be predicted, due to the instability of the region (Cordesman, 2018).

5.4. Summary

Based on the analysis provided by Carlsnaes’ foreign policy model, the complexity within the alliance is apparent. The different perspectives and argument intersected with the different systemic levels lead to an expansive answer to the problem. The following section will argue that due to the longevity of the alliance, economic, strategic and diplomatic ties between the countries have been advancing, leaving the alliance to be so institutionalized, that breaking it seems incomprehensible. The endurance of the alliance has roots in various factors, yet the instability and insecurity of the Middle East have left the U.S. unable to distance themselves from the alliance.

As outlined in the section of the structural dimension, it is evident to find that the importance of the geographical position of Saudi Arabia alongside the institutional settings of the various trade agreements and investment plays a vital role in the alliance. Despite the discovery of domestic oil shares, which would suggest that the trade agreements would be less influential, it has been argued that they still play a vital role in the alliance due to path dependency. This can be as both private and governmental actors follow a habitual path, thus not evaluate the agreements. Due to the longevity of the alliance, these agreements are incredibly comprehensive, thus not enabling a will to move beyond them. The mutual benefits of the agreements thus still exist and private and public interest to uphold the alliance maintains within American foreign policy.

The second section elaborated upon the dispositional settings. This section shows great diversity based on the changing administrations throughout time, yet that most conditions withstand. Based on the analysis, it is apparent to find, that the U.S. seeks to promote western values, yet in the case that domestic security is threatened, or economic profit is possible, the values are dispersed. In light of the literature on alliance formation, this dimension can be closely related to the section of alliances and security, as it explains why states engage in relations based on a common threat.

Lastly, the third section elaborates on the intentional dimension, which discusses the choices and preferences of a country. Within this section, one of the most significant concerns deals with regional
instability and the lack of predictability. Given the analysis, it has been presented that the endurance of the alliance moves beyond the transnational nature. Here it is argued that withdrawing from the alliance or region could lead to further instability. This can be explained due to the long-term involvement of the U.S., which would make them a part of the regional dynamics. Furthermore, it is evident, to elaborate on the changing administrations and their policies, that despite the variation does not affect the outcome related to Saudi Arabia, as the alliance has been continually enduring. This perspective could be seen in close relation to the literature of asymmetrical alliances and balance of threat and power, as engaging in the alliance with Saudi Arabia contests to their security, thus does not motivate them to further aggravate against Iran as balancing out their power.

In summary, the alliance has been explored to be significantly complicated, based on a variety of factors. The longevity of the alliance and path dependency plays a vital role in the matter, as the different institutional settings affect the structural norms of the alliance, and arguably have formed deeply embedded ties both in terms of strategic, diplomatic and private considerations. Due to the long-term involvement given the alliance, it can, therefore, be argued that the U.S. has become so involved in the alliance and the region, that leaving it would affect both the strategic interests, the domestic security, and various trade relations.

6. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, alliance formation has been a great debate in IR. Within constellations of alliances, it is often agreed that the states need to be somewhat likeminded in order to ally continually. Despite this, it is possible to observe the case of Saudi Arabia and the U.S, where radical differences and conflicting events distinguish the two allies. This phenomenon has therefore been apparent to study, as it falls out of the usual categorizations of alliance formation. The research has, therefore, conducted a case study to investigate the Saudi-American alliance endurance throughout times.

The research has found that the endurance of the alliance is caused by a variety of different factors such as economic relations, strategic importance, and regional instability. Despite the variety of different factors, which also can be seen in light of the different administrations, it has been argued that the U.S. needs the Saudi involvement regardless. Furthermore, it has been found that the alliances cannot be analysed isolated of the surrounding region, due to the complexity of the Middle East, given aspects of security and stability. Subsequently, it has been argued that the longevity of the relation has contributed to the consistency of the factors mentioned above. This is evident in the
unpredictability in terms of the region, instability, and insecurity that opposes threats to the U.S., and economic trade relations which have discouraged the U.S. from leaving the alliance.

To enlighten the basis of this puzzle, the study has provided a literature review, in which have argued for four different types of literature regarding alliances, being; security, balance of power and threat, asymmetrical alliances and path dependency. The literature primarily shows that alliance formation can be placed in various contexed, yet it is insufficient to place the Saudi-American alliance within the field. The literature review has furthermore provided this study with theoretical conceptualizations, which have been an important aspect of the analysis, as they can explain different aspects of the alliance distinctively.

In order to comprehend the endurance, it was necessary to provide an in-depth holistic study of the alliance, and the research has thus conducted a single N case study using Carlsnaes’ model. Primarily it has been argued an FPA model has provided the analysis with a multifaceted, multilevel analysis of the case, which IR theories usually cannot do. This is furthermore apparent as the analysis has been conducted based on the different structural levels, which have been necessary given the case’s complexity. The model has therefore provided the analysis with a clear structure of the foreign policy move, despite that the initial framework is to analyse foreign policy change.

As provided by the analysis, the research has found vast complexity within the alliance. As given by the summery, it can be argued that the alliance incorporates various factors besides the institutional trade agreements, that effectively ties the two countries together. Here it is suggested that given the longevity of the alliance, the two countries are so embedded in each other’s strategic and political interests. Moreover, it is possible to argue that the alliance has moved beyond transnational relations, given the complexity, unpredictability, and instability of the Middle East.

Given the structural dimension, it has been found that the historical background of changing polarities as well as the geographical position of Saudi-Arabia has played a vital role in the original conditions. As analysed, many of these conditions remain, which can be explained based on path tendency theory. Despite new technologies, which have allowed the U.S. to extract oil from domestic shares, the trade and investment agreements still play a vital role, due to public and governmental interest of economic profit that can affect U.S. foreign policy.

Secondly, the aspect of perceptions and values has influenced American foreign policy in the region and in light of the alliance. Here it has been argued that the U.S.’ status as hegemonic power has led the American foreign policy to be directed to promote western values and to secure and stabilize the region. Despite the criticism of Saudi’s engagement with these values, it has been evident
to find that the U.S. in both situations of promoting western values and stabilizing the region have been depended on Saudi Arabia. This is apparent as they portrayed a regional power which can support the U.S.’ involvement. As argued in the dispositional dimension, there have been differences in the reasons behind the U.S.’ involvement in the Middle East. Despite the strategic change of American foreign policy, the need to engage with Saudi Arabia did not change.

Lastly, the choices and preferences have been outlined in the intentional dimension. Here the aspects which have made the alliance prosperous have been outlined. Based on the findings, it has been apparent that the American involvement can be seen in light of the longevity of the relation. Based on the instability and unpredictability, it is clear that the U.S. has been so embedded in the region, that withdrawing from the alliance could cause further instability. It is furthermore evident that such instability could threaten domestic security. The U.S. thus prioritized stabilizing the region rather than promoting human rights and other western values.

Concludingly, this analysis has summarized and discussed the findings. Given the alliance’s complexity, it is evident to find a variety of different factors that have contributed to the endurance, such as economic trade, strategic importance, regional stability and the position of U.S. as world hegemon. It has been shown that despite the different foreign policy strategies, conflicts, and perceived threats, there has been a continuing need for Saudi support. Overall, this research explains the endurance based on the longevity of the relation, which has made the factors mentioned above so embedded within the alliance, that breaking the alliance seems incomprehensible.

In principle, the endurance of the alliance has created a mutually constrained relation. These findings could provide the field of alliance formation with further studies of time in relation to alliances. Given the longevity of the alliance, it has been apparent that many of the factors which have influenced the alliance have been strengthened over time.
7. Bibliography


