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Global Responses to Conflict and Crisis in Syria and Yemen

Amanda Guidero
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*This book is dedicated to the Yemeni and Syrian civilians
that have been affected by these conflicts, wherever they may live.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the primary research question: why does the media cover the Syrian conflict more than the conflict in Yemen despite the similar degree of humanitarian crisis and the presence of international intervention in both cases? The chapter provides basic background information for each conflict, discussing the political and economic context that gave rise to the respective conflicts. This chapter also provides an outline of the book as a whole.

Keywords Syria • Yemen • Humanitarian crisis • Security

It has been more than seven years since the anti-corruption and pro-democracy movements that swept across the Middle East and North Africa (the so-called Arab Uprisings or Arab Spring) drew global attention. While many of these movements have dissipated, conflicts in Syria and Yemen continue, devastating the countries' economies, politics, and societies. However, the two conflicts garner very different levels of attention from the global community. The Syrian conflict remains ongoing, a proxy war for powerful outside actors, with a continued outflow of Syrian civilians to neighboring countries and beyond; more than half of Syria's pre-war population has been killed or displaced by war (Mercy Corps 2018). Further, the use of chemical weapons and airstrikes by global and regional powers

with a history of rivalry makes for attention-grabbing headlines. Thus, Syria remains at the forefront of global media and humanitarian attention. Yemen, on the other hand, is experiencing a similar degree of crisis for the population, has received similar international intervention, and, as of December 2017, has reached a record number of cholera cases, but has not been on the global media's radar to the same degree as Syria. In fact, thousands of migrants from Somalia and Ethiopia, where drought and unemployment are rife, have fled to Yemen, ignorant of that country's conflict. In this book, we compare the different international responses to the internal conflicts in Syria and Yemen through an examination of the coverage each conflict has received by the media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations (IOs). We explore and evaluate rival explanations for why the Syrian conflict has garnered so much more attention. Using this assessment, we then discuss why this differential attention matters in terms of international relations (IR) theory, international law, humanitarian response, and policy recommendations for responding to humanitarian crises.

WHY DO SOME COUNTRIES IN CRISIS RECEIVE MORE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION?

Since the start of the so-called Arab Uprisings that began in Tunisia in December 2010, much has changed in the region, even while some regimes and patterns of power have remained relatively unscathed. Dictators were toppled in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, while monarchies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and Morocco (among others) have remained solidly in power, albeit with some reforms, particularly in the case of Oman and Morocco. Although tensions—and at times bloody conflict—have continued in a number of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, the uprisings in Syria and Yemen have differed in scale and scope, with civil wars that have killed hundreds of thousands, displaced millions of people (Connor 2016), and become internationalized through the interventions of external actors. Despite the outward similarities of the two conflicts—with high civilian casualties, domestic fractionalization, the role of foreign extremists, and the manifestation of regional rivalries between Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular, albeit also increasingly between Israel and Iran at time of writing—Syria has received significantly more global public attention, whereas the conflict in Yemen has largely remained outside the headlines (Staff 2018). In this book, we examine

international coverage of the two conflicts using data collected through Google GDelt as well as through content analysis of selected articles from NGOs, IOs, and news outlets. Our quantitative results show that, since 2010, much higher numbers of articles have been published about the conflict in Syria from many more countries than articles dealing with the conflict in Yemen. Our qualitative analysis reveals that articles have similarities in content, with emphasis on the scope and scale of the humanitarian issues in each conflict, begging the question as to why such a discrepancy in reporting exists and what it means in terms of how various actors respond to the two crises. Conventional wisdom and realist theories of IR might suggest that this has to do with great power interests (notably the US and Soviet Union/Russia), the fact that Syria has long symbolized the heart of the Middle East and has been a leader of Arab nationalism, the number of displaced and killed Syrians, and the relative proximity of Syria to Europe. However, we question whether this alone explains the difference between the coverage of the two conflicts, since Yemen's strategic location at the mouth of the Red Sea has long been valued by outside powers, and the US has a history of security interests in Yemen, particularly in regard to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In examining coverage of the conflict we explore alternative explanations, such as identity politics, economic issues, and the relative weight and location of Yemeni and Syrian diasporas.

This book begins with a brief overview of the countries and their respective conflicts. Chapter 2 then explores how states use international humanitarian law (IHL) and associated frameworks to justify international involvement in domestic conflicts and humanitarian crises. Chapter 3 presents and discusses contending explanations from IR for why Syria might receive more attention than Yemen. Chapter 4 explains the use of data from Google's GDelt project to collect and analyze media coverage of the two conflicts between 2010 and 2017, documenting the findings graphically and narratively. Chapter 5 presents the results of the qualitative analysis of news articles on sampled events from Syria and Yemen. Chapter 6 presents a discussion on the theoretical and policy implications of the data analysis.

CONTEXT: CURRENT CONFLICTS IN SYRIA AND YEMEN

Both Yemen and Syria have suffered tremendous losses in the past years of conflict. For Syria, the violence that began in 2011 has claimed an estimated 400,000 lives, with more than five million Syrian refugees (Syria Regional Refugees Response 2018) and over half of the population having

been displaced (OCHA 2017). In fighting in Raqqa in May 2017, over 23,000 people were displaced in a four-day period. The economic impact of the conflict has been similarly devastating. As of April 2016, the estimated impact of the war was 400% of Syria's 2010 gross domestic product (GDP), and their economy has constricted by more than 50% (Bourgi 2016). In Yemen, the number of casualties has been lower, at an estimated 6500 (World Bank 2017), but the devastation to the population and the country as a whole has likewise been stark. There, almost seven million people are in a state of emergency, a step away from famine, and an additional ten million are deemed in crisis (Roopanarine et al. 2017). Compounding the food insecurity is Yemen's weak economy, with a GDP that declined by 28% in 2015 and a further 4% in 2016 (World Bank 2018a). Comparison between the two countries requires a brief examination of their respective "baselines", that is, their level of need prior to the outbreak of violent conflict.

Prior to the outbreak of conflict Syria had an estimated population of just over 21 million, with a net migration rate of -1.2 migrants per 1000 persons (World Bank 2018a). The GDP was estimated at \$106.4 billion and the GDP per capita was estimated at \$4800 (Countries of the World 2011a). In July 2016, the Syrian population was estimated at slightly over 18 million, with a net migration rate of -2.1 migrants/1000 persons (World Bank 2018b). Syria's economy has declined by 70% since the start of the conflict, with GDP estimated at \$50.28 billion and GDP per capita estimated at \$2900 in 2015 (Central Intelligence Agency 2017a). Yemen had an estimated population of just under 23.5 million in July 2010, with a net migration rate of zero per 1000 persons. The estimated GDP in 2010 was \$62.88 billion, and the GDP per capita was \$2600 (Countries of the World 2011b). The estimated population of Yemen in July 2016 was 27.5 million, with a net migration rate of 0.7 migrants per 1000 persons. The GDP in purchasing power parity was estimated at \$73.45 billion in 2016, and the GDP official exchange rate was \$31.33 billion. GDP per capita was estimated at \$2500. Despite these numbers, the estimated real growth rate was -28.1% in 2015 and -4.2% in 2016. Yemen's economy is propped up in large part due to a three-year \$570 million Extended Credit Facility granted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in August 2014 (Central Intelligence Agency 2017b).

Both Yemen and Syria are experiencing humanitarian crises, although one might argue of different types. As of March 2018 over 22 million people in Yemen, approximately 76% of the population, are in need of

some sort of humanitarian assistance, with 8 million at risk of famine (OCHA 2018). Civilian casualties increased significantly in the second half of 2017, with 714 reported civilian casualties in December 2017 alone, mostly as a result of Saudi-led airstrikes (OHCHR 2017). More than 3 million people have been displaced and 17.8 million (60% of the population) experience food insecurity, with over 8 million completely dependent on external assistance (WFP 2018). The World Food Program estimated that they had only three months of food stored in Yemen, meaning famine could be imminent (BBC 2017a). Civilians have suffered significantly since the start of the Saudi-led air campaign in March 2015. At the end of March 2017 the United Nations (UN) reported over 13,000 civilian casualties, 4773 of which were deaths. Over half of Syria's pre-war population, or about 11 million people, have been either killed or forced to leave their home, and 13.5 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance as of March 2017 (Mercy Corps 2018). The crisis has affected neighboring countries, who host 4.8 million refugees, as well as Europe, to which some refugees have tried to escape.

Justifying Case Comparison

Despite the difference in the scale of conflict-related deaths in Yemen and Syria, the humanitarian situation in both countries is grim, and the conflicts share a number of striking similarities. Both countries were ruled by the same leader for decades. Yemen was ruled by Ali Abdullah Saleh since the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, and prior to that, he ruled North Yemen since 1978. Bashar al-Assad has ruled Syria since 2000, and his father, Hafez al-Assad was in power for 30 years. Both countries had approximately the same population pre-conflict. However, they differ in key areas as well. Syria lies at the heart of the Arab world, whereas Yemen lies on the periphery; Yemen has the historical legacy of civil war between the two Yemens, whereas Syria was a relatively stable unitary state, although one ruled by a minority sect. In 2012, Syria had a GDP per capita purchasing power parity (PPP) of \$4684 (Trading Economics 2018a), whereas Yemen's GDP per capita was \$3793 (Trading Economics 2018b). In both countries protest against government abuses and excesses began nonviolently, but then escalated as more parties became involved. Ali Abdullah Saleh eventually stepped down as a result of an agreement facilitated by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whereas Bashar al-Assad remains in power in Syria. However, Saleh returned to Yemen

after a brief period abroad, and once again became an actor in the political conflict until he was killed on December 4, 2017 (Tharoor 2017). Both conflicts have become enmeshed in regional rivalries and Syria in particular is deemed a proxy war between the US and Russia, on the one hand, and between Iran and Saudi Arabia, on the other. Despite these differences, both governments face a severely divided opposition and have drawn the attention of regional and global players. In the next section we provide a brief discussion of the origins and dynamics of each conflict.

Syrian Conflict: Born Out of the Uprisings

Like other countries in the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Uprisings, the conflict in Syria began with a protest at a Mosque in the city of Daraa on March 18, 2011. The demonstrators were protesting the arrest and mistreatment of 15 local children after they painted revolutionary slogans on a wall (Al Jazeera 2018; BBC 2013a). The protestors were met with support from other community members, who participated in protests throughout Daraa. Government forces fired on the protesters, leaving hundreds dead, wounded, and imprisoned (Al Jazeera 2018). In reaction to the protests, President Assad promised political reforms to meet protesters' demands, including dissolving the Higher State Security Court, which was tasked with prosecuting people who challenged the government (CNN 2011). He also lifted the state of emergency, which allowed the government to preemptively arrest people and issued a decree affirming citizens' right to peacefully protest (CNN 2011). However, by July 2011, defectors from the military announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army (Al Jazeera 2018).

Although the protests began with the arrest of the Daraa children, the conflict has been attributed to a wide variety of issues, including climate change, which fueled migration from rural areas to urban areas, government repression, and economic troubles, which were made worse by the violence directed at the protestors. Five years later, the conflict has amounted to what has been described by the then US Secretary of State, John Kerry, as an "unfolding humanitarian catastrophe unmatched since World War II" (as cited in CBS 2016). By December 2014, 450,000 Syrians had perished and 12 million had been displaced (Al Jazeera 2018).

The Syrian conflict has become ever more complicated for a variety of reasons. The massive outflow of Syrians to surrounding countries and Europe has created a new set of humanitarian crises for the people fleeing and has become a source of political division in Europe. Out of a popula-

tion of roughly 23 million (based on 2013 data), as of January 2017, 4.9 million Syrians are refugees and 6.1 million are internally displaced (World Vision 2017). The various attempts by some members of the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution on Syria have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the international organization in responding to reports of massive civilian casualties and accusations by activists and leaders, including President Obama, that the Assad regime was using chemical weapons on civilians. Despite issuing a “red line” regarding chemical weapons, no action was taken by the Obama administration against Bashar al-Assad, in part due to Russian support for the Syrian regime (Ahmad 2016). The extent of direct and indirect external interference from the US, Britain, France, Turkey, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, and, more recently, Israel has elevated the Syrian conflict in the public domain (Zavis 2015). Talks held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in January 2017, coordinated by Russia, Turkey, and Iran, illustrate the important role of external powers in the conflict, as well as the extent to which the power center has shifted over the course of the conflict, with the US and Saudi Arabia currently with less influence in the region (Bonsey 2017).

Internal factionalization has compounded the difficulty of finding a resolution to the Syrian conflict. Hundreds, if not thousands, of militias are fighting against the Assad regime as well as against each other. The factionalization of the Free Syrian Army, the first military opposition group, created an opening for jihadist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front (now Fath al-Sham, BBC 2013b). In addition to the these groups, there are also Kurdish groups, notably the Kurdish People’s Protection Unit (YPG) and an alliance of Kurds, Christians, and Arabs called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), as well as the Jaish al-Fateh umbrella group supported by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar, the Lebanese Hizbollah, backed by Iran, and numerous other militant groups (BBC 2013b).

Although the Syrian conflict began with unarmed civilian protest, over the past six years it has morphed into an internationalized proxy war, in which jihadist groups have played a major role. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of Daesh, also known as the ISIS, which has used shocking violence in 29 countries around the world, including Syria, Iraq, France, the US, Turkey, and Belgium (see Lister et al. 2017), was headquartered in Syria from 2014 through the end of 2017 (Chulov 2018). The extent of attacks on civilians, as well as the challenges of waging war with nonstate, transnational entities, has complicated the situation in Syria, made the

conflict and the parties to the conflict somewhat fluid, and has contributed to the fact that neither the regime nor the opposition movements is clearly able to defeat the other side. Half of the Syrian population has been displaced and more than half of Syria's housing units have been destroyed, rendering Syrian civilians unsettled and vulnerable (Balian 2017). The severity of the humanitarian crisis has also provided fertile ground for the expansion of jihadist militias. Often fighters are recruited because it is the only available paycheck in a devastated economy and society. With a generation of children out of school for the past six years and family members killed or displaced, many feel lost, hopeless, and without options.

Yemen Conflict: Continuation of Past Tensions

Yemen's current conflict has its roots in previous conflicts and the inability of the state to attain primary allegiance over tribal and other identity loyalties. Egypt and Saudi Arabia both intervened in Yemen in the 1950s and 1960s, and the country was thrown into civil war between pro-revolutionary forces backed by Egypt and pro-royalist forces backed by Saudi Arabia. After years of fighting, the war concluded with a victory by the royalists, cementing the Saudi influence in the North (Ferris 2013). With the formation of a Marxist South Yemen in 1967, tensions continued between the North and South, leading to years of border clashes and ideological differences between the two states (BBC 2016b). While the exact start of the current conflict in Yemen is debatable, given the series of events leading up to the Houthi takeover of Sanaa in September 2014 (BBC 2017b), what is clear is that the situation in Yemen is a continuation of conflict dynamics that have plagued the country since the merger of two countries, North and South Yemen, in 1990. While the leaders agreed that unification was the best way to ease long-standing hostility and fighting, it created tension among the various communities within the two states, particularly in terms of religiosity and ideological differences (see Sharro 2015). According to Winter (2011) violent conflict broke out between government forces and the Houthis, a Zaadi-Shi'a movement seeking greater representation in the government and autonomy for the Northern region, in and around Saada province (Northern Yemen) six times between 2003 and 2010. Although a history of internal conflict and external intervention shape the conflict in Yemen, the current violence has been attributed to the transition of power from President Ali Abdullah Saleh to President Abdrabbu Mansour Hadi—negotiated with the help of Saudi Arabia and the GCC—in response to the 2011 uprising in Yemen.

Early on President Hadi struggled to manage the challenges facing the Yemeni state, which in addition to the Houthis is challenged by separatists in the South, attacks by al-Qaeda and ISIS, and military loyal to Saleh (BBC 2016a).

Like the events in Syria several external actors have directly or indirectly engaged in conflict in the area, including Saudi Arabia and Iran (Al-Madhaji et al. 2015). The US has also been conducting drone strikes in Yemen since 2002, with variable successes and failures (Shane 2015). While these drone strikes have been able to combat militants from terrorist organizations, this has come at the cost of civilian lives (Shane 2015). This issue has been exacerbated with the introduction of the US-backed Saudi-led campaign, to conduct airstrikes against the threat of the Houthi rebels (Northam 2016). Attacks on the rebel group have intensified, putting more civilian lives in the balance of the warring parties (Northam 2016). Tensions between the Saudi coalition forces and the Houthi rebels have greatly impacted the ability to reach ceasefire agreements, and have allowed the war to continue. In contrast to the conflict in Syria, however, although Saudi Arabia, the US, and Iran are involved in arming and supporting various parties involved in the Yemeni conflict, Russia has not played a significant role to date, thereby eliminating one of the proxy conflicts present in the Syrian imbroglio. Similarly, whereas historic tensions between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights have added to the complexity of issues and actors in the Syrian conflict, Yemen and Israel do not have a history of territorial conflict.

Internal factionalization has driven internal conflict for decades leading up to the current conflict, and like Syria, complicates the prospects for a resolution to the conflict. Numerous internal divides—including the al-Hirak movement in the South, the Houthis in the North, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the General Congress Party, and the Islah Party—create numerous challenges, including the different views of the elite delegates involved in the National Dialogue Conference after Hadi's, transition posing significant difficulties for the transition process (Laub 2016; Schmitz 2014).

The ongoing conflict between internal groups, which has been exacerbated by external actors, has also made the conditions ripe for extremists operating in Yemen to commit violence. Extremist violence, particularly in the form of salafi-jihadist attacks, has caused over 6000 deaths in Yemen—more than half of which are civilians (Salhani 2016). As in Syria, Yemen is fertile territory for recruiting to such movements. The country is the

poorest in the region and recently suffered food, fuel, and financial crises in 2008–2009 that led to negative GDP growth (Breisinger et al. 2011). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2016) predicted that approximately 70% of Yemen’s population of roughly 27 million, or 18.8 million, would be in dire need of aid in 2017. The 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan reports that 22.2 million are in need, as compared to 15.9 million before the latest crisis (OCHA 2018). The most recent figures estimate 17.8 million people are food insecure, with 8.4 million at risk of starvation, and an estimated 5.4 million require emergency shelter, including those who are internally displaced (OCHA 2018). Although the number of casualties in Yemen may be lower than that of Syria, there is profound humanitarian need for basic physical safety and the means for survival.

The next chapter examines international approaches to civil wars and humanitarian crises, rooted in international law and humanitarian norms, to explore both the available options for international intervention in these conflicts and possible explanations for the varying degrees of attention paid to the two conflicts.

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International Laws and Norms and Intervention in Syria and Yemen

Abstract This chapter investigates the legal basis for discussing the various ways states are reacting to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. It focuses on three different explanations for differing state actions in the two countries, including the international laws and norms on intervention by invitation, international laws and norms on intervention for international peace and security, and international laws and norms on intervention for humanitarian purposes. The chapter concludes that international legal frameworks for humanitarian intervention are not frequently invoked in either conflict despite the humanitarian need. It also points to limitations in the international legal framework in instances when the Security Council does not act in situations that involve humanitarian crises.

Keywords International law • IHL • United Nations • Security Council • Responsibility to protect

The conflicts in Syria and Yemen and resulting humanitarian crises and displacement of civilian populations raise questions concerning whether the current actions of states and IOs within the international community suffice, or if more or different actions are warranted. Given the severity of the humanitarian crises in both questions, why is Syria receiving more attention than Yemen, when a diverse array of states have been so involved

in one or both of the conflicts. To address these questions, this chapter begins by investigating the legal basis for how states are reacting to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. It focuses on three different explanations for differing state actions in the two countries. The explanations are summarized as (1) international laws and norms on intervention by invitation—including Russian and Iranian military engagement in Syria and Saudi and Saudi-led military engagement in Yemen; (2) international laws and norms on intervention for international peace and security—such as US and US-led coalition’s military engagement against ISIS and other extremists in Syria; and (3) international laws and norms on intervention for humanitarian purposes—US military strikes against Syrian military installations.

LEGAL BASIS FOR INTERVENTION

The legal basis for intervening in a sovereign state’s affairs for humanitarian purposes is both murky and contested. The emergence of the UN in the aftermath of World War II and the establishment of the Security Council, the body charged with maintaining international peace and security, created legal mechanisms for international interventions to stop genocide under the premise of collective security (by way of the Security Council). Resolutions passed by the Security Council, which can authorize peace-keeping interventions, are binding under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. International law limits unilateral actions by states in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which forbids use of force against “the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” with the exception of self-defense (covered in Article 51). Here it should be noted that it is unclear if Article 2(4) applies to nonstate actors in addition to state actors, since the text does not specifically refer to actions outside of those between states (Lanovoy 2017).

Legal scholars tend to interpret Article 2(4) as meaning that states cannot use force against another state without Security Council approval (Valek 2005). For example, in response to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO’s) intervention in Yugoslavia, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (1999) argued that the use of force could be a legitimate method to ensure peace when diplomacy fails and reiterated the role of the Security Council in decisions relating to intervention. Any attempt to legalize unilateral action on humanitarian grounds raises concern among some academics and policymakers that states would “exploit a humanitarian exception to justify military aggression” (Goodman 2006, p. 107). Still, states have used (and do use) force on humanitarian grounds without Security Council approval, for instance NATO’s

intervention in Kosovo in 1999, US invasion in Iraq in 2003, and Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia in 1978, although the states in each of these cases framed their argument in terms of self-defense (see Mohamed 2009).

While states are limited in using force to intervene in other states, through developments such as the 1998 Rome Statute, the international legal framework has evolved to provide some avenues for states to participate in prosecuting individuals suspected of violating international law. The 1998 Rome Statute established the International Criminal Court (ICC), a judicial body external to the UN, and included a number of crimes against humanity. According to the Statute, states, along with the Security Council and the ICC Prosecutor, can refer cases to the ICC. Upon referral, the Prosecutor can open an investigation and, if necessary, prosecute individuals accused of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression. If the Prosecutor determines that an individual should be prosecuted, an arrest warrant will be issued and states will be notified to make the arrest. This process, however, depends on states becoming signatories to the Rome Statute and fulfilling their obligations to the ICC. While a number of critiques have been leveled at the ICC, including its lack of enforcement mechanisms for noncompliant states and its seemingly disproportionate focus on charging Africans with crimes (Phooko 2011), the ICC also effects little change on the ground during an active conflict. That role falls squarely within the purview of the UN.

To promote and enforce international laws and norms, the UN has six organs, each with their own committees, departments, and offices, including the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, the International Court of Justice, and the Trusteeship Council. Each organ or department is responsible for different aspects of international law. The Security Council, for instance, can authorize intervention in state affairs to maintain peace and security, while the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), a program within the General Assembly, advocates for children. However, the complexity of the UN system can result in disparities between allegations made by one organ and actions to address those allegations, which must be approved by a different organ. For instance, the Secretariat (and related offices and departments) can provide information about crimes against humanity to the Security Council, but cannot compel the Security Council to act. Although states have limited ability to intervene in the affairs of another state without Security Council approval, they invoke international law in a variety of ways to justify unilateral interventions.

Intervention by Invitation

A common argument made by states justifying intervention in the affairs of another state is that they are acting by invitation and therefore by consent of another state, despite the fact that intervention by invitation is not codified in international law (Byrne 2016; Wippman 1996). However, because states are sovereign, as emphasized in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, in theory they can consent to other states using military force within the confines of their territory without violating international laws. This is also consistent with international norms that prioritize state sovereign control over its territory (Barkin and Cronin 1994). The UN Charter both asserts the limits of its intervention capacity and implies the primacy of state sovereignty in Article 2(7): “[N]othing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.” According to Byrne (2016), this section of the Charter enables states to legally invite others to use force in their territory.

The intervention by invitation argument has been used by the Syrian and Yemeni governments, as well as by Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia and its coalition. However, the norm has been advanced more actively by more actors in Syria than in Yemen. In September 2015, Syrian President Assad invited the Russian military to conduct airstrikes targeting ISIS in places like Raqqa and Palmyra. In February 2018, after years of denying that their troops were fighting alongside Syrian forces, the Iranians acknowledged their presence in Syria, arguing that they were invited by the Assad government (O’Connor 2018). Additionally, both the Russians and the Iranians have publicly demanded other states, like the US, who were not invited to use military force in Syria, respect Syrian sovereignty (Mehr News Agency 2018). In Yemen, Saudi Arabia and its coalition were invited to use military force by President Hadi in April 2015 to push the Houthis out of Sanaa, Yemen’s capital (Dyke 2015). The US also had the Yemeni government’s consent to use force to battle ISIS and al-Qaeda until February 2017, when, in response to an incident involving children, the Yemeni government withdrew consent for US ground operations (Hathaway et al. 2018).

While many states operate by invitation, the context within which consent is given is important and might also explain state actions in the two countries and differing coverage of those actions. Consent must reflect “the true, voluntary and clear intention of a state” (Byrne 2016). The

question of validity is raised in another legal agreement by the UN known as the Draft articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (DASR). Specifically, Article 20 notes that consent must be valid and that validity depends on whether “the agent or person who gave the consent was authorized to do so on behalf of the State (and if not, whether the lack of that authority was known or ought to have been known to the acting State), or whether the consent was vitiated by coercion or some other factor.” Essentially this means that in order for states like Russia, Iran, or Saudi Arabia to argue that they intervened upon consent, thus not committing wrongful acts in Syria or Yemen, they must show that their acts were in accordance with valid consent. Thus far the question of validity of consent in Syria seems clear given the Syrian government has not publicly rebuked Iranian or Russian actions in Syria. The Yemeni government has not rebuked Saudi Arabia for actions that deviate from its consent, but questions arise regarding the voluntary nature of the consent. Some observers allege that Saudi Arabia has been preventing President Hadi, who took up residence in Riyadh after fleeing Yemen in January 2015, from returning to Yemen (Al-Karimi 2018). If this is the case, President Hadi might not be able to challenge Saudi and coalition actions in Yemen. While the media has cited Syrian government officials defending Russian and Iranian actions in Syria, the questionable situation (discussed below) between Hadi and the Saudi government could explain why Hadi himself is rarely cited in the media on issues relating to the conflict, in defense of Saudi and coalition actions or otherwise.

Another related challenge to consent is that it must come from a legitimate government representing the state. Government legitimacy is challenged in cases where it has lost control “to such a degree that it is merely one of two or several parties to a civil war” and is therefore not representing the state and the people, who have an inherent right to select their representatives (Byrne 2016, n.p.; Farer 1990). Questions pertaining to the validity of consent and the legitimacy of the consenting government have been raised in regard to Saudi and coalition intervention in Yemen, given President Hadi overstayed his two-year term in office, which was set to end in 2014, resigned from his position, and fled to Saudi Arabia in January 2015 (BBC 2018; Dyke 2015). These questions have been somewhat subdued by the fact that Hadi retains international recognition as the President of Yemen. Similar issues arise concerning the Syrian government with its substantial loss of territorial control, coupled with the fact the last elections were held during the war after four million had fled the country

(Hayatli 2016). International attention has been drawn to this issue by other states; for instance, in 2011 US Secretary of State Clinton made the case that Assad was not legitimate and that the US goal was to see a democratic transition for the Syrian people (BBC 2011). While international attention might be focused on Syrian legitimacy, neither states nor IOs are drawing attention to how questions of Assad's legitimacy affect Russian and Iranian justifications on the grounds of intervention by invitation into the Syrian conflict.

Intervention for International Peace and Security

Intervention to establish international peace and security is another argument often used by states to justify military intervention in another state. The legal foundation of this argument is found in Chapter VII, Article 51 of the UN Charter, which specifies that states have a right to self-defense “*if an armed attack occurs*” (emphasis added). The Federal Court of Justice further specified that states can invoke Article 51 only in the case of an actual armed attack or the prospect of an imminent attack (Travalio and Altenburg 2003). The Security Council can also approve collective military action in response to threats or breaches of peace or acts of aggression (Svarc 2007). While Article 51 has typically been interpreted as states having the right to self-defense against another state, the law does not implicitly make such a designation, which might imply that states can also defend themselves against nonstate actors, including terrorist groups (Franck 2001; see also Lanovoy 2017). In the post-September 11 era, the Security Council has increasingly referred to the actions of nonstate actors like al-Qaeda as a threat to peace and security. For instance, Resolution 1368 affirms the Security Council's determination “to combat by all means threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts” and recognizes “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in accordance with the Charter”. Security Council Resolution 2368 reiterated the Security Council's commitment to combat terrorism and referred to ISIS and al-Qaeda as threats to peace and security.

States in both conflicts have advanced and embraced the language of ISIS and al-Qaeda as threats to international peace and security to justify their actions in both Syria and Yemen. In response to the unanimous passage of Resolution 2368, the US representative at the UN observed that the US and coalition were working to liberate territories from ISIS, as defeating ISIS and al-Qaeda was “the highest priority”. The US also

listed ISIS as a threat to national security and leveraged an invitation by Iraq to assist in combating ISIS to justify its interventions in Syria by arguing that the Syrian government is incapable or unwilling to prevent ISIS from staging attacks against Iraq (Pizzi 2016). In August 2016, Turkey launched a major offensive in Syria to fight ISIS, stating its fight was “against terror groups which constantly threaten our country” (Shaheen 2016). NATO (2017) has stated that ISIS is a security threat to the citizens of member countries and international stability. In addition to justifying their intervention by invitation, Russia and Saudi Arabia have also argued that they are fighting terrorists in Syria and Yemen, respectively. In October 2016, the Russian ambassador to the UK penned an op-ed in which he argued that Russia intervened in Syria to “fight terrorists and extremists” and create the conditions for peace (Yakovenko 2016). In a letter to the Security Council in November 2017, Saudi Arabia stated that it would take “appropriate action to respond to acts of violence and terrorism” committed by Iranian-supported Houthis in Yemen that threaten Saudi and regional security (Al-Arabiya 2017). US forces conducted their first airstrike on ISIS in Yemen in October 2016 in what the Pentagon described as “ongoing counter terrorism operations” (as cited by Starr and Cohen 2017). Although states have used similar arguments for intervention in both conflicts, it is possible that this type of justification for intervening in Syria draws more attention because ISIS, which appears to be a greater global threat, established its caliphate in Syria.

Syria might also get more attention from states and the media because of tensions between states and because of how they apply the peace and security framework to justify their actions. While there is international consensus that ISIS and al-Qaeda are threats to international peace and security, Turkey has extended similar lines of argument to justify its intervention in Syria to combat Kurdish forces, while Russia refers to rebel factions as terrorists (Akkoc and Oliphant 2015; Haaretz 2017). The US, on the other hand, supports the Kurds and at least some of the rebels in Syria. This has created tension between the US and the NATO ally Turkey, while further exacerbating existing US tensions with Russia. The Syrian government has also publicly condemned Turkish attacks on Kurdish forces in Syria as a violation of its sovereignty (BBC 2016). While it garners less attention than Turkey’s treatment of the Kurds, Saudi Arabia’s characterization of the Houthis as an immediate threat to the region and Saudi territory is also problematic, if only because the Houthis have defended firing missiles into Saudi Arabia in retaliation for Saudi-led

coalition war crimes (Reuters 2015). This line of reasoning, nevertheless, has not received much attention and the Security Council has seemingly come to the defense of Saudi Arabia by both condemning the attacks and alleging that the Houthis planned to carry more attacks out on Saudi Arabia and others in the region (The National 2017). In addition to offering a potential explanation for why Syria receives more attention, these cases illustrate the challenges of applying international laws and norms on intervening to achieve peace and security, especially as they apply to non-state actors in domestic conflicts.

Intervention for Humanitarian Purposes

The third argument states use to justify intervention is for humanitarian purposes. This line of argument has been most frequently argued by states intervening in Syria. These types of interventions are less justifiable under international law, given that Article 2(4) of the UN Charter is understood as forbidding unilateral action except in self-defense. Still, humanitarian interventions garner much international attention particularly because states and international organizations like NATO have intervened (and do intervene) in the affairs of other states on humanitarian grounds. US and NATO interventions in the 1990s were both illustrative of how much attention humanitarian interventions garner and the way international actors have circumvented legal restrictions to take action unilaterally or without Security Council consent. In the early 1990s after the US used humanitarian justifications to intervene in Somalia to support aid workers trying to alleviate widespread famine, the media covered Somalia extensively (Mermin 1997). NATO justified sending forces to intervene in the conflict in Kosovo to protect Albanians from Serbian forces in part because the Security Council had not authorized intervention in the conflict, which was also widely covered in the media (Tesón 2009; Thussu 2000). While subject to much debate among policymakers and legal scholars alike, the interventions did not result in any sanctions or legal challenges. In fact, some scholars argue that NATO's actions in Kosovo set an important precedent establishing the legitimacy of unilateral humanitarian interventions (Tesón 2009).

Though not sanctioned in international law without approval of the Security Council, humanitarian interventions are often informed by IHL and international norms concerning the global community's responsibility toward civilians caught in conflict zones. IHL lays the foundation for humanitarian

justifications for intervention by identifying humanitarian issues that arise during war and restricting the weapons and tactics warfare as they pertain to combatants and noncombatants (ICRC 2004). The Geneva Convention III and Additional Protocol II outline conflict parties' obligations and actions that are prohibited (Gill 2016; ICRC 2004). Article 3 of the General Provisions states that parties in a domestic conflict (known as a noninternational armed conflict) should treat persons not involved in the hostilities humanely. Parties are prohibited from cruel treatment, murder, and mutilation, taking hostages, humiliating and degrading treatment, and passing sentences or carrying out executions without judgments pronounced by constituted courts. This issue has drawn particular international attention concerning Syria, where rebel groups, the US government, and advocacy organizations like Amnesty International have accused the Assad regime of torturing and executing political opposition without due process (Phippen 2017). Indeed, it was on humanitarian grounds that the US justified strikes against Syrian government targets on two occasions. In April 2017 the US launched strikes on Syria amid allegations that the Syrian government used chemical weapons on civilians, and again with France and the Great Britain in April 2018 (Cohen and Liptak 2018; Starr and Diamond 2017). While the US is not officially at war with Syria, these direct strikes garnered much attention because of the humanitarian reasons the US used to justify potentially violating international law and due to the fact that these strikes have been the first direct US military engagement against Syrian forces.

IHL also stipulates that the wounded and sick should be cared for by conflict parties and impartial third parties such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Islamic Relief, and Save the Children. In both Syria and Yemen, this provision of IHL had been violated by all sides. For instance, high-profile attacks on hospitals and medical facilities, including some affiliated with MSF, have occurred in both countries, limiting the ability for medical personnel to care for the wounded. In Syria, while the majority of attacks on medical facilities have been by the Syrian government, and increasingly the Russians in support of the government, ISIS, the US-led coalition, and anti-Assad rebel groups have also been responsible (Keating 2015; Reeve 2017). In Yemen, Saudi-led coalition forces bear the brunt of the responsibility for attacking medical facilities, but the Houthis and other rebels have also participated in attacks (Monaghan 2017). Despite the prevalence of attacks on hospitals in both conflicts, states have not

used arguments to protect medical facilities and personnel in either country to justify their interventions in Syria or Yemen.

While both parties have violated IHL in both Syria and Yemen, the Additional Protocol may not be used to justify external intervention in a state's sovereign territory as specified in Article 3. This means that in theory states cannot use IHL to justify their interventions in the affairs of another state on humanitarian grounds; however, international norms regarding humanitarian interventions suggest that while not technically legal, intervention on humanitarian grounds might be accepted by the international community. The justification for humanitarian intervention is often associated with just war theory, or the idea that if executed for the right reasons, war can be a force for good. For example, in 2003, the former US President Jimmy Carter used the just war doctrine to argue against the US invasion of Iraq in a *New York Times* op-ed, arguing that to be just, a war must be the last resort, must separate combatants from noncombatants, should be proportional to incurred injuries, must be sanctioned by a legitimate authority (in this case the global community), and must establish a peace that is an improvement on previous conditions (Carter 2003). In 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) released a report entitled the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) that outlined when and how states should intervene in the domestic affairs of other states. The logic of R2P is that the international community is obligated to assist civilians when an individual state will not or cannot protect their citizenry. R2P stresses that prevention is the key to halting human atrocities, but the authors borrow heavily from just war theory to explain when and how force can be used to stop violence against civilians.

While R2P opened debates within the international community about how to be more responsive to humanitarian crises, the UN remains the authority that can authorize international interventions for humanitarian purposes. ICISS intended R2P to be adopted into the UN Framework as an "emergency measure", but thus far such efforts have not come into fruition (Valek 2005). R2P has not received as much coverage in the press and has not been invoked overtly by states to justify their interventions in Syria or Yemen, but the UK is a particularly strong advocate of using the R2P approach to legally circumvent Russia's and China's refusal to support a Security Council resolution on Syria. In reality, R2P has rarely been invoked to end human suffering, and in the few cases in which it has,

observers argue that states use intervention on humanitarian grounds to promote their own interests and not the interests of civilians (Paris 2014).

The conflicts in both Syria and Yemen reignite attention to long-standing debates regarding the state's rights and responsibilities within the international system when the Security Council fails to take action (see Bellamy and Williams 2006). A commission established by the UN Human Rights Council alleged that the Syrian government is guilty of "crimes against humanity of murder, rape or other forms of sexual violence, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance and other inhuman acts" (UN News 2016). A UN panel that "monitors the conflict in Yemen for the Security Council" accused Saudi Arabia of targeting civilians with airstrikes and the Houthi rebels of systematically attacking civilians, both of which could constitute crimes against humanity (Nichols 2017). In September 2017 the UN Human Rights Council agreed on a resolution to send war crime experts to investigate human rights abuses and other violations of international law to Yemen (BBC 2017). Though different UN branches have alleged and investigated violations of international law in Syria and Yemen, at the time of writing, the Security Council has not authorized military intervention in either conflict for humanitarian purposes, but it has not formally condemned states that have used the humanitarian argument to justify interventions in Syria.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter explored three different arguments that states use to justify intervening in another state and the way in which such explanations draw international attention to Syria and Yemen. Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have used two justifications for operating in Syria and Yemen respectively—intervention by invitation and establishing peace and security. The US and NATO allies have justified intervention for peace and security and occasionally intervention for humanitarian reasons in Syria, perhaps drawing more attention to the conflict. Through this exploration, serious moral and ethical questions emerged concerning the international community's response (or lack thereof) to internal conflicts with serious humanitarian repercussions due to the unilateral actions of powerful states outside of the context of Security Council resolutions, coupled with the lack of consensus and action within the Security Council in cases like Syria and Yemen. Additionally, the legal arguments states use to justify their actions raise questions about the effectiveness of existing international

legal frameworks for responding to humanitarian crises and regulating state behavior (see Goodman 2006). The varying responses between the different organs and departments on humanitarian issues play out in both conflicts, where some UN agencies have made claims that parties are violating international law, but the Security Council has not approved measures to address said violations (Nichols 2017; UN News 2016).

Just as this chapter has explored how contending explanations of state actions and international law may shape the differential international attention to the conflicts in Yemen and Syria, the next chapter evaluates different explanations from the perspective of IR theory. Why, if humanitarian concerns are great in both countries, does Syria receive greater international attention than Yemen?

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International Relations Theories and Global Attention to Syria and Yemen

Abstract This chapter examines rival explanations for the different degrees of attention paid to the crises in Syria and Yemen using a range of IR theories. In particular, the chapter explores four categories of explanations: ones that focus on great power interests, including alliances, ones that explore structural inequalities in the global system, including geographic location and postcolonial legacies, ones that engage with various aspects of national security, including refugee flows, and ones that consider different types of military engagement. These arguments set up the exploration of the data collected in Chap. 4.

Keywords Realism • Structural inequality • Postcolonialism
• National security

Several alternative explanations exist for why there is a difference in international response to and coverage of the two conflicts given that both have resulted in significant humanitarian crises. This chapter outlines different theoretical explanations found in IR; the suitability of these various explanations is discussed in more detail in Chaps. 4 and 5 based on the data collected.

The literature on state intervention in external conflicts provides a number of alternative explanations for why states intervene in some foreign domestic conflicts but not in others. Interest in foreign conflicts can

stem from a variety of reasons, including the identity and relations between the state and the potential target, location, the nature of perceived threats, and a range of political, economic, and social circumstances, including the availability of lootable resources (Pearson 1974, p. 268; Koga 2011). Given that both Syria and Yemen are Arab states, identity can be excluded as a primary explanation for the variance in coverage of the two cases. However, as is discussed further in the sections that follow, Syria and Yemen have different patterns of ties to states in the international arena, with Syria having greater connections with the international community than Yemen, which is more politically and geographically marginal. Pearson (1974, p. 286) finds that armed attacks, government sanctions, and deaths from domestic violence were associated with foreign intervention in over 50% of intervention targets, suggesting that the nature of perceived threats has a significant impact on the likelihood of foreign action. Further, as will also be discussed in this chapter, Pearson (1974, p. 283) notes “that the frequency of newspaper reporting of such conflicts appears to be greater than reports of other types of conflicts”.

Other explanations for foreign intervention in conflicts relate to theories of audience costs and leaders’ own constituencies. For example, Thomson (2016) finds that executive inconsistency is not punished when a leader backs down from a military commitment to a nonthreatening crisis, suggesting that the degree of threat to a potential intervening country is an important factor in weighing international coverage of events. Some studies have also investigated regime type’s effect on foreign policy choices to explore when autocracies and democracies are likely to intervene in civil conflicts. Koga (2011) finds that leaders of democratic countries assess whether intervention would be effective in supporting the chosen side of a domestic conflict prior to taking action, whereas autocratic countries are more likely to intervene if there are lootable resources in the target country. However, neither Syria nor Yemen has lootable resources, which reduces the explanatory value of this approach. Further, in the case of Syria, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of opposition groups, and the conflict has already dragged on for seven years, which suggests that the likelihood of winning is not a driving factor in international attention to the conflict.

Consequently, of the primary reasons offered for increased attention to certain conflicts over others, the following IR explanations are most likely to account for the difference in the international response to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen: (1) great power interests and alliances, particularly in

relation to the permanent members of the Security Council; (2) structural inequalities—including racist tendencies, economic differences, and geographic location; (3) national security narratives dealing with refugee flows, terrorism, and/or border threats; (4) different types and degrees of existing military involvement; and (5) differences in media attention to the conflicts.

GREAT POWER INTERESTS

The first of these explanations, that great power interests and alliances determine the greater attention paid to the Syrian conflict, falls squarely within the purview of realist theory. Numerous studies have suggested that great power interests play a role in attention to and intervention in civil wars (Burgess 2018; Pearson 1974; Koga 2011; Shirkey 2016) as well as in humanitarian intervention (Bruch 2016; Falk 2014). According to the neorealist scholar Ken Waltz (2001), IR can be explained by the relative distribution of power and by states' efforts to achieve their national interests within this context of power distribution. Syria has long been seen as a state with key relevance to the security interests of both the US and Russia. Historically, Russia was a major arms supplier for Syria, and it has had a naval presence in Tartus, Syria, since 1971, which is a focal point of Russian-Syrian relations (Synovitz 2012). Under President George W. Bush, the US declared Syria part of the expanded "axis of evil" in 2002, grouping Syria with "rogue states" considered a threat to global security due to their pursuit of chemical or biological weapons. In an era of global power shifts and the desire of Russian President Vladimir Putin to project greater power, Syria became a site of proxy war and vicarious struggle between Russia and the US. The long history of conflict between Syria and Israel—a key US ally and strategic regional partner—has also increased the visibility of the conflict, as has the presence of a long-standing (since 1974) UN peacekeeping force in the Golan Heights. In addition to great power involvement, regional rivals Iran (funding the Lebanese Hizbollah, among others) and Saudi Arabia (funding anti-regime militias), as well as Turkey (concerned about the rising power of Kurdish groups in northern Syria) and Israel (worried about the rising Iranian influence and the future of the Syrian government), are enmeshed in the Syrian conflict. Because of these factors, the Syrian conflict has been central to contentious debates in the Security Council, which has thereby garnered greater attention in the media and international community. Further, the

sheer scale of the conflict, with over 470,000 killed in Syria versus 10,000 in Yemen (Al Jazeera 2017; Barnard 2016), merits greater attention to be paid to Syria based on strategic realist calculations.

According to the realist paradigm, great power interests shape the construction and (non)implementation of international law and the operation of IOs. The configuration of the Security Council, for example, is tasked with maintaining international peace and security, and determining when and where UN peacekeepers will be deployed. The Council can also impose sanctions on states and authorize the use of force. While 10 of the 15 members on the Security Council serve two-year terms upon election by the General Assembly, Chapter V, Article 23, of the UN Charter establishes China, France, Russia (formerly the USSR), the UK, and the US as permanent members. Often referred to as the P5, these states hold disproportionate power over all other UN member states with their unique ability to veto initiatives once they reach the Security Council. The political tensions and ideological divides between P5 states are especially obvious when considering the way each of these states invokes its veto power. A cursory examination of vetoes dating back to 1946 shows that the US and Russia have utilized their veto power the most frequently. When the UK and France use their veto power, it is almost always in concert. China, on the other hand, uses its veto power alone infrequently and has increasingly used its veto alongside Russia. The veto record is also useful because it reveals the track record of the P5 members on specific issues. For instance, the US alone has a record of vetoing resolutions that pertain to Israel, Palestine, or the Occupied Territories, whereas Russia and China have more recently used their vetoes on resolutions pertaining to Syria. Such patterns drive criticisms of the Security Council and the UN more generally as ineffective in the face of humanitarian crises and crimes against humanity (BBC 2015a). According to this perspective, P5 interest in the Syrian conflict, and particularly P5 discord at the Security Council, heightens the conflict's profile relative to other conflicts and humanitarian crises, such as that in Yemen, where there are no significant P5 rivalries. In fact, all five permanent members supported the GCC initiative in Yemen (Eshaq and Al-Marani 2017). Thus, according to the realist paradigm, there is little surprise in the fact that the Syrian crisis attracts more attention than the crisis in Yemen—it simply reflects the relative interests of great powers.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND GEOGRAPHIC

The second of these explanations, that structural inequalities and racist tendencies in the international system privilege certain voices and issues over others, has its roots in critical IR theory and postcolonial approaches. From this vantage point, Euro-America tends to engage in coercion/domination practices toward the Global South, and the use of missiles and other weaponry is seen as a “common sense” means of addressing “complex social and political problems” (Persaud 2016, p. 550). Similarly, postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said have discussed the “othering” processes that create dualistic thinking and can “justify and naturalize some structured patterns of domination and exploitation” (Samiei 2010, p. 1146). From such a vantage point, the fact that the millions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey were not considered a refugee “crisis” by the media until they crossed into Europe in 2015 reflects structural inequalities (see BBC 2016, for more information on Syrian refugees in Europe). Despite the vast differences in wealth and infrastructure between European and Middle Eastern refugee-hosting states, the 200,000 Syrian refugees who reached Europe were deemed a “tsunami”, whereas little was said about the 1 million refugees in Jordan, a country of 8 million, and 1.5 million refugees in Lebanon, a country of 4.5 million (Schenker 2015). Turkey was hosting almost 2.5 million refugees by the end of 2015 (Fisseha 2017). This difference in assumptions regarding where refugees “belong” and what constitutes a “crisis” reflects not only structural inequalities but also assumptions regarding the inferiority of the Orient in comparison to the West (Samiei 2010).

According to the world systems theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, the global political economy can be divided into zones he calls the core (industrialized, exporting, capital-owning countries), periphery (agricultural, poor, exploited countries), and semi-periphery (a diverse group that both exploits and is exploited economically and politically), each of which has its own particular place in the system, defined by political and economic status inequalities (Wallerstein 1974, 1976). Because of these hierarchies, Europeans had the luxury to ignore problems in the more peripheral former colonial countries until Syrian refugees were entering their borders. Turkey, a semi-peripheral state, benefited from receiving international and domestic credit for its support and charity work, as well as tax revenue from IOs working with refugees inside its borders (Fisseha 2017). Spatially,

politically, and culturally, however, Turkey represents a mid-level status in terms of power and influence compared to Europe and the Middle Eastern refugee-hosting countries (Wellhofer 1989), as it has economic and geographic resources that states like Jordan lack. However, Turkey's spatial position, as a major route connecting the Syrian conflict with Europe, as well as its economic relationship with Europe, meant that it was also subject to the controversial refugee swap deal in which it would take back irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Europe in exchange for European assistance in resettling refugees in Turkish camps (Fisseha 2017). This deal underscores Turkey's semi-peripheral status as both "exploiter" (of the refugee situation) and "exploited" (by Europe, serving as its gatekeeper). In addition, the deal reflects power differences between Europe and Turkey related to Turkey's stalled efforts to join the European Union (EU), which is also influenced by European views toward Turkey's Muslim, poorer, and ethnically "other" population (Mandel 2013).

Such critical approaches to IR suggest that the more limited reporting on the conflict in Yemen stems from the fact that the problem has not directly affected the West. As of October 2015, 2.3 million Yemenis were internally displaced, and over 165,000 refugees had arrived in Gulf countries as well as in East African countries, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan (UNHCR 2017). Thus, not only is the absolute size of the Yemeni refugee population less than that of Syria, its effects have been felt primarily in other countries in the Global South, and thereby easier for more powerful states to ignore. Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East, with a GDP per capita at \$990 in 2016 compared to \$4087 for Jordan, \$14,982 for Oman, and \$20,028 for Saudi Arabia. Yemen's exclusion from the GCC underscores the country's peripheral status. Politically, Yemen has been excluded, even attacked by the GCC, due in part to the Marxist history of South Yemen and the support of former President Saleh for Saddam Hussein against the US military intervention in Iraq in the early 1990s (Al-Muslimi 2015). The anti-religious nature of communism was in direct opposition to the Arab monarchies like Saudi Arabia that claimed legitimacy in part due to their role as custodian of Muslim holy sites and use religious law to govern. Throughout the Cold War, in fact, Saudi Arabia combatted Soviet influence in countries around the world, often with the support of the US, precisely because of this concern (Bronson 2006). Others suggest that Yemen is also excluded from the GCC due in part to its sizable Shi'a population (Martini et al. 2016), a fact that also shapes and is shaped by the

rivalry between Saudi Arabia (majority Sunni) and Iran (majority Shi'a). Yemen's Muslim population is approximately 35–40% Shi'a, as compared, for example, to Saudi Arabia, where it is 10–15%, and Oman, where it is 5–10% (Pew 2009). Although Bahrain has a majority Shi'a population, the ruling family is Sunni. Racist assumptions can also account in part for the relegation of the Yemeni war as “tribal” and therefore “backward” or “inevitable”, in contrast to the war in Syria, which is portrayed in terms of rebels versus authoritarian government (Orkaby 2017; Schoen 2018). By discounting the conflict as “tribal”, those involved are relegated to pre-modern and irrational status in western eyes, thereby absolving them of the responsibility to engage in the same way as they would with “rational” or “civilized” individuals, thereby perpetuating Orientalist and imperialist tendencies.

Geographically, Yemen is also more peripheral than Syria, and the more extensive coverage of the Syrian conflict may be due to its geostrategic location in the heart of the Middle East. Damascus, the capital of Syria, is not only one of the most ancient cities in the Middle East, but it is considered to be among the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. The city played a central role in trade routes through the region, and was the home to the Umayyad caliphate; the famous Umayyad mosque in the old city of Damascus builds on and incorporates elements of previous civilizations, including part of a Byzantine church. In more recent centuries, Syria has symbolized Arab nationalism—*Bilad al-Sham* was the center of the Arab state promised to Sharif Hussein of Mecca during World War I, but ultimately the British abandoned and the French defeated Faisal, who was then given the newly created Kingdom of Iraq as a consolation prize (Lust 2011). Syria was thus ruled by France through a series of French administrators in the pursuit of France's own objectives for several decades (Fildis 2011). Given that France has historically placed “great importance to maintaining influence” over its former colonies (Heimann 2016, p. 150), Syria remains more central to the concerns of European states than does Yemen, which was never formally colonized. Under Hafez al-Assad, Syria was a leader of the rejectionist camp, and hosted numerous exiled Palestinian political figures as a result. The UN has had a Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights since 1974, placed between Syria and Israel in the wake of the 1973 war. The mandate of the UNDOF—which currently has 833 troops—has been renewed every six months since, and is still deemed “essential” given the tense situation in the region (United Nations Disengagement Observer,

n.d.). In addition to bordering Israel, Syria also borders Turkey, another historically strategic US ally. The conflict in Syria has directly and indirectly affected US allies in the region, destabilizing a US-supported regime in Iraq and causing violent flare-ups in Turkey. Although Israel has remained largely quiet vis-à-vis the Syrian conflict, it has watched with utmost concern what is happening on its northern border, and in 2018 has engaged in targeted airstrikes (Erdbrink 2018).

In contrast to Syria, which was a French mandate after World War I, that is, a quasi-colony approved by the League of Nations, Yemen as a whole was not directly colonized by western powers. Instead, British influence in Aden, located on the southern coast of Yemen, evolved from “obscure and often ill-defined treaty obligations” between the British and tribal leaders in 1839 into the Aden Protectorate States in the 1950s and 1960s (Tripodi 2016, p. 96). Typical of British colonial concerns, Aden was selected for its strategic location on the route to India—in fact, Aden was under the responsibility of the India Office for some time—and was increasingly important once the Suez Canal opened. However, relations with the rest of Yemen were largely conducted informally and with tribal leaders; there was no centralized administration over the whole of the territory, much of which was under Ottoman control until the collapse of the empire after World War I (Tripodi 2016). Like Syria, Yemen was a center of ancient civilization; however, in contrast to Syria, which was part of the Christian Byzantine empire and a center of the Muslim Umayyad dynasty that expanded through Spain to France, the kingdoms in Yemen eventually fell under Ethiopian and Persian rule, thereby connecting the country to East African and Central Asian empires rather than to Europe.

Economically, Syria and Yemen play different roles in the global economy, and due in part to their geography, they have access to varying levels of natural resources. Prior to the outbreak of the war, Syria was the leading oil and natural gas producer in the eastern Mediterranean, with energy sector earnings accounting for roughly a quarter of government revenue. Prior to sanctions levied on Syria due to the war, Europe was the main importer of Syrian oil; in 2011, Europe imported over \$3 billion of Syrian oil (US Energy Information Administration 2015). Sanctions have also been placed on Syria by Turkey, the Arab League, Australia, and Canada. The US has had various sanctions levied against Syria dating back to 1979, and more have been added recently due to violence (BBC 2012). The global reach of these sanctions further illustrates Syria’s connection to the West, albeit as a semi-peripheral state. In December 2013 Russia

signed a 25-year deal with Syria for exclusive offshore exploration rights for gas (Daragahi and Foy 2013), thereby underscoring the rival approaches to Syria and the conflict held by Russia and the US.

In contrast to Syria, which had a more diversified economy prior to the conflict (Al-Khalidi 2014), Yemen has a very small (and declining) oil sector, and its economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas revenue. Oil revenue was used in a clientelistic manner by the Saleh regime and not for the benefit of the country as a whole; this has contributed to the current conflict. Yemen has expanded its exploration and production of natural gas since 2009 (Haykel 2013), but remains an impoverished state in dire need of economic assistance. With its economy dominated by the export of crude oil (Salisbury 2011), and its history of British control due to its location on the route to the economically and politically important colony of India, Yemen exemplifies the economy of a peripheral state. Yemen has been both economically and geographically more peripheral than Syria, as well as more reliant on food, water, and other imports than Syria. This difference in status within the world economy would, to world systems theorists, further explain the discrepancy in coverage of the two conflicts.

NATIONAL SECURITY FRAMING: REFUGEE FLOWS, TERRORISM, AND BORDER THREATS

A third reason for an increased focus on Syria relates to the security concerns of western powers, particularly as they relate to refugee flows, terrorism, and unconventional challenges to state borders through both phenomena. Previous studies have indicated that states are more likely to intervene in conflicts after unexpected events occur (Shirkey 2016, p. 434), and that states are more likely to intervene where their interests are high and where they have been attacked or where the threat of attack is high (Burgess 2018). Studies have also shown greater coverage of conflicts that tie into readily accessible frames, such as “war on terror”, which has also helped catalyze “interest in intervention justified on humanitarian grounds” (Bruch 2016, p. 149). Soderlund et al. (2012, p. 133), for example, suggest that Darfur received more coverage than the Congo in the same time period due to the role of “bad” Arab militias in Darfur in the post 9/11 context and no Islamic or Arab connection in the Congo. The conflict in Syria more directly impacts western countries, particularly due to the flow of over one million refugees that landed on European

shores in 2015 and the ISIS-linked terror attacks that have happened in Europe, which are seen as connected to the conflict in Syria. ISIS has claimed responsibility for or motivated 143 attacks worldwide (Lister et al. 2017). The highest profile attacks in the West include the series of shootings across six locations in Paris, which claimed 130 lives and wounded 350 others; an office shooting that claimed 14 lives in San Bernardino, California; attacks on the airport and a subway station in Brussels, which killed 32 people; and an attack in Nice, killing 84 people (Lister et al. 2017). In part as a consequence, the issues of terrorism and migration have become increasingly linked in the policy discourse, despite the fact that most terror attacks were committed by citizens and not refugees (Crone et al. 2017). Particularly in the context of Syrian refugees, such assumptions reflect stereotypes that lump all Arabs and/or all Muslims into a single undifferentiated category, and obscure the specific claims and concerns of the refugees themselves (Akram 2000). This is illustrated by the fact that despite relatively low numbers of Syrian refugees relative to Europe, governors in 30 US states called for an end to Syrian refugee resettlement for alleged security concerns after the 2015 Paris attacks, despite the long and rigorous security screening process used by the US government (Seipel 2015; Pope 2017).

Syria borders Turkey and has a Mediterranean coastline, both features that have provided Syrian refugees with greater access to Europe than Yemeni refugees, and therefore Syrian refugees (and the conflict-related causes of their migration to Europe) are of more direct concern to Europe and its allies than Yemeni refugees, which have primarily landed in eastern African countries. Threat assessment concerning refugees is related to the geographic issues mentioned previously. Although it is treacherous and often deadly, Syrians can travel via boat from the Syrian coast across the Mediterranean to Europe, or go over land via Turkey. In 2015 alone Hungary received asylum applications from almost 1800 asylum seekers per 100,000 Hungarians, and Sweden received almost 1700 per 100,000 Swedes (BBC 2016). Due to Turkey's strategic geographic location relative to Syrian migration to Europe, a March 2016 deal sought to encourage Turkey to keep those Syrian refugees at bay through European support for Syrian refugees in Turkey and a process of accelerating visa liberalization for Turkish nationals (Chollett 2016). According to UNHCR (2017), as of October 31, 2017, approximately 190,352 Yemeni refugees have landed in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

The media analysis indicates that countries in East Africa and the Indian Ocean region had a higher relative reporting rate on the conflict in Yemen, suggesting that the direct impact of the refugee situation is a key factor in reporting. Moreover, while the European discourse on Syrian refugees has been linked to security concerns, Europe has tended to view Yemen through the lens of fragility rather than security (Eshaq and Al-Marani 2017). Further, a strong Syrian diaspora has made an active effort to provide support for their homeland, with over 600–700 NGOs created since the outbreak of the war in 2011. While these groups have struggled to gain the attention of the international humanitarian community, they may have helped raise the profile of the conflict through their efforts (Wall 2016). In contrast, Yemen does not have a considerable diaspora in the West; for example, only 2% of Arab Americans are of Yemeni descent (Yemen Times 2014).

The shift in narrative regarding Syria as a humanitarian crisis to a security crisis was facilitated in part by the rise of ISIS (also known as Daesh, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or the Islamic State); one could argue that this also increased the visibility of the Syrian conflict in the eyes of the international community (Friis 2015). Indeed, the US administration has stated that its goal in Syria is to defeat ISIS (Myre 2017). ISIS has brutally and graphically murdered US and European citizens and has also carried out attacks in Europe and recruited foreign fighters from western countries, and not only from among the impoverished in Muslim-majority states (Vogel 2016). This raises fears that radicalized citizens will return after fighting with ISIS to carry out attacks on their home countries' soil. This national security narrative was heightened during the 2016 US presidential debates, for example, with the then-candidate Donald Trump promising to defeat ISIS and blaming the then-president Barack Obama for creating ISIS (Politico 2016). Although US aid to Yemen has largely focused on counter-terrorism operations (Eshaq and Al-Marani 2017), a security framing, the prominent role of US ally Saudi Arabia and its GCC coalition in the Yemen conflict has lessened the direct importance for the US.

Although the US has been involved in anti-terror operations in Yemen for years, the greater prominence of ISIS in Syria as compared to discussion of al-Qaeda in Yemen may explain the variance in coverage (Schoen 2018). Indeed, the security threat from ISIS terrorists in Syria is first mentioned on page 1 of the 2017 US National Security Strategy, whereas Yemen is not mentioned once in the 68-page document. The only oblique reference to the Yemen conflict is referenced in the section on the Middle

East to “helping our partners achieve a stable and prosperous region, including through a strong and integrate Gulf Cooperation Council” (NSS 2017, p. 49). This prioritization of terrorism related to the Syrian conflict as a major national security concern is thus one possible explanation for the difference in media coverage of the Syrian conflict relative to the Yemen conflict and is consistent with mainstream IR theory approaches that suggest the primacy of security in calculations of national interests.

TYPE OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

A fourth explanation for the increased visibility of the Syrian conflict in the media stems from the different degrees of military involvement of the great powers. The use of airstrikes, for example, can signal low resolve on the part of states using them, as they result in lower military risk and cost than sending ground troops (Allen and Machain 2018, p. 151; Gillespie 2006). When states are engaged in a high-salience conflict, they are more likely to use both airstrikes and ground troops (Allen and Machain 2018, p. 159). At the same time, the type of military involvement by states is likely to shift coverage of the conflict away from the humanitarian focus toward one of national security. Indeed, humanitarian concerns—as well as human rights concerns—often compete with national security interests in the foreign policy arena (Margon 2018, p. 44). At times, states may justify the selection of particular military tactics in humanitarian language, for example, talk of “smart bombs” and targeted airstrikes as a means of rendering war “less bloody and indiscriminate” and keeping human losses “to an absolute minimum” (Gillespie 2006, pp. 11, 156). There is also an assumption that the general public will be more invested in and more likely to follow a conflict if there are troops on the ground—since this has significant human and financial costs; indeed, the democratic peace theory is partly premised on this assumption (Reiter 2012).

The US has long been militarily involved in Yemen, using the so-called Yemen model of missile and naval strikes—relying often on drones—to target al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. This has resulted in Yemen being largely out of the public eye, with few Americans knowing about the regular attacks (Craig 2014). Only 16% of US citizens knew about their government’s airstrikes in Yemen in a 2014 survey, and the US does not broadcast its “counterterrorism” efforts in Yemen, nor did Yemen’s government (Craig 2014). In contrast to the national conversation about US intervention in Syria, which has included Congressional debates,

US intervention in Yemen has been done in a more secretive manner (Goodman 2013). Perhaps the focus on anti-terrorism, specifically regarding al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) rather than support for rebels against a Syrian regime long deemed hostile to US interests, accounts for the different degree of attention. Alternatively, the US has been engaged in anti-AQAP activities in Yemen for over a decade, long before the most recent conflict, and thus there is nothing “new” about the US action (ICG 2017), although in its involvement in drone strikes in the first six months of the Trump presidency, the US used more than five times the lethal counter-terrorism force than President Obama did in his last six months in office (Humphrey 2017). Even before this increase, Yemenis felt that despite providing humanitarian aid to their country, the US had little regard for the impact of its drone campaign on civilians (Greenfield and Kramer 2013). US drone strikes have killed somewhere between 166 and 210 Yemeni civilians since 2002 according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (Almosawa and Saleh 2018). The indiscriminate targeting of civilian areas, such as markets, by the Saudi-led coalition (Youssef 2017) and the continued sale of US weapons to the Saudis have only further fueled this perception (Coppi 2018, p. 28).

According to the UN, Yemen is the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, with more than 22 million Yemenis in need (UN 2018). However, the US and Europe have been largely silent regarding the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, which international aid agencies attribute to these countries’ lucrative arms sales to Saudi Arabia, which not only is leading the bombing campaign targeting Houthi rebels, but also has blockaded aid deliveries to Yemen (Noack 2017). In 2015 alone, France made \$18 billion from arms trade with Saudi Arabia, while (ironically) contributing \$500,000 to the humanitarian response in Yemen (Jarhum 2017); in March 2018, the US sold an estimated \$670 million in anti-tank missiles to Saudi Arabia, with the Trump administration lobbying heavily to persuade Congress to shelve an effort to question the large number of civilian casualties in Yemen (Cooper 2018). Under the Trump administration, the US has also engaged in “strategic and military support” for the government of Yemen, through arms sales and advising (Coppi 2018). As noted earlier, support for the Saudi-led GCC coalition is part of the National Security Strategy issued by the Trump administration in December 2017. While Iran has provided support to the Houthis, Russia and China have not been involved militarily in Yemen.

Unlike Yemen, where western military involvement has primarily been via third parties or through drone strikes, the US has supported so-called moderate rebel forces with money, weapons, and training (Sanger et al. 2017), has engaged in airstrikes on Syrian and ISIS targets, and has also approved the use of ground troops to help in the fight against ISIS. France launched aggressive airstrikes against Raqqa, Syria, on November 2015 in the wake of a string of terror attacks in Paris (Rubin and Barnard 2015), and as of August 2017, the Coalition had a total of 24,566 strikes in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. According to the Department of Defense (2018), the US Air Force has flown more than half of the 167,912 sorties since operations began in Iraq and Syria in August 2014. In addition to airstrikes, the US also has troops stationed on the ground in both Syria (1720) and Iraq (8892), thereby signaling additional resolve in the Syrian conflict (Coppi 2018). The total funding allocated by the US government alone in countering ISIS in the fiscal year 2018 is just over \$1.2 billion, which includes also supporting vetted Syrian opposition forces (Thornberry 2017). Russia has also been involved militarily in Syria in a number of ways, including airstrikes, training Syrian forces, as well as supplying special forces troops and thousands of private military contractors. At least 44 Russian service personnel have died in Syria since 2015 (Reuters 2018).

In addition to the military action of these great powers, a number of key regional powers, notably Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, have also been involved militarily in the Syrian conflict (Mitton 2016). In contrast to Yemen, where the extent of its involvement has been contested, Iran is openly involved in the conflict in Syria through logistical, technical, and financial support, as well as more indirectly through its support for Hizbollah (Habets 2016). Not only has Iran trained and supported Syrian fighters, but it has sent tactical advisers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and used drones for both surveillance and attacks. In 2018 Iran and Israel engaged in a series of exchanges that risk further military involvement of both countries and their allies (Hubbard et al. 2018). Turkey, a NATO ally, has increased its direct involvement over the years, from support to the Syrian opposition and permission to use its air and land space to launch operations, to conducting its own airstrikes and ground offensives, particularly in northern Syria (Marcus 2018; BBC 2018). The international community has called on Turkey to “exercise restraint” in its offensives due to the humanitarian impact (BBC 2018), although this concern for the humanitarian crisis has been selective, given

that the US, the UK, and France provide arms to Saudi Arabia that are then used to carry out indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations in Yemen. Saudi Arabia was the first Arab state to condemn the Bashar al-Assad's repression of the 2011 protesters, and to provide funds to the Free Syrian Army; Saudi Arabia also provided \$100 million to establish the Army of Islam (Jaish al-Islam) and has expressed a willingness to commit ground troops if needed (Blanga 2017; BBC 2015b). The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is not the only one contributing to heightened attention to Syria; the antagonism between Turkey and Kurdish forces also influences coverage of Syria. The 2014 siege of Kobane, a Kurdish town on the border with Turkey, by ISIS was widely portrayed in the international media as a humanitarian crisis, leading to Kurdish mobilization in countries around the world for an international response (Buchanan 2014). Kurdish fighters have been heavily—and visibly—involved in the Syrian conflict, which is of concern not only to the four countries with sizeable Kurdish minorities, but also to the Kurdish diaspora.

ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN INTERVENTION

Although Pearson (1974) suggests that links between the frequency of media reporting on violent civil conflicts and riots, protest, and interventions might be coincidental, Bell et al. (2013) find that there is a positive reciprocal relationship between media attention and civil conflict. Further, Bell et al. (2013, p. 651) find “that the strategic and/or economic value of a state determines the amount of media coverage a conflict generates. In other words, the media is biased against reporting peaceful news in far-flung countries and biased toward reporting the unusual and violent in locales that are likely to be of interest to policymakers in potential interveners.” This supports the IR scholarship referenced earlier that suggests that intervention is more likely after particularly noteworthy or surprising violent events. Scholarship also supports the well-known aphorism “if it bleeds, it leads”, suggesting that “journalistic news is structurally geared toward specific actions and dramatic occurrences...while it incompatible with long-term processes, calm and cooperation” (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018, p. 27). As a result, the media is likely to focus policymakers' attention on conflicts that are least likely to be helped by conflict management due to their attention to the most violent and dangerous events; in one study of foreign media coverage across six con-

flicts, references to violence and victimhood or suffering surpassed references to negotiation or peace (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018; Bell et al. 2013).

Although media coverage is greater for violent and dangerous events, such events also lead to higher costs for journalistic coverage, and an increased reliance on humanitarian NGOs and other alternative sources for conflict-related information. Syria and Yemen are two of the deadliest places for journalists in 2018, and rank 177th and 167th, respectively, in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index (out of 180 countries).¹ In a study on media coverage in the Syrian conflict, Meyer et al. (2018, p. 149) find evidence of rising NGO visibility and provision of news related to the conflict and human rights violations. Further, they find that Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International often included “evidential claims with strong moral framing” (Meyer et al. 2018, p. 162). However, human rights groups have also been under attack in Yemen, with dozens of NGOs closed in the capital, Sana’a, in 2014 and 2015 alone, and only a few locally based humanitarian organizations are able to operate.² Although conditions are also bad in Syria, the NGO community is larger and more organized, with groups such as the Syrian NGO Alliance working “to effectively advocate for humanitarian affairs on behalf of the Syrian people”.³ Such findings suggest that media coverage of Syria may be greater due to the larger number of human rights and humanitarian organizations in the country, such as the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which may contribute to media coverage that includes more humanitarian appeals and/or calls for intervention based on moral claims. Research on media and intervention also suggests that conflicts that fit standard frames such as tribal warfare, good versus evil, and western

¹ According to Reporters without Borders, in the first half of 2018, the deadliest countries for journalists are Afghanistan (11 killed), Syria (7 killed), Yemen (5 killed), and Mexico (5 killed)—<https://rsf.org/en/news/47-journalists-media-workers-killed-first-half-2018-rsf-says> (accessed August 8, 2018).

² See, for example, “Houthis close NGOs in Yemen’s capital: rights group”—<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/houthis-close-ngos-yemen-capital-rights-group-151213054807769.html> and “Here’s how you can send help to people trapped in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis”—<https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-11-29/heres-how-you-can-send-help-people-trapped-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis> (accessed August 8, 2018).

³ Homepage, Syrian NGO Alliance—<http://syrianna.org/en> (accessed August 8, 2018).

responsibility are more readily accessible to readers. In a study comparing media coverage of conflicts in the Congo and Darfur, Soderlund et al. (2012, p. 139) find that Darfur received more coverage in part due to “the long-running nature and very real complexity” of the Congo. Further, despite the high number of casualties and the humanitarian crisis, the Congo did not experience dramatic differences in the level of violence, only a continuation of a horrible situation (Soderlund et al. 2012, p. 132), and thus was not “news”. The conflict in Yemen is largely portrayed as a tribal conflict, so the “standard frames” argument is not necessarily sufficient in explaining the difference in coverage of the two conflicts. However, the fact that conflict in Yemen can be considered part of a longer trajectory of conflict dating back to the country’s civil war, and tensions between North and South Yemen before that, may differentiate Yemen from Syria, where the outbreak of violent conflict was not anticipated. Further, the difference in coverage may also be partially due to dramatic events in Syria such as the use of chemical weapons, ISIS attacks, and large refugee flows, which grabs attention in a way that the humanitarian tragedy of Yemen, which builds on years of low-level conflict and poverty, does not.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, IR theory provides several competing explanations for why more attention is paid to the Syrian conflict—and its resultant humanitarian crisis—than the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Realist theory asserts that the great power interests involved in the Syrian conflict, particularly the conflict between great powers as evidenced in the use of their Security Council veto on resolutions dealing with Syria, heighten the focus on that conflict vis-à-vis the conflict in Yemen, which is played out more as a proxy war between regional powers Saudi Arabia and Iran without direct great power contestation. A second explanation suggests that in terms of the structure of the international system, the peripheral nature of Yemen—economically, geographically, and politically—explains the greater attention paid to Syria, which has historically been at the center of Arab culture, politics, and trade. A third explanation is that the framing of the Syrian conflict vis-à-vis national security, both in terms of the large flows of Syrian refugees to European countries and in terms of the focus on defeating ISIS and its terrorist acts, has resulted in greater attention and a desire to find humanitarian relief for Syrians so as to prevent them from knocking on Europe’s doors. The fact that most Yemeni victims of the conflict have been

internally displaced or else have landed in East African states not only lends further credence to explanations of Yemen's peripheral status or international racism, but also suggests that its conflict is of less direct security concern to great powers. Finally, the sheer differential in terms of military involvement of global and regional powers makes the Syrian conflict much more salient in terms of the international community. In contrast to Yemen, where most military involvement is through arms sales or airstrikes, major and regional powers provide not only military aid and conduct airstrikes in Syria, but many also have committed ground troops, a signal of much greater commitment.

The next chapter examines quantitative data on the media coverage of the conflicts in Yemen and Syria to explore empirically which of these explanations carries the most weight in terms of the relative lack of attention paid to the Yemen conflict despite the humanitarian crisis.

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Comparing Coverage in Syria and Yemen: Quantitative Analysis

Abstract This chapter investigates why Syria receives more attention than Yemen in the media using quantitative data from Google’s GDelt project. The results empirically demonstrate that Syria receives more attention than Yemen, both prior to and during the ongoing conflicts in the two countries. The results further show that while humanitarian issues in Syria receive more attention than in Yemen, overall the use of force by state and nonstate actors draws more media attention in both conflicts.

Keywords Quantitative analysis • Security • Humanitarian crisis
• Refugees • Use of force

The basic premise of the book thus far is that due to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, both countries are experiencing desperate humanitarian crises; however, the conflict and crisis in Syria receive more attention than in Yemen. Indeed, a cursory Google search of “Yemen Conflict” reveals that much of the media coverage of the Yemen crisis focuses on the fact that no one is talking about the situation (such stories ran in *The Federalist*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*), with some variation such as how Saudi Arabia is making it difficult to report on the conflict (e.g. *New Statesman*) and how the Saudi public is ignoring the war (e.g. *Washington Post*). Syria, on the other hand, is in its eighth year of conflict,

and while it has received plenty of global media attention, such exposure has yet to produce the type of public outcry witnessed in the 1990s.

The focus of this chapter is to determine how the media reports on the two conflicts given its role in raising attention to the issues faced by populations in crisis. The press has the capacity to elevate the stories of people affected by conflict and can help create pressure on governments to take action, through eyewitness accounts of the situation on the ground and compelling images of conflict zones (Hawkins 2001). Furthermore, news coverage can bring to life the situation for audiences far removed from the conflicts and draw attention to the actions (or inaction) of states and IOs like the UN. The prominence of the media in conflict zones and its potential role in influencing policy decisions have come to be known as the CNN effect (Robinson 2013). The concept emerged as academics became interested in how the press shapes foreign policy in the 1990s, when media attention on humanitarian crises in Northern Iraq, Somalia, and Kosovo coincided with direct state and Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) action (Hawkins 2001; Robinson 2013). While the media is present in both countries—though it offers less coverage of Yemen—multiple years of conflict and the ongoing humanitarian crises in Syria, and Yemen, challenge the idea that the media drives policymakers to intervene, at least for humanitarian purposes (see Friedman 2018).

This chapter examines media coverage of Syria and Yemen quantitatively. Data were collected from GDelt, a program that tracks articles that were published about each conflict in major newspapers around the world, to compare media coverage of the two conflicts. This open database “monitors the world’s news media from nearly every corner of every country in print, broadcast, and web formats, in over 100 languages, every moment of every day and that stretches back to January 1, 1979 through present day” and is updated daily. The data were pulled from GDelt 2.0, which translates news in 65 languages in real time (in addition to collecting stories in 100 languages) and measures more than 2300 themes and emotions in each article. The data are coded along three different themes: actor attributes, event actions attributes, and event geography. These themes identify an actor that does something (known as actor 1) or an actor that has something done to it (known as actor 2), a type of event ranging from making some sort of appeal to protesting, and fighting, and where the event occurs. Examples of actor attributes include name, country code, group, religion, and ethnicity. Event action attributes include type of event, the potential impact of the event, number of sources, articles, and mentions, and negative or positive tone. Event geography includes geographic data such as latitude and longitude.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This book used country codes, types of actors (e.g. rebels/refugees), event actions like appealing for aid and conventional and unconventional use of force, and number of articles and sources. The data provided by GDelt is limited by what is included and what is left out. For instance, al-Qaeda is identified as an actor, but ISIS is not. Similarly it is not clear whether and how different actor designations overlap, for instance, if al-Qaeda's activities are coded twice, both as "al-Qaeda" as a known actor and as an "insurgent". The data were accessed, sorted, and analyzed using Tableau, a software interface that uploads raw data from GDelt every 15 minutes. Queries were run and graphics created using Tableau to visually represent coverage disparities between Syria and Yemen.

Comparison of Reporting Sources and Articles on Syria in Yemen

The first set of queries run with the data determined the difference in total reporting between the two countries before and during the conflicts. These queries establish the extent to which global assumptions that Syria receives more attention than Yemen are accurate as well as situates the attention each country receives in context by examining past attention paid to each country by the media. The GDelt data are documented according to differences along a number of metrics, including sources—newspapers and news agencies from around the world—and articles—discrete written works about the conflict. Looking at sources helps determine which countries and news agencies are reporting on the respective conflicts, helping provide a view of regional and global variation in coverage, whereas looking at articles can determine the absolute volume of coverage, as well as the content of coverage. Syria and Yemen were selected as primary actors and the results were filtered to include the total number of articles produced and sources that have reported on each country for a specified date range.

In order to establish a baseline of news coverage prior to the outbreak of conflict in the two countries, all news stories and sources that mentioned "Yemen" and "Syria" from 2000 to 2009 were examined (Fig. 4.1). The top row shows the number of articles pertaining to Syria (blue line) and Yemen (orange line), and the second row shows the total number of sources reporting on the two countries.

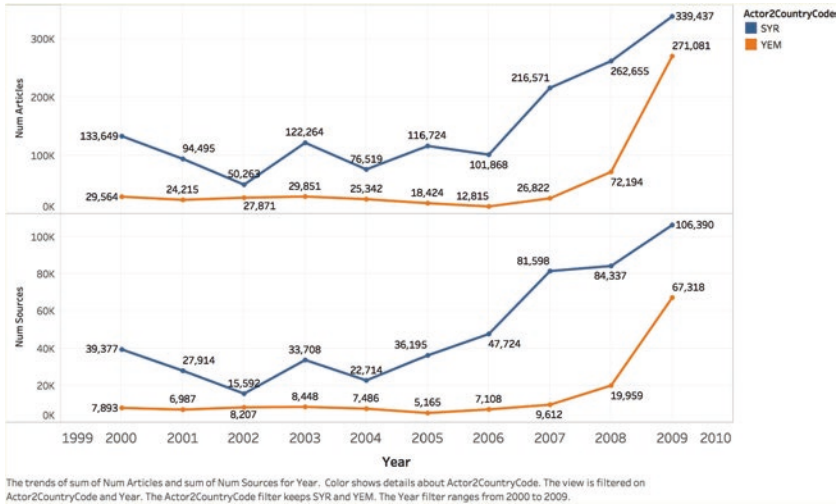


Fig. 4.1 Syria and Yemen articles and sources, 2009–2010

The results of the 2000–2009 inquiry reveal that a significant discrepancy between the total number of sources reporting on and the total number of articles published about Syria and Yemen already existed prior to the beginning of the Arab Spring-related conflicts. For example, in 2000 there were 142% more sources reporting on Syria (56,599) than on Yemen (9557). By 2009, the number of sources reporting on and articles about Syria was 196% greater than Yemen.

The number of sources and articles reporting on Syria grew to a much greater degree from 2000 to 2009, increasing on average by nearly 26% (articles) and 22% (sources). This might be explained by the fact that, in 2002, the US Under Secretary of State, John Bolton, argued that Syria (along with Cuba and Libya) could be included in the list of “rogue nations” that make up President George W. Bush’s “axis of evil” (BBC 2002). The US war in Iraq in 2003 might have also increased global attention to Syria, which borders Iraq to the northwest, as news broke in April 2003 that the US Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans was asked to put together a briefing making the case to go to war with Syria (Borger et al. 2003). While President Bush ultimately vetoed the plan, ending all discussion about a war with Syria, the potential of such an event likely

raised Syria’s profile in the international media. The number of articles and sources reporting on Yemen declined over the same period by –2% (articles) and –12% (sources). Sources and articles on Yemen swung upward in 2008, possibly due to increased clashes between Houthis and government forces and a series of bombings in March and April targeting police, officials, diplomats, foreign businesses, and tourism, which resulted in the US evacuating all nonessential personnel (BBC 2018b). Al-Qaeda attacked the US embassy in September 2008 with car bombs, suicide bombers, and snipers, a scenario which certainly contributed to increased global attention to Yemen in 2008 (CNN 2008).

After determining the baseline news coverage of the two countries, the next query focused on the total number of sources and articles reporting on any story relating to Yemen and Syria from 2010 to 2017 (see Fig. 4.2).

The 2010–2017 data indicate a proliferation in sources reporting on the two countries as well as an increase in the total number of articles about each country as compared to 2000–2009. The results also show the substantial difference between the total number of sources reporting on Syria and that on Yemen and the total number of articles produced about each country per year. Reporting for Syria peaked in 2016, with 2.6 million sources and 11.1 million articles, likely due to a number of events,

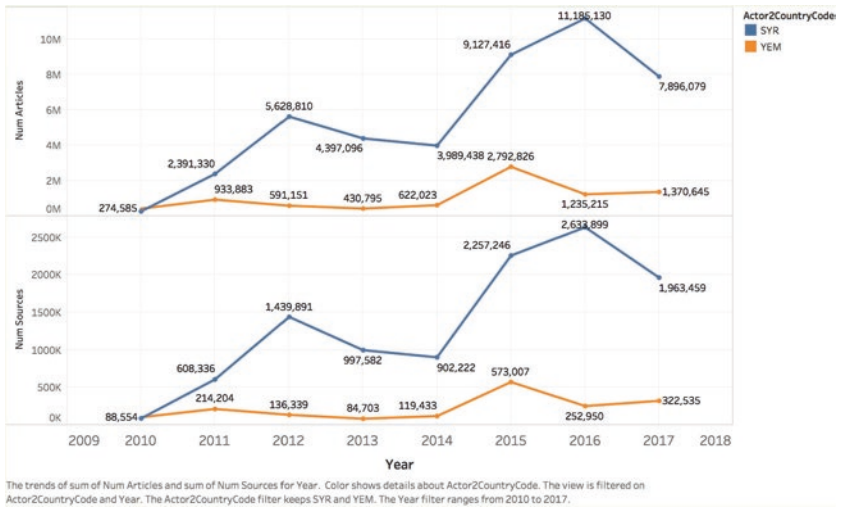


Fig. 4.2 Syria and Yemen articles and sources, 2010–2017

including a Russian-American-negotiated ceasefire between warring parties (excluding ISIS, al-Nusra Front, and other extremist groups) in February 2016, US-led forces killing Syrian troops instead of the ISIS fighters they claimed to target in September, and Syrian forces retaking Aleppo from rebel forces in December. Reporting on Yemen peaked in 2015, with 573,007 sources and 792,826 articles, likely due to the fact that 2015 is when the Houthi rebellion began. Although reporting on Syria declined between 2016 and 2017 by 29% and increased on Yemen by nearly 11% in the same time period, the reporting discrepancy between the two remained striking. In 2011, 2.5 times more articles were published on Syria as compared to Yemen. By 2017, that number increased to nearly six times as many articles produced about Syria as compared to Yemen. While reporting increased on Syria between 2015 and 2016, it declined on Yemen in the same time period and only slightly increased in 2017 over 2016 despite the fact that, according to most reports, the situation in Yemen has deteriorated since 2015.

Disaggregation of the data by country that published the articles reveals that most countries produce far more articles on Syria, while a limited number have more stories on Yemen (Fig. 4.3).

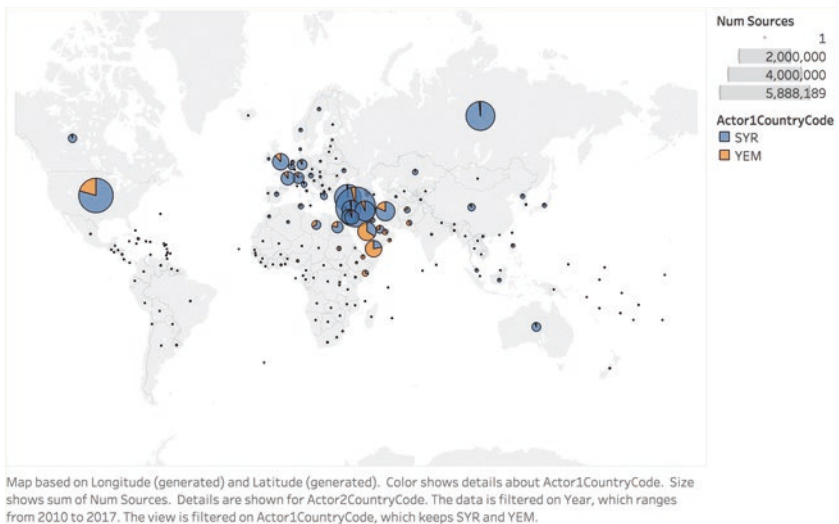


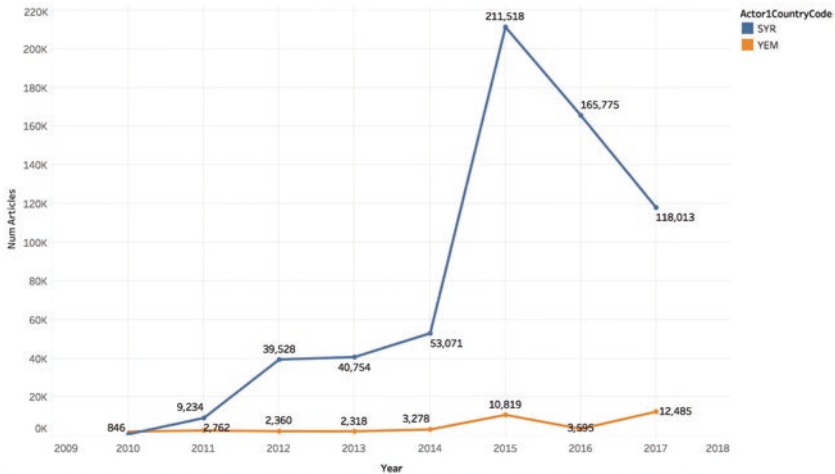
Fig. 4.3 Syria and Yemen sources map, 2010–2017

Of the 196 countries included in the dataset, nearly 90% reported more stories about Syria between 2010 and 2017. Only 20 countries had more sources that reported on Yemen than on Syria. These countries include Burundi, Bahrain, Somalia, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan, Kenya, Oman, Pakistan, Somalia, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. As one might expect, a number of these countries are in close proximity to Yemen and/or are receiving countries of Yemeni refugees. Ethiopian attention to Yemen might also be bolstered by historical links between the two countries; Yemen was part of the Ethiopian empire in ancient times and the two countries share a long history of integration as a result of “extensive trade relations during medieval times” and the growth of a Yemeni expatriate population in Ethiopia in the 1920 (Assamiee 2008).

After empirically demonstrating that indeed, as expected, more articles were published on Syria than on Yemen, the next set of queries using GDelt data focused on the content within the articles. Specifically, the queries examined the frequency of certain terms or references contained within the articles to determine whether the discrepancy in coverage was due to differences in the conflicts themselves and/or differences in how they were discussed. Three variables were examined: refugees, humanitarian aid, and the use of force by state and nonstate actors. These variables were selected since, as previously mentioned, the data does not have a code that would sort the number of articles based on whether or not they directly discuss the conflict, and these three variables provide insight regarding how articles on each conflict are framed. Additionally, they reflect the theoretical perspectives and concepts introduced in previous chapters, as refugee outflows and appeals for humanitarian aid draw international attention concerning humanitarian crises, the use of force by state actors can serve as a proxy for how powers exercise their interests, and the use of force by nonstate actors can serve as a proxy for security-related issues.

Refugees

Part of the purpose of this research is to evaluate contending explanations for why the Syrian conflict receives so much more attention than the conflict in Yemen. As discussed earlier, one of the possible explanations deals with the scale of humanitarian need, especially since, on occasion, states justify forceful interventions for humanitarian purposes. As previously mentioned, two queries were used to demonstrate humanitarian need: references to refugees and appeals for humanitarian aid. The first query



The trend of sum of Num Articles for Year. Color shows details about Actor1.CountryCode. The data is filtered on Actor2.Type1.Code, which keeps REF. The view is filtered on Year and Actor1.CountryCode. The Year filter ranges from 2010 to 2017. The Actor1.CountryCode filter keeps SYR and YEM.

Fig. 4.4 Syrian and Yemeni refugees

focused on references of refugees and Syria and refugees and Yemen from articles between 2010 and 2017 (see Fig. 4.4).

The results of this query are consistent with those from previous queries: far more articles have reported on Syria and refugees than on Yemen and refugees. This suggests that at least as far as humanitarian issues relating to refugees are concerned, far more attention is given to Syria. The data also show variances in the number of articles on refugees in each country each year. The total number of articles on Syria overall peaked in 2016 (as reflected in Fig. 4.2), but reporting on refugees peaked in 2015, likely due to the Syrian migrant crisis in Europe. In 2017, the number of articles on Syrian refugees declined by 44% from peak reporting in 2015. Despite this drop, in 2017, the number of articles on Syria and refugees remained more than nine times higher than the number of articles on Yemen and refugees. This may be due to the greater number of Syrian refugees in total, or it may be a result of the more direct impact of the refugees on European states, making Syrian refugees difficult for the press, policymakers, and public to ignore given their physical presence in communities across the European continent. Further, this might also result from the agreement between Turkey and the EU in 2016, which led to a downturn in the number of Syrian refugees in Europe and decreased their

visibility among the general public (Budge 2018). Global awareness of Yemeni refugees might be lower than of Syrian refugees in part because they are even less visible. Over two million people are internally displaced in Yemen, while there are just under one million Yemeni refugees and asylees (UNHCR 2018). Moreover, Oman, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia are the top five recipient countries for Yemeni refugees and thus less physically visible to western audiences (UNHCR 2017). The number of stories reporting on Yemen and refugees peaked at 12,485 in 2017, up by 247% from reporting in 2016. This is likely explained by a greater global awareness of the Yemeni crisis, and particularly the uptick in attention due to the Saudi blockade and destruction of water and sanitation systems which resulted in cholera outbreak, affecting a global record of one million people, toward the end of the year (Erickson 2017). Overall, however, coverage of Yemen and refugees has remained relatively low and relatively stable.

The difference in number of articles about refugees in Syria and that in Yemen raises questions about which countries have sources primarily reporting on refugees in Syria and Yemen (Fig. 4.5).

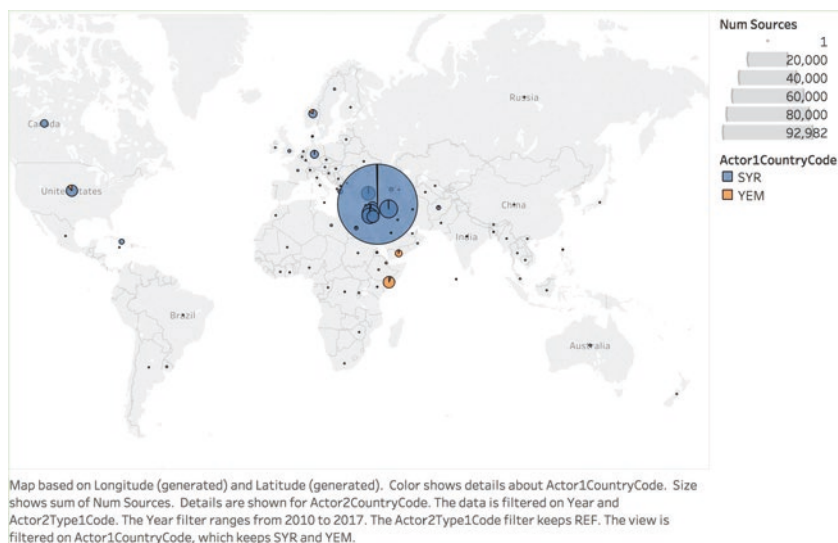


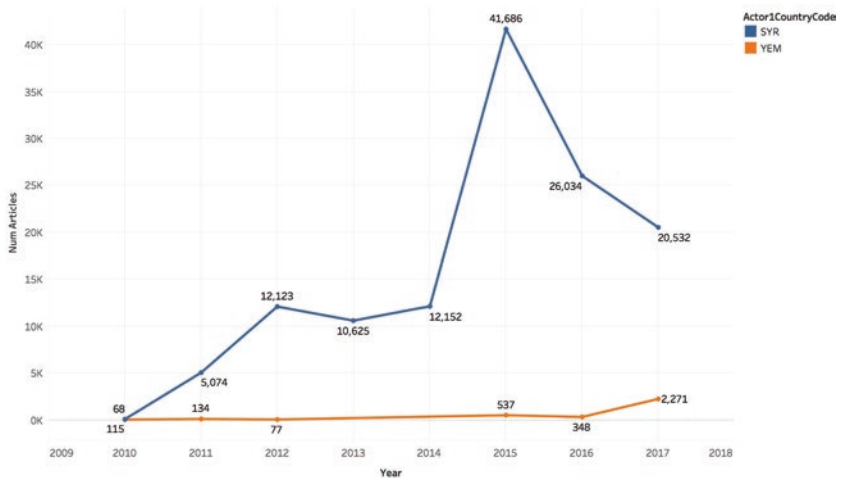
Fig. 4.5 Syrian and Yemeni refugees source map 2010–2017

The results of the query show that 65,866 sources produced articles about refugees and Syria, while 286 sources produced articles about refugees in Yemen from 2010 to 2017. Only 26 out of 154 countries with sources that produced articles on refugees had sources that reported on refugees in Yemen. In addition to Yemen, both Djibouti and Somalia had more sources producing articles on refugees and Yemen, most likely because Yemeni refugees have a large presence in those countries. The remaining 151 countries have more sources producing articles on refugees and Syria. This further indicates that a much greater portion of states have media sources producing stories on Syrian refugees.

Humanitarian Aid

The second GDelt query explored the linkage between humanitarian issues and each country by focusing on articles that contain “appeals for humanitarian aid” in relation to Syria and Yemen from 2010 to 2017 (Fig. 4.6).

Consistent with the results of previous queries, the results of this query also reveal that far fewer stories contain appeals for humanitarian aid in regard to Yemen despite the fact that in 2017 the *New York Times* declared



The trend of sum of Num Articles for Year. Color shows details about Actor1CountryCode. The data is filtered on Primary Event Code, which keeps 0233. The view is filtered on Year and Actor1CountryCode. The Year filter ranges from 2010 to 2017. The Actor1CountryCode filter keeps SYR and YEM.

Fig. 4.6 Appeals for humanitarian aid

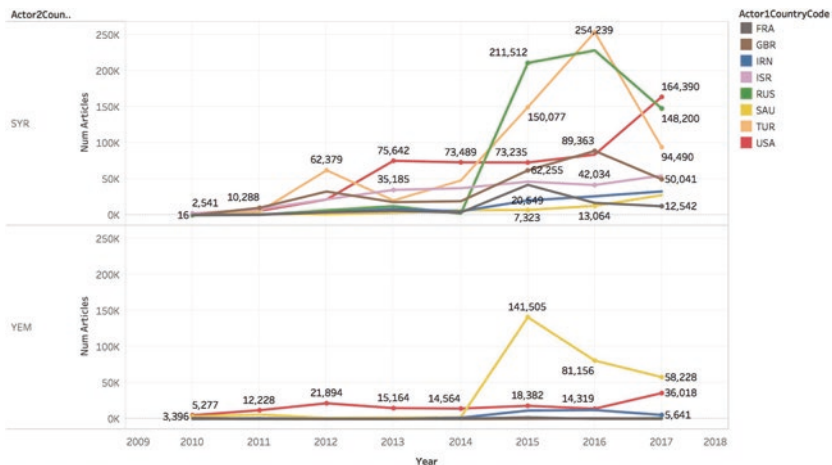
Yemen to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis, a designation reinforced by the UN Secretary-General in 2018 (Carboni 2018; Nikbakht and McKenzie 2018). Perhaps more importantly, this query demonstrates that articles containing appeals for humanitarian aid comprise a miniscule percentage of the overall reporting on each country. For example, in 2015, appeals for humanitarian aid pertaining to Syria appeared in 41,686 articles out of a total of 9.1 million articles, amounting to 0.45% of reporting. The numbers in Yemen are even more striking. In 2017, 2271 articles contained appeals for humanitarian aid out of a total of 1.3 million articles pertaining to Yemen that year, amounting to 0.165% of reporting. What this seems to indicate is that the greater coverage of Syria has less to do with a concern for humanitarianism even as the humanitarian tragedy continues to unfold in the region and on the doorstep of Europe. Although the absolute number of articles on Syria and humanitarian appeals is higher, it remains a tiny fraction of a percent of the total reporting.

When the data from appeals for humanitarian aid and that for refugees are combined to capture both aspects of humanitarian issues, it still only accounts for a small proportion of the total number of articles produced about Syria and Yemen. For instance, in 2015, 253,144 articles referenced appeals for humanitarian aid and/or refugees, just 2.7% of the total articles on Syria that year. For Yemen, the combined number of articles on humanitarian issues was 11,356, comprising only 0.5% of the total number of articles. By 2106, humanitarian articles on Yemen comprised 0.15% of the total number of articles. Thus, the data indicates that vast majority of the coverage does not stem from humanitarian issues, especially as they pertain to Yemen; therefore, other explanations for the disparity in coverage are more likely, despite the overwhelming humanitarian crisis in both countries.

Use of Force by State and Nonstate Actors

A second possible explanation for the difference in coverage of the two conflicts stems from IR theory and holds that state actors have a monopoly on the use of force. As members of the international community vis-à-vis the UN, states are, however, limited in when and how they use force by international law, which determines the means and methods of warfare, as discussed in Chap. 2. Given the assumption that states have a monopoly on violence, the use of force by nonstate actors raises security considerations, in part because such actors challenge the state's monopoly, they are not necessarily beholden to the same international laws governing the use of force,

and some nonstate actors, like al-Qaeda and ISIS, are deemed as threats to global peace and security by most members of the international community. Thus, a final set of queries aimed to capture how articles pertaining to Syria and Yemen discussed a range of issues and actors related to security and use of force, particularly given that the presence of extremist groups in both countries has been a justification for external intervention. The US and Russia have both targeted ISIS in Syria and in Yemen, and the Saudis and the US have been targeting al-Qaeda in Yemen. Great power interest and involvement is one of the possible explanations for a difference in coverage in the two conflicts (Fig. 4.7). To explore the viability of this explanation, this query examined the involvement of great powers and their allies, specifically looking at how many articles reported on the actions of France (gray line), the UK (brown line), Iran (blue line), Israel (pink line), Russia (green line), Saudi Arabia (yellow line), Turkey (orange line), and the US (red line) in both countries. While some of these states are implicated in direct actions in each state (Turkey, the US, France, the UK, and Russia in Syria, Saudi Arabia in Yemen), Iran has been accused of supporting rebels in both conflicts, but is rarely implicated in direct attacks in either. Israel has engaged in limited airstrikes in Syria, but these strikes did not garner much



The trend of sum of Num Articles for Year broken down by Actor2CountryCode. Color shows details about Actor1CountryCode. The data is filtered on Event Base Code and EventRootCode. The Event Base Code filter keeps 10 members. The EventRootCode filter keeps 19 and 20. The view is filtered on Year, Actor2CountryCode and ActorCountryCode. The Year filter ranges from 2010 to 2017. The Actor2CountryCode filter keeps SYR and YEM. The Actor1CountryCode filter keeps 8 members.

Fig. 4.7 External state action in Syria and Yemen

global attention until May 2018—after the time period captured in these graphs—when Israel struck Iranian military installations in Iran after rockets were fired at Israeli military in Golan Heights (BBC 2018a). Therefore, results of this query show articles in which states have used force against Syria or Yemen. They also reflect two different means of attack, conventional and unconventional attacks. Both types of attacks were included to capture the variety of tactics that have been used or alleged in both conflicts, especially considering that unconventional warfare includes actions that are considered in violation of international law.

First, the results indicate that state use of force receives much more attention overall than humanitarian issues such as refugees and appeals for humanitarian aid. They also reflect the discrepancy in the number of articles on Syria versus on Yemen. Whereas Syria had a total of 253,144 articles that mentioned refugees and/or made appeals for humanitarian aid in 2015, that number is only slightly higher than the total number of articles reporting on Russian use of force alone. In Yemen, articles that invoked some sort of humanitarian issues (appeals and/or refugees) in 2015 amounted to 11,356 stories, whereas 141,505 articles pertained to Saudi attacks that same year. A similar pattern—articles containing states' use of force outweighing humanitarian issues—exists for the years prior to and after 2015 for both countries.

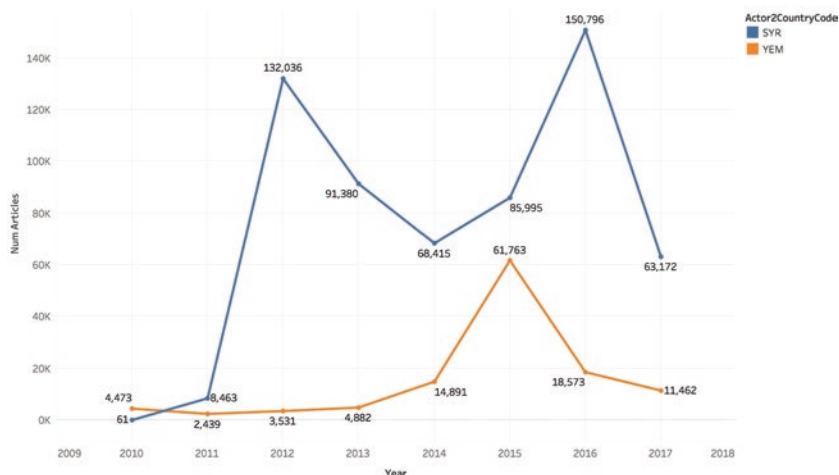
The results also show variation in states' activities in both countries. In Syria, all countries represented in the query are implicated in articles for use of force, with Turkey and Russia generally receiving the most attention, followed by the US. The state that had the highest number of articles reporting on its actions varied by year, with Turkish actions receiving the most attention from 2011 to 2012. This could be explained by border clashes between Turkey and Syria (Arango and Saad 2012). US actions received the most attention from 2013 until 2014, a time when President Obama sought congressional approval to use force in Syria and began actively training and arming rebel groups (Conway 2017). Reporting on Russian actions peaked in 2015, the same year it received consent from President Assad to intervene and began launching military strikes in Syria (Quinn 2016). Turkey's ground campaign in concert with Syrian to fight ISIS in August 2016 coincides with increased reporting on Turkey in 2016 (see Shaheen 2016). While reporting on Russian and Turkish use of force declined after 2016, reporting on the US increased, perhaps as a result of ongoing airstrikes on Syria and because the US launched strikes on Syria amid allegations that the Syrian government used chemical weap-

ons on civilians in April 2017 (Starr and Diamond 2017). The fewest number of articles report on Saudi action, although the reporting remained static until 2014, when it increased by 94.6%, and then gradually increasing in each subsequent year. Overall, it increased by 285.6% between 2013 and 2017. The increase in reporting in 2016 might stem from reports that Saudi Arabia took part in airstrikes in Syria against ISIS, which raised global attention on Saudi action in Syria (Reuters 2016), or due to increased attention on Syria more generally given that overall reporting spiked in 2016 (see Fig. 4.2). Articles on Iranian action followed a similar pattern as Saudi Arabia, but with a 789% increase between 2014 and 2015, continuing to rise in each subsequent year. The increase in reporting on Iranian use of force in 2015 might in part be explained by reports of Iranian troops crossing into Syria in October (Dearden and Bolton 2015).

As expected, Saudi use of force is predominantly represented in articles about Yemen, starting in 2015, which corresponds with Saudi and Saudi-led coalition involvement in the conflict (Almasy and Hanna 2015), and peak reporting on the country (see Fig. 4.2). Articles have also focused on US military actions in Yemen from 2010 to 2017. This might be explained by the fact that, in addition to drone attacks, in 2017, the US military used ground forces against al-Qaeda and ISIS in Yemen (Moore 2017). The results also show that between 2014 and 2017 Iran has used force in Yemen, the same period in which it has been accused of sending weapons and providing military training to Houthis (Saul et al. 2017). There are no articles that discuss military actions by the other states included in the analysis—Israel, France, Turkey, Russia, and the UK—which is not surprising given that these states have not been directly engaged in military efforts in Yemen.

Just as states have used force in Syria and Yemen, so have nonstate actors, including rebels, separatists, and insurgents as identified in GDelt. As discussed in prior chapters, states may use nonstate actors' use of force to justify their intervention in Syria and Yemen because these types of actors are often viewed as security threats. Therefore, nonstate actors' use of conventional and unconventional use of force is analyzed to see how much media attention such actions receive (Fig. 4.8). Again, both uses of force are included to capture the full spectrum of methods nonstate actors have used in the conflicts and because unconventional uses of force as defined in GDelt correspond to violations of international law.

Similar to the results of previous queries, the results show that articles on nonstate actors' use of force in Syria outnumber those on Yemen considerably. This could be explained by the different dynamics at play in the



The trend of sum of Num Articles for Year. Color shows details about Actor2CountryCode. The data is filtered on Actor1Type1Code, Event Base Code and EventRootCode. The Actor1Type1Code filter keeps INS, REB and SEP. The Event Base Code filter keeps 9 members. The EventRootCode filter keeps 19 and 20. The view is filtered on Year and Actor2CountryCode. The Year filter ranges from 2010 to 2017. The Actor2CountryCode filter keeps SYR and YEM.

Fig. 4.8 Rebel, separatist, and insurgent violence against Syria and Yemen

two conflicts, particularly the fact that whereas a number of states are supporting Syrian rebels against the Syrian regime, and there are far more rebel groups in Syria, in Yemen, the Houthis are the primary rebel group. Nevertheless, the results show that the time when the Houthis started fighting in 2015 corresponds with a spike in articles on rebels' use of violence against Yemen. The number of articles reporting on rebels' use of conventional and unconventional force represents a very small percentage of overall reporting, accounting for only 0.8% of the number of articles on Syria, while the reporting on rebels' use of force in Yemen accounted for 8.3% of the total number of articles.

The result of this query empirically demonstrates the disparity in reporting on the use of force and humanitarian issues. In 2012, articles reporting on nonstate actors in Syria amounted to more than 2.5 times the number of articles making appeals for humanitarian aid or referencing refugees. This likely stems from the emergence of the Free Syrian Army and increased military engagement between opposition and Syrian forces, which contributed to creating the conditions necessitating humanitarian appeals and preceded the refugee outflows (BBC 2018c). After 2012, the total number of articles that made appeals for humanitarian and/or referred to refugees has been higher than articles reporting on nonstate actors' use of force. Unlike Syria,

the number of articles reporting on nonstate actors' use of force has been higher than those reporting on humanitarian issues in Yemen, starting in 2014–2015. The greater number of articles on nonstate actors' use of force in those two years is likely explained by the Houthi takeover of Sanaa and their push south during that time frame, coupled with increasing violence committed by ISIS. When taken with the results of the previous query, the discrepancy in reporting in subsequent years indicates that state and non-state use of force garner more attention in Yemen than humanitarian issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative data provides overall trends in total numbers of articles and sources pertaining to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen between 2010 and 2017, demonstrating the greater magnitude of coverage on Syria in terms of both the number of articles and sources around the world, and the higher number of state actors mentioned in the Syrian conflict. Overall sources and articles reporting on Syria far outweigh reporting on Yemen, with nine times more articles on Syria published in just over ten times the sources in 2016, and 5.76 times the articles published in six times the sources in 2017. The same general pattern exists in terms of specific issues as well, with articles on refugees, those that make humanitarian appeals, and those that discuss different types of force—legal, contested legality, and illegal means—by rebels/separatists/insurgents, and state actors in Syria far outpacing articles about the same issues in Yemen. A greater number of articles report on the use of force by states in Syria and Yemen than on humanitarian issues, as reflected by refugees and appeals for aid. Though useful for getting an overall sense of how the media reports on the two conflicts, these results cannot, however, explain whether the content of the articles, that is, how each conflict is framed, offers an explanation regarding the different scale of coverage. Therefore, a closer examination of the framing of the conflict through the qualitative method of content analysis helps gauge how the international community views these two conflicts, provides a method for verifying the patterns observed in the quantitative analysis, and allows investigation of themes and actors not covered in GDelt (such as ISIS/ISIL activities in both conflicts).

The next chapter examines media coverage on specific events in Syria and Yemen to compare how the media frames events involving actions by state and nonstate actors that result in high civilian casualties, illustrating the humanitarian crises in both countries.

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Comparing Coverage in Syria and Yemen: Qualitative Analysis

Abstract This chapter examines why Syria receives more attention than Yemen given the severity of humanitarian crises in both countries using content analysis of articles from purposefully selected media sources. The analysis focuses on multiple high-profile events in each conflict to assess how the media covers instances in which the use of force by state and/or nonstate actors results in humanitarian crisis. The results indicate that humanitarian issues in both conflicts receive similar—and high rates of—attention, but international law and international humanitarian law receive little attention in the media. The results also show that even in coverage on events that illustrate the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen and involve potential breaches of international humanitarian law, articles and international actors, including the UN and nongovernmental organizations, tend to refrain from discussing how state and nonstate use of force might violate those laws.

Keywords Content analysis • Qualitative methods • Humanitarian law
• Humanitarian crisis • Use of force

The quantitative data showed that Syria has received much more attention, overall than Yemen, and in specific reference to refugees, appeals for humanitarian aid, and the use of force by state and nonstate actors alike.

Furthermore, the vast majority of countries have had far more sources reporting on Syria than on Yemen, with the exception of those countries that receive more Yemeni refugees. While useful, this information only captures references to particular issues, but does not fully address the question of why Syria receives more attention *given the fact that both countries are experiencing ongoing—and worsening—humanitarian crises*. To address this question further, qualitative analysis of high-profile conflict events that resulted in civilian casualties was conducted to examine how such breaches of humanitarian law were covered in the media. In particular, the analysis explored how the use of force by state and nonstate actors was framed, as well as the reactions of the international community to these events to determine if the international community responds differently to similar types of humanitarian crisis-inducing events in Syria and Yemen.

To conduct the content analysis, nine news sources were purposively sampled to include those media outlets that had a broad and diverse audience, were geographically proximate as well as distant to the two conflicts, and had the availability of stories in English (for purposes of comparative analysis). Sources were purposively sampled to try to include reporting from a range of political perspectives on the conflicts. The media sources include BBC, CNN, *Haaretz* (English), Al Jazeera (English), Al Arabiya (English), and Xinhua (English). Al Arabiya, for example, is owned and operated by the Saudi Arabian government, which is involved in both conflicts; *Haaretz* is Israel's oldest, and perhaps most liberal, newspaper; and Xinhua is based in China, which has vetoed multiple Security Council resolutions on Syria. BBC and CNN were included due to studies conducted by political science and media studies experts on these stations' 24/7 broadcasting (known as the "CNN effect") on states' foreign policy decisions in the post-Cold War era (Ricchiardi 2011). Al Jazeera functions in a similar fashion and has been credited with bringing news from the Global South to the Global North (known as the "Al Jazeera effect"). Furthermore, the former US Secretary of State Clinton publicly discussed Al Jazeera, perhaps raising its profile among western audiences (Ricchiardi 2011).¹ Al

¹ US Secretary of State Clinton argued that Al Jazeera was "changing minds and attitudes" amid reports that President Obama's administration was trying to improve relations with the news outlet because it was one of the most influential news sources in the Middle East (see Ricchiardi 2011).

Jazeera's profile was further elevated after its reporters were targeted by some regimes during the Arab Uprisings (Al Jazeera 2016a).

In addition to traditional media sources, news stories and press releases from MSF² and Save the Children, two of the largest humanitarian organizations in the world, with field offices in both countries, were also included in the analysis. These NGOs were included given their role in raising public awareness about humanitarian crises and violations of international law, and to see how their coverage (if any) of the conflicts compares to the press. NGO information-spreading activities can potentially reach a broad audience and create pressure on state actors to respond to humanitarian crises and violations of international law (see Blitt 2004). Moreover, the humanitarian perspective seemed particularly important given the low rate of humanitarian coverage in the mainstream media, to see if the NGOs included more humanitarian appeals, and if so, how they were framed. As nongovernmental entities, NGOs may be less restrained than states and IOs like the UN, thus enabling them to more directly call out potential violations of international law and to request its enforcement, although arguably NGOs that rely on public donors for funding might be less able to voice concerns than privately funded organizations. Interestingly, other humanitarian organizations of interest, notably Islamic Relief and World Vision, did not have reporting on the selected incidents aside from annual reports and were thus omitted from the analysis.³

Stories from UN News were also included in the qualitative sample to compare the coverage of an intergovernmental organization with that of humanitarian NGOs and traditional media. Including the UN News allows for an examination into if/how the UN references international law—and IHL in particular—in comparison with other news outlets. As discussed in Chap. 2, the UN serves many functions, including delivering humanitarian aid and raising awareness of humanitarian issues among the public. As an important source of international law, it potential wields authority in determining if and when violations occur.

² Also known as Doctors Without Borders.

³ Unlike other NGOs, in addition to their annual reports, representatives from MSF often speak out against hospital bombings in Yemen and Syria, and note that such attacks violated IHL. Representatives from Save the Children have made statements on violations of international law pertaining to children in both countries.

To examine international responses to the two conflicts, major events between 2011 and 2017 (listed in Table 5.1) were identified in both countries that involved attacks against civilians and negatively affected the humanitarian crises in each country. While the quantitative data showed that humanitarian events receive less coverage than those involving the use of force by state and nonstate actors, these events were selected to

Table 5.1 High-profile events in Syria and Yemen

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Source/type</i>	
Yemen	March 20, 2015	Badr and al-Hashoosh Mosques, Sanaa	Islamic State/suicide bombing	
	August 21, 2015	Taiz	Houthi/Saudi strikes	
	March 15, 2016	Mastaba/Hajja	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes	
	March 25, 2016	Aden	ISIS/suicide bombings	
	June 18, 2016	Saada market	Saudi coalition/airstrikes	
	August 14, 2016	Hayden/Saada (school)	Saudi coalition/airstrikes	
	August 15, 2016	Hajja Province (MSF hospital)	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes	
	October 8, 2016	Sanaa, (funeral)	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes	
	July 18, 2017	Taiz (displaced families)	Saudi Arabia	
	August 23, 2017	Arhab, Sanaa	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes	
	December 13, 2017	Sanaa (rebel prison)	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes	
	December 2017	Sanaa, Saada, Al Hudaydah, & Taizz	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes	
	Syria	December 26, 2017	Taize & Hodeidah	Saudi Arabia/airstrikes
		August 21, 2013	Damascus, Eastern Ghouta	Syria/chemical attacks
October 2014		Kobane	Siege	
May 21, 2015		Palmyra	ISIS militia	
June 26, 2015		Kobane	ISIS militia	
August 16, 2015		Douma, market	Syria/airstrikes	
October 30, 2015		Douma, market	Syria/airstrikes	
January 17, 2016		Deir al-Zour	ISIS militia	
February 21, 2016		Homs & Damascus	ISIS/car and suicide bombings	
April 29, 2016		Aleppo	ISIS militia	
May 23, 2016		Tartous and Jableh, Bus Station Hospital	ISIS/car and suicide bombings	
July 19, 2016		Manbij	US and coalition/airstrikes	
July 27, 2016		Qamishli	ISIS/truck bomb	
November 2016		Aleppo	Rebels, Syria, and Russia	
April 15, 2017		Aleppo	Syria/bus bomb	
June 2017	Raqqa	ISIS		
November 2017	Eastern Ghouta	Syria-Russia Alliance		

determine how the media covers humanitarian issues brought on by state and nonstate actors' use of force in the two conflicts. These particular events were selected because they served as worst-case examples, involving a high number of civilian casualties and/or occurring in areas with high concentrations of civilians and therefore constituted potential violations of IHL as discussed in Chap. 2. The date range was chosen to be consistent with the quantitative data and because, as these two conflicts are ongoing, it was necessary to establish a timeframe that would enable an analysis of associated stories. Selecting a set of events provided a common base for investigating how the sampled sources covered the humanitarian issues that arose from state and nonstate use of force. Likewise, it provided a means for comparing between various actors' responses to the use of force by state and nonstate actors by selecting a set of worst-case examples to compare. For Syria, 16 events were selected and 111 articles were identified, while 13 events were selected and 60 articles were identified for Yemen. Fewer cases and articles were identified for Yemen precisely because there is less reporting overall, making case identification difficult.

Using Google search and Nexus Uni, a database that houses articles from domestic and international news sources, articles from each source were identified pertaining to each conflict event. In cases in which a single source had multiple articles covering the same event, the article that covered the event most generally (i.e. did not focus on a single person's story) and also focused primarily on the event in question (i.e. did not provide a general overview of the conflict more broadly) was selected. Similar to what was found in the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis found that, on average, just over 4.5 articles were written per case in Yemen, whereas nearly 7 articles were written per case in Syria. While these numbers do not mathematically align with the annual differences in reporting based on GDelt, they reflect a similar pattern of fewer news sources producing articles on Yemen, even on relatively high-profile events.

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically to compare how the articles were framed in terms of the international community's responses to the events vis-à-vis public statements by representatives from states, NGOs, and IOs, if/how international law was invoked, and if/how parties justified actions that resulted in high civilian casualties. As such, themes fell under two main categories: humanitarian issues and international law and the use of force by state and nonstate actors. These categories were chosen in order to compare the qualitative results with the quantitative results and to examine which of the differing explanations regarding why Syria receives more global attention than Yemen, given the current

humanitarian crises in both countries presented in Chaps. 2 and 3, is most salient. Specific themes within each category are discussed below.

Under the topic of humanitarian issues and international law, content analysis was used to examine the extent to which terms associated with international law and IHL were invoked in the media stories on Syria and Yemen. If an article mentioned “internally displaced persons” (IDPs) and “refugees” at least once, it was notated in an Excel document. Distinction between these terms and recognition of how they are used are important because both groups, if officially designated as such, have specific international protections under IHL. Other terms that are covered by international law such as “human rights”, “war crimes”, “crimes against humanity”, and “international humanitarian law” were also included if they were mentioned at least once in the article. General references to humanitarian conditions in the country or event, attacks on medical units (since these are outlawed in international humanitarian law and also make responding to humanitarian needs difficult), the number of people that have been displaced but are not designed as IDPs, and descriptions of civilian casualties were placed under “humanitarian issues”. If the article itself or someone quoted within the article made some sort of appeal for humanitarian aid, such as asking for blood donations, food, water, medicine, and so on, these were coded under “appeals for humanitarian aid”. The results were also analyzed to examine if and how actors invoked humanitarian reasons to justify the use of force as discussed in Chap. 2.

In order to determine the extent to which the use of force by state and nonstate actors was covered in the media, and particularly whether coverage depended on the type of weapon used, articles were analyzed for themes similar to those used in GDelt. “Conventional attacks” focused on the method of attack, such as fighting, airstrikes, military engagement, and so on. “Unconventional attacks” included items listed in GDelt’s codebook under the same designation, such as the use of chemical weapons, and was expanded to include methods not mentioned in the GDelt codebook that could violate international law or IHL. The international community uses four principles to determine the legality of the means and methods of warfare: a distinction between civilians and combatants should be made, damage and loss of life should be proportional to military gains, the attack should be of military necessity, and the attack should avoid unnecessary suffering. Such weapons include suicide bombers, barrel bombs, and drones. The data were also analyzed to further disaggregate which actors were attributed with using different kinds of weapons in order to see if the articles framed the use of force differently depending on the actor and type of weapon used. States identified

for using force differed between Syria and Yemen due to the fact that different state actors are involved in the two conflicts. Likewise, different rebel groups emerged in the analysis for both Syria and Yemen. However, for both countries, ISIS and al-Qaeda were coded separately from rebels in part because of their treatment as threats to international peace and security as discussed in Chap. 2. The results were also assessed to determine how frequently actors used security issues to justify the use of force.

A third set of themes explored the reactions of different international actors via quotes from representatives of states, NGOs, and IOs to the events listed in Table 5.1. This analysis was used to examine if international actors responded to comparable events in Syria and Yemen similarly and to explore whether some groups of actors, like the UN and NGOs, are more prone to invoking IHL and others are more prone to invoking security issues. This analysis also provides further insight into which state actors dominate media coverage of the two conflicts.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

To further investigate why Syria receives more attention in light of the severity of the humanitarian crisis in both countries, the first analysis compared how the articles framed the humanitarian issues and whether the article authors or individuals quoted referenced international law. Given that the events selected for the qualitative analysis were chosen precisely because they involved high civilian casualties, thus illustrating the humanitarian crisis associated with each conflict, it was anticipated that they would contain references to humanitarian issues. As expected, the results indicate that 80% of the articles on Syria and 86.6% of the articles on Yemen articles mentioned humanitarian issues more broadly, such as listing the total number of casualties or how many people have fled their homes. This shows that the two conflicts receive nearly equal treatment in terms of the frequency at which some sort of humanitarian issue was invoked.

The two conflicts also received similar—and limited—attention in regard to how often the articles mentioned (or quoted an actor that mentioned) terms typically associated with international law. For instance, very few articles mentioned IDPs (one article pertaining to Syria, three on Yemen), while, in keeping with the quantitative results, refugees were mentioned only in 5.4% of the total number of articles on events in Syria and received no mentions in the articles on Yemen. The articles on the sampled events for both countries paid similar attention to appeals for humanitarian aid: approximately 16% of articles mentioned appeals for

both Syria and Yemen, a higher rate than was reflected in the quantitative data. Other terms associated with international law was also referenced infrequently in the events pertaining to both conflicts: the most often referenced, albeit only by a small margin, were war crimes, mentioned in 6% of the articles on Syria and 5% of the articles on Yemen, and IHL, mentioned in 8% of the articles on Syria and 10% of the articles on Yemen. These results indicate that the articles included in the sample treat the two conflicts similarly, with greater attention paid to the general humanitarian situation and limited attention paid to matters that might invoke international law, indicating that the humanitarian crises alone do not account for the greater amount of attention Syria receives over Yemen.

Another possible explanation for the difference in attention is that international actors draw more attention to the humanitarian issues in Syria than in Yemen by framing conflict events in terms of the humanitarian toll or violations of humanitarian law. As discussed in Chap. 3, attention to humanitarian issues often comes as a result of great power interest and as a by-product of increased attention to security-related issues. However, as Bell, Frank and Macharia (2013) note, media coverage plays an important role in elevating visibility of humanitarian disasters in conflict countries. Therefore, assessing the extent to which humanitarian issues are raised in the sampled articles could explain why Syria receives more attention than Yemen. The articles were examined to determine if/how parties to the conflict and external parties used references to the humanitarian toll or violations of international law when referencing conflict events in both countries.

Humanitarian Framing by Conflict Parties

The results of the analysis on whether and how parties to the conflict used humanitarian issues to justify their actions show that they (states and various rebel groups) rarely invoked international law or humanitarian issues to defend their own actions. Instead, parties to the conflict were more likely to level accusations against their opponents for violating specific aspects of international law in Syria. For example, Russia implied that the US violated international law when it compared US airstrikes in Raqqa to US attacks in Dresden in World War II, alleging that the US wiped the Syrian city off of the face of the earth. In addition to making this comparison with a past atrocity, Russia further suggested that the US was using foreign aid to cover up “evidence of its crimes” (BBC 2017).

Conflict parties in Syria appeared to be sensitive to how UN representatives framed conflict events. On occasion various parties accused UN representatives of bias when they made comments suggesting that some violation of international law had occurred. For example, the Syrian government accused the UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura of being biased after he called the Syrian government's attacks on Douma "unacceptable under any circumstances" (Al Arabiya 2015). These results are notable for two reasons. The first is that, in the articles analyzed, parties to the conflict tend to use the humanitarian crisis and associated international laws not in justification for their own actions, but to draw attention to the nature of the actions of their opponents. Moreover, the results indicate a tendency among conflict parties to be sensitive to how their own actions are viewed among at least some international actors (i.e. UN representatives).

The same evaluation of conflict party responses was conducted on the events sampled for Yemen to examine if/how international actors invoked the humanitarian crisis or international law in regard to conflict events. As was the case in Syria, conflict parties were more likely to directly invoke international law violations in allegations about opponents' behavior than as a justification of their own actions. For example, Yemen's acting Health Minister stated that Saudi Arabia "committed a major crime" when it carried out airstrikes on a funeral in Sanaa (Haaretz 2016a), and the Houthis accused the UN of remaining silent toward Saudi Arabia's crimes in the case of the Hayden school bombing (Balkiz et al. 2016). Given the similarity in reporting on when and how conflict parties framed conflict events vis-à-vis international law and humanitarian issues, these results do not explain why Syria receives more attention than Yemen. While the parties themselves might not invoke international law or the humanitarian toll of particular conflict events, it is possible that external actors draw attention to these issues, and in so doing, draw more attention to Syria than to Yemen.

Humanitarian Framing by External Actors

The qualitative results demonstrate that external state parties and inter-governmental organizations, including members of the P5 and the Arab League,⁴ tend to refrain from outright accusations of international law

⁴For the purposes here, external actors are defined as those not involved in a particular incident. Thus, an actor could be a party to the conflict more broadly but still be considered "external".

violations in the sample of Syrian events, opting instead for statements that are more neutral than accusatory. Instead, after a violent event, these parties were often quoted reminding all parties to respect international law or explaining that certain actions constitute war crimes. External actors also commonly referred incidents to the UN for investigation. For instance, in response to the alleged chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta, France, and the UK, the Arab League, and the Syrian National Coalition, called on the UN to investigate. Invoking the powers of the Security Council to authorize interventions and calling for investigations fits squarely within the standard process for addressing alleged violations of international law. The Eastern Ghouta case also, however, provides an example in which external actors more directly connected a party with a potential violation of international law; in this instance, France, the US, and the NATO, all accused the Syrian government of using chemical weapons on civilians. This suggests that in cases that involve allegations of the use of weapons of mass destruction, external actors will deviate from a more neutral position to one that invokes a direct action or response, thus drawing more attention to these types of incidents.

The results for Syria included quotes from representatives of a diverse array of states, especially in reference to the Eastern Ghouta case and the aforementioned allegations that the Syrian government used chemical weapons on civilians. In this context, international law emerged clearly in arguments against external military intervention absent a formal UN investigation. For example, the Lebanese Caretaker Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that a “military operation outside the UN Security Council framework [...] ‘would have grave repercussions throughout the international community’”. The Brazilian government also opposed intervention without the UN’s full support, and the Cuban government emphasized that military engagement would compromise Syrian territory and sovereignty, a reference to the UN’s commitment to upholding territorial sovereignty (Xinhua 2013). These results indicate that external parties are more likely to invoke international law to prevent states from intervening in the affairs of others than to hold conflict parties accountable for violations of IHL at least the articles pertaining to the events sampled in Syria, reflecting the strength of norms pertaining to sovereignty over pro-intervention norms like Responsibility to Protect.

External states were less responsive to potential violations of IHL in Yemen than in Syria, but when they did react, they followed the same pattern of mostly avoiding direct accusations and instead cautioning all par-

ties to respect their obligations under international law. The airstrike on the funeral in Sanaa drew the most attention from states, including Iran, which called the event a “horrific and inhuman crime” (indirectly invoking Additional Protocol II of IHL) and advocated for peace talks (Haaretz 2016a). The US National Security Council spokesman Ned Price stated that the US considered reducing support for Saudi Arabia in response to the funeral attack, adding that the “US security cooperation with Saudi Arabia is not a blank check”. However, Price did not invoke international law (Haaretz 2016a). The UK responded to this same funeral attack by joining in the investigation of the event. Further, the UK Defense Secretary Sir Michael Fallon stated that UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia would be reviewed if the Saudis knowingly targeted civilians (Gardner 2016). Although international law was not directly referenced, the violation was implied through the UK’s concern regarding “knowingly targeting civilians”. Such statements from external actors emerge only in scenarios in which they are implicated in a specific conflict event in Yemen.

External actors tend to frame conflict events in Syria and Yemen similarly, with few instances in either conflict in which parties were directly accused of violating international law. However, in the Syrian case, external actors did raise international legal arguments to discourage parties from certain behaviors, typically in the aftermath of an alleged chemical weapons attack. Given the greater number of actors in Syria, this result is to be expected. Overall, the qualitative results suggest that external attention to humanitarian law or the humanitarian toll of the conflict does not account for the difference in reporting. Therefore, the next inquiry compares the number of UN representatives addressing each conflict and identifies the specific representatives that are quoted the most often in the sampled articles to assess how the treatment of the two conflicts by the UN influences the amount of attention Syria receives over Yemen.

Presence of UN Officials

Specific UN departments and organs were frequently cited in the articles in response to the humanitarian conditions in Syria. Table 5.2 indicates the percentage of the 111-article sample on Syria that cited representatives from each of the various humanitarian-related organs of the UN.

The results show that UN bodies concerned with humanitarian issues were mentioned frequently in the articles in the sample. The Secretary-General was cited in 11.6% of the articles, usually underscoring the

Table 5.2 UN responses in articles on Syria by organ/department

<i>UN Secretary-General</i>	<i>OHCHR/UNHCR/OCHA</i>	<i>Other UN-affiliated groups and individuals</i>	<i>Security Council</i>
11.6%	28.3%	31.6%	1.6%

humanitarian issues associated with the conflicts and generally condemning actions that targeted civilians, often without assigning blame. Representatives from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), were cited in 28.3% of the articles, usually drawing attention to deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Syria through statements similar to those of the Secretary-General. Nearly one-third of the articles mentioned a specific UN-affiliated individual or entity, including UN chemical weapons inspectors, the special humanitarian coordinator for Syria, the UN special envoy for Syria, the regional UN envoy, and war crimes investigators. Individuals most frequently cited in this group include Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, and UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura. The prominence of these two UN representatives is perhaps unsurprising given that the Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator is responsible for coordinating humanitarian efforts of member states, the UN, and NGOs in response to human-made and natural disasters, while the Special Envoy is tasked with finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria. The Security Council, on the other hand, had limited responses to humanitarian issues in Syria in the selected sample. This data suggests that, as one might suspect, the Security Council is less directly concerned with matters of humanitarianism, delegating such matters to specialized UN organizations, and focusing more specifically on its mandate for upholding peace and security. It also shows which organs and departments within the UN are the most vocal, with individuals and organizations within the Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General, and the General Assembly most frequently cited, suggesting that some UN employees might be more able to make public comments than others, and that the situation in Syria warrants more public activities by the humanitarian agencies within the UN.

Table 5.3 UN responses in articles on Yemen by organ/department

<i>UN Secretary-General</i>	<i>OHCHR/UNHCR/OCHA</i>	<i>Other UN-affiliated groups and individuals</i>	<i>Security Council</i>
6.3%	9%	9%	2.7%

Table 5.3 lists the various UN actors that were cited in the 60 articles reviewed on conflict events in Yemen. Similar to the results captured in Table 5.2, certain UN-affiliated agencies and representatives are more prominently represented than others.

The result of the analysis shows that representatives from UN organs and departments are less frequently cited in articles pertaining to events in Yemen than in Syria, with the Secretary-General commenting on Syria twice as often, and OHCHR/UNHCR/OCHA representatives and other UN-affiliated groups commenting thrice as often. Nevertheless, the data on Yemen shows that specific groups, such as refugees and human rights and humanitarian organizations were the most frequently cited. UNICEF representatives commented on issues relating to children. Jamie McGoldrick, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, and Stephen O'Brien, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination, were also among the other UN-affiliated actors cited in articles on Yemen on the humanitarian situation. Like in Syria, it is unsurprising that these individuals would be cited more often given the humanitarian mandate of their positions. Notably, the Secretary-General was cited in a much smaller percentage of the articles on Yemen than on Syria (11.6% on Syria vs. 6.3% on Yemen), perhaps another reflection of the fact that the conflict in Yemen has been marginalized relative to Syria. In one statement, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon did allege that the Saudi-led coalition—which had recently been included on a UN blacklist of states and other armed actors guilty of committing “grave violations against children”—put “undue pressure” on him to remove the country from the blacklists (Balkiz et al., 2016; McGrath, 2016). The statement is notable in part because it illustrates the trend noted earlier: Ban Ki-Moon places responsibility on Saudi Arabia and its coalition but still refrains from stating that the coalition has violated IHL.

Of the various UN bodies referenced in the articles on Yemen, the Security Council was only cited in 2.7% of the articles, often in the context of offering to investigate or hold a briefing. This suggests that while UN actors

are relevant and important authority figures vis-à-vis humanitarian concerns, they do not figure prominently in the news coverage in either country, and notably less in Yemen than in Syria. Further, the analysis suggests that the UN actors who are most vocal regarding international law in these cases are those with the least formal power, that is, affiliated agencies rather than the Security Council or the Secretary-General, further underscoring the limited weight of IHL in the international calculus and discourse on these conflicts, particularly in Yemen, despite the acknowledgment of the dire humanitarian need.

The results of the analysis on humanitarian issues and international law show that while the articles in the events sampled for the two countries generally draw attention to the overall humanitarian crises, neither parties to the conflict nor external actors discuss conflict-related events in a way that explicitly underscores potential violations of international law or IHL. The results also show that the international community, including states, various UN organs and departments, and NGOs, tends to follow a similar pattern of reacting to events in both countries, with the least empowered UN actors most likely to draw attention to violations of IHL, without directly attributing blame to a specific party. The results also indicate that representatives from the UN's humanitarian branches have a more active voice in the articles pertaining to Syria than to Yemen, which could be one contributing factor to the greater coverage of Syria than of Yemen. It is also possible that additional attention by the UN and the media to Syria is explained by the nature of the conflict events, such as the use of chemical weapons, since it is both an event that causes mass casualties, therefore escalating the humanitarian crisis, and a clear violation of international law. Overall, however, given the similarity of results in terms of how often humanitarian issues are discussed more generally in the two conflicts, coupled with the hesitancy of international actors to invoke international law and the use of international law by parties to levy accusations against their opponents in both conflicts, the severity of the humanitarian issues and alleged international law violations alone do explain why Syria receives more attention than Yemen.

USE OF FORCE BY STATE AND NONSTATE ACTORS

Another explanation for why Syria receives more attention than Yemen despite the severity of humanitarian crises resulting from the two conflicts might be related to the number of and type of actors using force in each

country, the type of weapons used, and how the use of force is framed in the articles. Some articles, like those by MSF and the UN News, rarely identified the party responsible for the action, but they did identify the type of attack (conventional, such as airstrikes or battles, or unconventional, such as barrel bombs, suicide bombs, or chemical weapons).

Use of Force by Actor

The majority of the articles in the events sampled—for both Syria and Yemen—identified the specific parties and type of weapons the parties used. In some cases, the parties themselves claimed responsibility for the attacks. In other cases, the articles identified a party—that is, the US-led coalition, the Syrian government, the Saudi-led coalition—that was allegedly responsible for the attacks. Table 5.4 breaks down the various conflict parties mentioned in the articles sampled (111 for Syria, 60 for Yemen).

The results of the analysis show that 87.4% of the 111 articles on Syria identified states as carrying out conventional attacks, while 55% of those articles identified rebels for carrying out conventional attacks. This is in part due to the sampling of high-profile cases, which perhaps drew attention precisely because they were events in which state actions incurred high civilian casualties. ISIS, on the other hand, was only identified in 18% of articles for conventional attacks. Further, 13.5% of the articles mentioned a conventional attack without attributing it to an actor. While these numbers reflect the means of warfare—or the weapons used by conflict parties—that are not prohibited under international law, they do not reflect the methods—or strategies—of warfare, which can violate international law and IHL if they target civilians.

Table 5.4 Breakdown of types of attacks and responsible party

	<i>Syria (%)</i>	<i>Yemen (%)</i>
Conventional attack (party not identified)	13.5	22.5
Unconventional attack (party not identified)	21	11.6
Conventional attack by state	87.4	83.3
Unconventional attack by state	4.5	3.3
Conventional attack by rebels	54.1	55
Unconventional attack by rebels	0.9	1.7
Conventional attack by ISIS	18	1.7
Unconventional attack by ISIS	26.1	15

The results further show that 26.1% of the articles reported that ISIS engaged in some form of unconventional attack, most often suicide bombing. Additionally, 4.5% of the articles identified a state for conducting an unconventional attack. Only 0.9% of the articles attributed the rebels with conducting unconventional attacks, although Russia and the Syrian government have accused the rebels supported by “the US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia” of using chemical weapons (BBC 2013). The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria had strong suspicions (but not proof) that the rebels used Sarin gas in Syria (Washington Times 2013). Though ISIS was the most likely to be attributed to using unconventional weapons, over a fifth of the articles on Syria (approximately 21%) mentioned unconventional attacks without attributing blame to a particular party. States and parties to the conflict were quick to blame a particular party for using unconventional weapons, whereas press releases from the UN and NGOs were the least likely to attribute blame to a party in an event in which an unconventional attack allegedly occurred.

Reporting on the use of force was similar in Yemen. The results of the analysis show that 83% of the 60 articles on Yemen identified states for carrying out conventional attacks and 55% of the articles identified the rebels for carrying out conventional attacks. The high percentage of states’ use of force reflects that actions of Saudi and Saudi-led coalition airstrikes injured civilians in the events sampled for Yemen. ISIS was identified in 1.7% of the articles for committing conventional attacks. Additionally, 21% of the articles mentioning conventional attacks did not attribute them to any specific actor. As mentioned in the analysis of the articles on Syria, these percentages reflect the use of weapons that are generally accepted under international law, which should not be conflated with the method in which they are used.

Unconventional attacks were also reported in Yemen, although not at the same rate as in Syria. Of the total articles, 15% reported that ISIS engaged in some form of unconventional attack, again this was mostly suicide bombing. Additionally, 3.3% of the articles mentioned a state in connection with unconventional attacks. This figure comes from two articles that mentioned US drone strikes in Yemen. Additionally, 1.7% of the articles attributed the rebels with carrying out unconventional attacks, reflecting Saudi accusations that the rebels recruit and use child soldiers (Al Arabiya 2016a), which is prohibited under international law and is one of the six grave violations outlined by the Security Council. Fewer number of articles

(11.6%) on events in Yemen mentioned unconventional attacks without attributing a source of the attack. This difference may be due to the different types of actors involved in the two conflicts; for example, a plethora of nonstate rebel and opposition forces in the Syrian conflict that are more likely to use unconventional forms of attack may result in a higher percentage of unconventional attacks overall. Alternatively, this difference may be due to the fact that fewer journalists are present in the Yemen conflict and therefore are less able to observe the type of attack in the direct aftermath. The results of the analysis of the type of attack by actor shows similarity among the articles on the sampled events in both Syria and Yemen in terms of how the use of force is framed. Therefore, these results alone are not enough to explain why Syria receives more attention than Yemen. Further analysis on the use of the force by specific actors—state and nonstate—involved in each conflict might offer further insights into why Syria garners more attention.

Use of Force by State Actors

As expected, the results show that the greater is the involvement of great power actors, including the US and Russia, the greater is the media coverage. They also show that states other than Syria are rarely attributed with using unconventional weapons that directly or potentially violate international law. Unconventional weapons include chemical and biological weapons, or those, like cluster bombs and drones, that might be in violation of international law.

Table 5.5 demonstrates that within the articles sampled on Syria, three states—Syria, Russia, and the US (often also lumped in with US-led coalition)—are most frequently identified for their use of force.

As might be expected due to its prominent role in the conflict, Syrian government forces have been mentioned in nearly 46% of the articles for

Table 5.5 Conventional and unconventional use of force in Syria by state actors

	<i>Conventional (%)</i>	<i>Unconventional (%)</i>
Syrian government	46	4.5
Russians	20.7	n/a
US and/or US-led coalition	17	n/a
Turkey	0.9	n/a

committing conventional attacks and in 4.5% of the articles for committing unconventional attacks. While the figure for unconventional attacks is rather low, these cases reflect serious accusations by the US and rebel forces that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons against civilians in 2017—and in 2018, although the 2018 event is not included in this data—despite being a signatory to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) since 2013 and allegedly destroying its stockpile in 2014 (Shane 2017). In response to accusations that it has violated international law by using chemical weapons, the Syrian government, and at times, Russia, has denied allegations, inviting the UN to investigate, and diverting attention by accusing the “US-backed” rebels of using chemical weapons (BBC 2013).

Russia also featured prominently in the data; it was mentioned in 20.7% of the articles for committing conventional attacks (primarily airstrikes) and was not associated with unconventional attacks in any of the articles. As discussed in Chap. 2, the Syrian government and the Russians justified their use of conventional weapons, which do not inherently violate international law, with security-related arguments, often referring to the rebels as terrorists or referring to their actions as anti-terrorist. The security justification emerged as the most common explanation provided by state actors targeting “terrorists” like ISIS or al-Qaeda, and therefore not violating their truce with the rebels (Al Arabiya 2016b). However, Russia sometimes mixed humanitarian arguments with security arguments. For example, in the case of Deir al-Zour, Russian sources claimed that the country was delivering humanitarian aid after conducting anti-terrorist operations alongside Syrian government forces (Alkhshali and Lister 2016). This use of humanitarian justifications for the use of force (often in the name of “security”) has important implications, as it deflects from the fact that anti-terrorist methods have resulted in the very humanitarian crises that state actors (in this case Russia) seek to address. In this particular case, it also reflects some Russian hypocrisy, as the Russians accused the US of using aid to cover up crimes committed by the US in Raqqa, wherein in the aftermath of US airstrikes in Raqqa, a UN official claimed that there had been “a staggering loss of life” (BBC 2017).

In addition to Russia, the US was another great power discussed in the articles for using force in Syria. The US or US-led coalition was mentioned in just over 17% of the articles for using conventional attacks in Syria and was not associated with the reported unconventional attacks. The US justified its actions as supporting the rebels in their fight against

the terrorist group ISIS, reiterating its respect for human life—although not referencing international law explicitly—in response to reports that airstrikes by the US-led coalition had amounted to over 100 civilian deaths in the Manbij area (Grinberg 2016). In their attempt to free Raqqa from ISIS, the US and US-led coalition forces made similar arguments about respecting human life and added that the airstrikes were intended to free people from the brutality of ISIS (Gupta 2017).

Regional powers Turkey and Iran were mentioned in a number of articles in the sample (Turkey in 25%, Iran in 16%), which is unsurprising given their proximity to Syria. None of the articles discussed Iran in terms of their use of force in the conflict, whereas Turkey was implicated in the direct use of force in one article that mentioned that Turkish forces downed a Syrian helicopter in 2013 (Levs and Yan 2013). While other regional powers are engaged in direct fighting in Syria, at least to a limited extent (i.e. Israel), the articles on the selected events in Syria focus primarily on the use of force by the Syrian government, Russia, the US, and the US-led coalition, which supports the proposition that great power involvement heightens media coverage, even though both the US and Russia were only mentioned in a limited number of articles sampled for this project.

Table 5.6, which captures the role of state actors in Yemen in the events sampled, demonstrates the overwhelming role of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen conflict.

In contrast to Syria, where the government itself was the most frequently referenced state party, Saudi Arabia was mentioned more than seven times as frequently as the Yemeni government in the 60 articles reviewed (see Table 5.6). Saudi Arabia or the Saudi-led coalition was mentioned as engaging in conventional attacks (airstrikes) in 71.6% of the articles examined and was only mentioned in one article for an unconventional attack. That article made a reference to the Saudi-led coalition's

Table 5.6 Conventional and unconventional use of force in Yemen by state actors

	<i>Conventional (%)</i>	<i>Unconventional (%)</i>
Yemeni government	10	n/a
Saudi Arabia/Saudi-led coalition	71.6	1.7
US	1.6	3.33

admitted use of British-made cluster bombs on a limited basis (Al Jazeera 2017), perhaps as a way to emphasize that its actions did not risk violating international law. When any rationale for the use of force was mentioned in the articles reviewed, none of the state actors in Yemen justified their actions on humanitarian grounds.

When justifying their use of force, Saudi officials invoked security-oriented justifications in a few instances. For example, in response to an airstrike in Hajja that killed 22 children, Saudi Arabia argued that the aim of the coalition was to set up a “cohesive government with a strong national army and security forces that can combat terrorism and impose law and order” (Haaretz 2016b). In response to airstrikes on a residential area in Sanaa, the Saudis claimed that they aimed at legitimate military targets and expressed “deep sorrow for this unintentional accident and for the collateral damage among civilians” (Almasmari et al. 2017). The Saudis used additional justifications for their attacks that were not necessarily rooted in international law, perhaps because they operate under the premise of Yemeni consent. For example, they explained an attack on civilians in Arhab, Sanaa, as a technical mistake, suggested that incorrect intelligence reports led to the Sanaa funeral bombing, and asserted that they had targeted a militia training camp in Hajja rather than a hospital (Almasmari et al. 2017; Capelouto 2016; Tuysuz and Visser 2016). In addition to minimizing their humanitarian violations, the Saudis also made political arguments in the articles reviewed, such as trying to prevent Iran, their regional rival, from gaining a foothold in Yemen (Al Jazeera 2016a). Saudi justifications cited in the sampled articles on conflict events in Yemen offer additional insights into how states justify the use of force. Saudi explanations rarely defended the legality of the troops’ presence in Yemen, since they considered this presence legitimate under international law because of Yemeni consent, and instead advanced arguments justifying their methods of engagement.

Other state forces credited with the use of force in Yemen included Yemeni government troops, which were mentioned in 10% of the articles sampled for committing conventional attacks and were not associated with unconventional attacks. The articles typically mentioned Yemeni troops in passing, without any justification for their actions. The US was only mentioned in 1.6% of articles sampled, thereby supporting the argument that the degree of great power involvement impacts media coverage of the two conflicts. Two of the 60 articles reviewed on Yemen mentioned the US drone strikes in the conflict, which were not the subject of any of the

sampled events in Yemen. These articles pertained to ISIS and al-Qaeda activities in Yemen as part of an overarching framework in both articles about groups that threaten international peace and security, and US actions to address said threats. Iran was mentioned for supporting the Houthis or condemning Saudi attacks and calling for peace talks. For instance, after the Sanaa funeral strike, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman asserted that "there is no solution but the end of aggression by the brutish Saudi rulers and start of new round of talks that includes all Yemeni sides" (Haaretz 2016a). Unsurprisingly, given that Iran supports the Houthis but has not engaged militarily in the conflict, Iran was not credited with direct military action in Yemen in the articles sampled. The overwhelming dominance of Saudi Arabia in the articles analyzed suggests that the more limited number of states involved in the conflict, especially the lack of direct great power involvement, may impact media coverage. Additionally, while all parties have been accused of causing large numbers of civilian casualties, the Syrian government has allegedly used chemical weapons against civilians on multiple occasions, whereas the Saudis have primarily been associated with airstrikes. Further, humanitarian law seemed to be of minor importance to state actors, although Saudi Arabia did feel the need to explain away alleged violations with a variety of excuses in some of the articles. Such rationalizing suggests that states attribute some import to international law by at least providing lip service to its principles and carefully sidestepping issues that question the legality or legitimacy of their use of force in Yemen. These differences in the number of states involved in the conflict and the method of attack could help explain why Syria receives more attention than Yemen. Further examination focuses on nonstate actors' use of force to determine if that plays a role in the difference in coverage.

Use of Force by Nonstate Actors

Examination of the activities of nonstate actors in both conflicts was used to determine if and how nonstate actors justify their own actions, since they are not necessarily beholden to the same rules in international law. The analysis also explored the extent to which states use the violent actions of nonstate actors to justify their own interventions and the extent to which terrorism is prominent in media coverage. Because GDelt did not provide a means of tracking ISIS in the quantitative analysis, ISIS was treated as distinct from other more general references to insurgents/rebels in the qualitative analysis. Al-Qaeda was also coded separately from the

rebel category in order to have additional points of comparison, particularly given the history of US targeting of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Nonstate actors have played a significant role in the Syrian conflict, and the battle against ISIS has been a major explanation for foreign involvement.

The content analysis of selected articles shows that in Syria, ISIS was mentioned for committing unconventional attacks (primarily suicide bombings and vehicle bombs) in 26% of the articles and conventional attacks in 18% of the articles (e.g. bombing; refer to Table 5.4 for breakdown). While the nonstate actors were less likely to be cited justifying their actions than state actors, in several instances ISIS claimed responsibility for attacks, and on occasion would offer some sort of explanation. For instance, in a daily news bulletin, ISIS claimed that its fighters “liberated” Palmyra (Botelho and Shah 2015). ISIS targeted the “support base of the Syrian government” in Homs and Damascus, specifically the site of a holy Shiite shrine and a neighborhood predominantly inhabited by Alawites, a minority group to which President Assad belongs (Basil and Hume 2016). ISIS justified its attack on the Kurdish stronghold Qamlishi as retaliation for US strikes in the ISIS stronghold Manbij (BBC 2016). These results indicate that the diversity of nonstate actors involved in Syria, and specifically those that represent threats to peace and security as discussed in Chap. 2, draws media coverage to the Syrian conflict.

The results show that certain rebel groups featured more prominently in the articles sampled. The Kurds and/or the People’s Protection Units (YPG)—a Kurdish militia in Syria—were mentioned in nearly 20% of the articles for committing conventional attacks. Although Kurdish officials were rarely cited in the articles, Kurdish officials made security appeals in reference to their fight against ISIS, stating that they would “restore peace and security in their town [Kobane] which has been a symbol of Kurdish defiance” (Al Jazeera 2015). Syrian rebels—primarily the US—supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—were mentioned in 29.7% of the articles for committing conventional attacks. Like the Kurds, rebel officials were quoted in only a few instances. In one example rebel leaders justified their decision to give ISIS 48 hours to leave Manbij and indirectly invoked international law by stating that their use of force came “after ISIL used residents as human shields [...] and to protect whatever civilians are left in the town” (Al Jazeera 2016b). According to US sources, the SDF also affirmed their commitment to international law in order to receive US support in Raqqa (Gupta 2017).

Other nonstate actors, mostly the Peshmerga, were mentioned for committing conventional attacks in 4.5% of the articles. Although, like other conflict parties, this group rarely justified their use of force, an official with the Ministry of Peshmerga stated that the Peshmerga entered Kobane to “reinforce fellow Kurds who are defending against ISIS” (Walsh et al. 2014), an argument that aligns with peace and security arguments used by states to justify their actions. Al-Qaeda and/or its Syrian branch al-Nusra Front was mentioned in 4.5% of the articles reviewed, not for using force but, for instance, for releasing hostages or being excluded from ceasefire discussions. These results show that certain nonstate actors receive media attention for their use of force, and in so doing, they may help draw attention to the conflict in Syria either through their actions or through the response those actions provoke, especially from great powers. Although there are many rebel, opposition, and extremist groups operating in Syria, the data also shows that certain groups, like the SDF and the Kurds, receive far more attention in the article sample analyzed than others. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the US provides direct support to the SDF and Kurds, or it could be that these specific opposition groups were the most relevant to the events selected. The fact that the most discussed rebel groups are linked to a great power may be a further indication of the role of great power interests in driving media coverage.

In contrast to Syria, where hundreds, if not thousands, of rebel factions exist, giving a diverse array of nonstate actors to draw media attention, in Yemen, the primary rebel actor is the Houthi movement. The Houthis were identified for committing conventional attacks in 55% of the articles on Yemen and unconventional attacks in 1.6% of the articles. Houthi representatives were rarely cited justifying their actions in the articles analyzed; instead, they were more frequently cited for criticizing the Saudis. However, in at least one article, the Houthis provided a security-related justification, notably that missiles launched at the *USS Mason*, a US naval destroyer, were carried out in retaliation for the Saudi strike on a funeral in Sanaa (Capelouto 2016).

ISIS was mentioned in 15% of the articles for carrying out unconventional attacks, usually suicide bombings, and in 1.6% of the articles for committing a conventional attack. These references to ISIS pertain to attacks on Badr and al-Hashoosh Mosques. A group claiming to represent ISIS justified these attacks by stating that “the soldiers of the Islamic State ... will not rest until we have uprooted them [the Iranians], repelled their aggression, and cut off the arm of the Iranian project in Yemen” (as cited

in Al-Haj 2015). Such arguments reflect political and security justifications rather than humanitarian arguments. Al-Qaeda was mentioned in 8.3% of the articles, mostly in reference to their strategic use of force in the conflict in Yemen to regroup and gain a foothold in the area. The results of the analysis on nonstate actors in Syria and Yemen show that the choice of occasions in which ISIS claimed they were behind an attack indicates that the group takes ownership of its aggression in a way that differs from states. Rebels groups in both conflicts, however, are more likely to mirror states when justifying their actions. The results further show that when broken down by the specific nonstate actors involved in the events sampled from each conflict, rebel activities, while mentioned less overall in the articles, draw attention in part because different rebel groups have been supported by different great and regional powers, at times pitting traditional allies like Turkey and the US against each other. The rebels in Yemen, on the other hand, were often represented as insurgents to the internationally recognized government, thus showing more general consensus among most states of who is right and who is wrong in the conflict.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presented the results of the qualitative analysis used to determine why Syria receives more coverage than Yemen given the severity of the humanitarian crises in both countries. The results indicate that coverage of the two countries is relatively similar, with articles on both Syria and Yemen giving limited attention to international law and IHL—or alleging parties responsible for violations—and instead focusing on more general humanitarian issues, which does not explain why Syria receives more attention than Yemen. The results do indicate that at least in the sampled articles, more UN representatives have been quoted in the media speaking about the Syrian conflict. While this might not fully explain the difference in coverage between the two conflicts, especially if the UN is not seen as a significant actor in world politics, it does reflect previous discussions on how different actors in the international community can raise humanitarian issues, but only a few are responsible for enforcing international law. On a related note, the articles very rarely referred to refugees (5.4% in articles on Syria and none on Yemen) and IDPs in relation to either country (three articles on Yemen, one on Syria), potentially as a result of the sampling of events or perhaps because the majority of Syrian and Yemeni

citizens that have been displaced internally or externally have not been officially designated as refugees or IDPs. This suggests, however, that the difference in coverage of the conflicts cannot be explained simply by the massive flow of Syrian refugees to Europe. The results also show that great powers and regional states actively engaged in conflict are far more likely to justify the use of force than nonstate actors, and all actors are more likely to justify their actions for security purposes and not on humanitarian grounds. The greatest deviation in results comes in the form of the number of great powers using force in the two conflicts and the type of force used, with more actors involved in the Syrian conflict and evidence that chemical weapons have been used on multiple occasions against civilians. Such an obvious violation of international law, coupled with the graphic imagery of the victims and the effect of these types of weapons, could contribute to the greater attention to Syria than to Yemen.

The next chapter evaluates and explains why Syria receives more attention than Yemen using the possible explanations offered in Chaps. 2 and 3 to examine quantitative and qualitative data. It also offers concluding remarks.

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Conclusion: Media Attention and the Erosion of Humanitarian Norms in the Face of “Security”?

Abstract This chapter relates the results of the data analysis to the explanations offered by international law and international relations for why the conflict in Syria receives more global attention than Yemen. While states have justified their interventions in the two conflicts using international laws and norms, such justifications rarely draw media attention to either conflict. Furthermore, the scale of humanitarian crisis alone is not enough to explain the difference in media coverage of the two conflicts, given the paucity of coverage of humanitarian issues in the media sources analyzed. Instead, the use of force by great powers, the diverse array of nonstate actors (including internationally recognized terrorist groups), and structural inequalities within the international system best explain why Syria receives more attention. The chapter concludes by highlighting areas of future research and underscoring the real-world consequences of the lack of global attention to the crisis in Yemen.

Keywords Security • Humanitarians • Structural inequalities
• Refugees

This project set out to answer why it seemed there was much greater global media coverage of the crisis in Syria as compared to that in Yemen despite the fact that both conflicts have resulted in humanitarian crises for

the civilian populations, have been the subject of Security Council resolutions, and have attracted the attention of a range of external actors, including NGOs, states, and nonstate actors. The research empirically demonstrates that, indeed, there is much more media coverage of the conflict in Syria—six to nine times that of Yemen depending on the year according to the data provided in Chap. 4—but this difference in coverage also existed prior to the outbreak of the Arab Spring-related conflicts in both countries. This chapter reviews the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses provided in Chaps. 4 and 5, respectively, and examines which of the possible explanations offered in Chaps. 2 and 3 seem to best fit the differential international response to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen.

International law provides a series of laws and norms on international intervention and international response to humanitarian crises in other countries, a body of literature overviewed in Chap. 2. Explanations for international involvement based on these international laws and norms fall into three general categories: (1) intervention by invitation, (2) intervention for international security, and (3) intervention for humanitarian purposes. According to the data collected and analyzed for this project, the first two types of intervention based on international law and norms help explain and justify some actions by external actors in the two conflicts, whereas international actors rarely used humanitarian justifications for their behavior. This finding is consistent with the data indicating the involvement of state and nonstate actor with acts of both conventional and unconventional force through methods that are less (or not) justifiable under international law. While the qualitative analysis shows that in some cases states tried to explain away alleged violations of international law and IHL—primarily indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations—after they received negative attention for such acts, international actors rarely used humanitarian need to justify their intervention. Furthermore, international actors external to the conflict rarely accused parties of violating international law directly in the articles examined, whereas the primary conflict parties in Syria and Yemen, such as the Syrian government and the Houthis, more directly invoked international law violations in allegations against their opponents.

The UN is a primary institution tasked with upholding and enforcing international law, including international peace and security. Although individuals and organizations within the UN system generally refrained from direct accusations of international law violations, the UN Secretary-General, specialized groups like the OCHA, and representatives like the

UN Special Envoy to Syria condemned attacks that targeted civilians and underscored the humanitarian obligations of conflict parties under IHL. However, despite the alleged violations in both countries and the grave humanitarian need in Yemen, the UN was more actively quoted in articles about Syria than about Yemen, in some cases at triple the rate. For example, while the UN Secretary-General was mentioned in 6.3% of the articles reviewed on Yemen, he was mentioned in 11.6% of the articles on Syria. Further, humanitarian organizations such as OCHA and UNHCR were mentioned in only 9% of the articles on Yemen, in contrast to 28.3% of the articles on Syria. The Security Council was mentioned slightly more in the articles on Yemen than the ones on Syria, but at 2.7% compared to 1.6%, the difference is marginal. This low rate of coverage of the Security Council in the articles examined could be for several reasons: one, it might reflect the low rate of involvement of the Security Council in humanitarian issues as compared with the specialized agencies; and two, it might reflect the lack of Security Council involvement either due to known divisions on the issue or due to a sense that the issue was a peripheral threat to global peace and security. Further, the events selected for the qualitative analysis were picked primarily for their high rate of civilian casualties, thereby accentuating the possibility for the humanitarian rather than security framing, and many of the P5 states are directly or indirectly involved in the Syrian conflict, which may lessen their desire for Security Council action. While the low rates of UN response to Yemen could also partially reflect the particular events selected for analysis, the differential underscores the lack of media attention paid to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen more broadly.

Figure 4.6 in Chap. 4 illustrates the appeals for humanitarian aid found in the media coverage of the two countries. Not surprisingly, there is a major uptick in the appeals related to Syria in 2015, when Syrian refugees were arriving on the coast of Europe by the boatload. However, after that peak in 2015, the number of appeals has steadily decreased. In contrast, the appeals for aid in Yemen have been relatively constant and low, with a slight uptick in 2017, perhaps due to a gradual increase in coverage or perhaps due to the cholera outbreak. The data here, although inconclusive based on the data gathered for this project and worthy of future research, suggest that perhaps the direct impact of a humanitarian crisis on the international community generates greater coverage. For instance, although the Syrian government did not request international involvement in addressing the refugee crisis, the Syrian refugee population itself demanded international attention from western powers through its life-

threatening voyage to Europe. Yemeni refugees have not been able to make their own needs as visible, although the outbreak of cholera, exacerbated by the collapse of health and sanitation systems due to the conflict, may have (slightly) raised the visibility of the country's humanitarian crisis, particularly with images of dying children, 60% of the cholera victims (Lyons 2017). The major gap in coverage of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is even apparent in the media efforts of humanitarian NGOs like Save the Children and MSF. In the context of the events analyzed, Save the Children had public statements addressing none of the events in Yemen, and just under 19% of the events in Syria, while MSF had press releases on 23% of the events in Yemen and 31% of the events in Syria. Given theories, such as the boomerang effect, related to the role of NGOs in raising international awareness of such events, it is not surprising that a low level of coverage of the crisis in Yemen by humanitarian organizations correlates with a low degree of international coverage of humanitarian crises. However, it still does not answer the question about why is there such a low rate of coverage on Yemen.

According to the qualitative analysis, direct appeals for humanitarian aid received approximately the same amount of coverage for the two conflicts, at 16%, while 80% of the articles on Syria and 86.6% of the articles on Yemen invoked humanitarian issues more broadly. Since the content of media coverage in relation to humanitarian concerns seems to be relatively constant across the two conflicts, the extent of the humanitarian crisis in absolute numbers of people does not seem to account for the varying amount of attention. However, should the cholera outbreak in Yemen become a risk to other countries, perhaps such humanitarian concerns might trigger increased coverage, just as increased refugee flows, when they became a "threat" to European demography and economics, led to increased media coverage of the Syrian conflict.

The qualitative analysis also demonstrates that though the use of force—both conventional and unconventional—by states and nonstate actors garnered media attention, the legality of the means and methods used in either conflict did not. This shows that the act of using force, regardless of the type of force, by actors is enough to warrant media attention. Although not the direct focus of this project, this seems to reflect the adage "if it bleeds, it leads" in terms of journalistic coverage of armed attacks over less photo-worthy forms of humanitarian suffering, such as displacement, lack of basic needs, and destruction of political, social, economic, and health infrastructures. Further, in most cases, nonstate actors'

justifications for the use of force—for security and retaliation—mirrored justifications made by states, thereby perhaps indicating that nonstate actors take their cues from state actors for how to justify attacks, or that, like state actors, they see security as the most acceptable reason to use force. While IHL and humanitarianism do not seem to explain the actions of major state and international actors in the conflict, IR theories provide some additional explanation.

Chapter 3 laid out four possible explanations for differential international response to the conflicts in Yemen and Syria: (1) great power interests and alliances, (2) structural inequalities, (3) national security narratives, and (4) different degrees and types of military involvement. After reviewing the data collected, explanations (1) and (2) appear to be the most compelling, although elements of explanation (3) also hold weight.

On a fundamental level, structural inequalities seem to account for a great deal of the discrepancy in international response to the conflicts and attendant humanitarian crises in Yemen and Syria. As illustrated in Chap. 4, the gap in media coverage on the two countries was significant in the 2000–2009 time period, with 142% more sources reporting on Syria than on Yemen in 2000 and 196% more reporting by 2009. Yemen is more peripheral to the western powers both geographically and strategically. Further, the fact that Yemen has historically been poor and marginalized even within the Arab world may have resulted in less attention being paid to the conflict, especially given that Yemen has had a series of internal conflicts in recent decades, including a civil war. Thus, due to these structural inequalities, poverty and internal conflict in the case of Yemen may not have been considered as newsworthy as the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria, which had a relatively stable economy and prided itself on being a mosaic of religions and cultures prior to the war (Polk 2013). One can also look at the sheer numbers of casualties, as over 470,000 Syrians have died as compared to over 10,000 dead (40,000 casualties) in Yemen (Al Jazeera 2018; Specia 2018); however, these numbers are dwarfed by the 5.4 million deaths in the Second Congo War. Perhaps the brutal attack on civilians by their own government in Syria is more “newsworthy” or grabs the headlines better than the more insidious death by disease and starvation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the massive humanitarian crisis compounded by preexisting impoverished conditions in Yemen. Structural inequalities in the global system are also illustrated in Fig. 4.3, where one sees that the 20 countries with more sources reporting on Yemen than on Syria are all countries in the Global South, most of

which are geographically proximate and/or host Yemeni refugees. Overwhelmingly, international coverage focuses on Syria, and the vast discrepancy in coverage of the respective refugee situations—with 211,518 articles on Syria in contrast to 10,819 articles on Yemen in 2015 (Fig. 4.4)—underscores the impact of the receiving country on the degree of international reporting. When refugees arrived in Europe, it was covered dramatically in the media, whereas refugees in countries neighboring Syria or in the Horn of Africa did not receive the same attention, thereby supporting the argument that structural inequalities in the international system help account for the variance in coverage of the two conflicts.

The argument that great power interests and alliances account for the discrepancy in international responses to the two conflicts is supported by the data collected in a number of ways. In the quantitative analysis (Fig. 4.2), one can see the dramatic rise in the coverage on Syria in 2015, when the waves of refugees landed in Europe. Figure 4.7 graphically demonstrates the difference in external state action in Syria and Yemen, with a much greater number and volume of external action in Syria than in Yemen. The quantitative data on Yemen shows a spike in 2015, when the Saudi-led coalition initiated a bombing campaign, but otherwise a relatively low-level reporting on the involvement of a few countries: Saudi Arabia, the US, and Iran. In contrast, external actors have been significantly involved in Syria, which also heightens the likelihood of media coverage. US involvement has been substantive since 2013 in particular, in the aftermath of the infamous “red line” statement and agreement on chemical weapons, and Russian involvement jumped significantly in 2015 and has been high, albeit fluctuating, since that point. Regional powers Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia are all mentioned in media coverage at a rate that is often higher than the rate of the US and Iran in the coverage on Yemen. Furthermore, France and the UK are mentioned in the coverage of Syria, although despite France’s imperial ties to the country, the UK is mentioned at a consistently higher rate. This figure supports the argument that great power and regional power involvement helps explain the greater coverage of the Syrian conflict in the international media.

In the qualitative analysis, one can see the greater accounting of external state actors in the coverage of the Syrian events as compared to the coverage of Yemen. In the coverage of Yemen, the use of force by Saudi Arabia or the Saudi-led coalition is mentioned in 71.6% of the articles, whereas the use of force by the US is mentioned in only 1.6% of the articles, with no other state actors featured prominently in the articles

examined for committing direct attacks. However, Iran was mentioned in connection with its support of the Houthis, an indirect form of involvement, in 25% of the articles surveyed on Yemen. In the coverage of Syria, Russians' use of force was mentioned in 20.7% of the articles and the US use of force in 17% of the articles; Turkey and Kurdish attacks were featured in media coverage of Syria as well. France was also mentioned in relation to the chemical weapons attack in Eastern Ghouta and the Aleppo siege in 2016, but was not mentioned in connection with any armed attacks in Yemen at all. Despite the long-standing rivalry between Israel and Syria, there was no mention of Israel in the articles analyzed, which is likely a factor of Israeli policy decisions to stay out of the conflict until its 2018 airstrikes. The lack of explicit coverage of Israel in the selected articles does not necessarily mean that the alliance between the US and Israel did not play a role in the heightened coverage of the Syrian conflict given the special relationship between the countries and the past role of the US in mediating between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights and offering Israel security guarantees. Additionally, since Israel does register in the quantitative analysis of media coverage of Syria, it may simply be a result of the selected events analyzed qualitatively. Similarly, despite the general assumption that Iran is involved in the Syrian conflict, references to Iran primarily referred to its condemnation of US actions, its support for Hizbollah, its role in negotiating civilian evacuations from rebel-held territories, and its inclusion in the 2017 peace talks in Vienna. However, if one extended the data analysis beyond 2017, one might in fact see increased mention of Israel and Iran, given that Israel has more recently engaged in airstrikes on Iranian targets in Syria (BBC 2018). These qualitative results further support the idea that great power interests and involvement shape international coverage given the greater mention of great powers in the articles on Syria.

Upon review of the data, the prevalence of Russia and the US in media coverage of Syria differentiates it from the coverage of Yemen, where Saudi Arabia predominates. Not only is Russia a traditional rival to the US for power and a veto-wielding Security Council member, but both have been involved in critical decision points related to Syria and support opposite "sides" in the multi-party conflict. For example, following the August 2012 "red line" statement by the US President Barack Obama, the US and Russia were able to orchestrate a subsequent September 2013 agreement to address Assad's chemical weapons stockpiles. Thus, great powers have been more explicitly and directly involved in the Syrian conflict. In

contrast, Saudi Arabia is a regional power, and although it is backed by the US and has purchased arms and other military equipment from great powers, no permanent members of the Security Council are directly involved in the conflict in Yemen. The possibility of colonial legacies impacting the coverage of the two conflicts does not seem to be clearly supported based on the available data, given the relatively low numbers of articles mentioning France and Syria in the quantitative analysis relative to other states and the limited mentions of France in the qualitative analysis. Additionally, Great Britain was mentioned more than France in connection with the conflict in Syria, whereas it was not mentioned at all in connection with the coverage of Yemen. While such colonial legacies can certainly shape media imaginaries and external involvement, particularly the difference between the much more direct involvement of France in Syria as a whole versus the more hands off approach to Yemen outside of Aden by the British. The French involvement in Syria may in fact help shape the overall differential in world attention paid to Syria vis-a-vis Yemen, this would require additional research beyond what was found for this project.

A third possible explanation for the different degrees of coverage of the situations in Syria and Yemen involves national security narratives. While this explanation does not account for the data as well as structural inequalities and great power interests, and the quantitative data only reflects events and not attitudes of states toward specific nonstate actors, the qualitative data suggests that national security narratives predominate, with humanitarian concerns playing a much lower role in media coverage of the conflicts. Syria and Russia, for example, justified their actions in the name of security, identifying their targets as “terrorists”. In addition, state parties involved in the Syrian conflict, including the US, Syria, and Russia, justified attacks in the name of fighting against ISIS. Turkey, due to its unique position vis-à-vis the conflict in Syria, identified its national security concerns in terms of its refusal to support the creation of a Kurdish state. The qualitative analysis of the conflict in Yemen does not reveal the same extent of coverage related to national security. While Saudi Arabia argued that it was combating terrorism in a couple of articles, the lack of a sustained threat to other states may be reason for the lower coverage of Yemen as compared to Syria. At the same time, however, the long history of the US with AQAP, including drone strikes on alleged AQAP targets since 2002, places US involvement in Yemen as part of a longer narrative in the “war on terror”, and thus much of the US action in Yemen has been relatively off the radar. In contrast, although Syria and the US have

had an antagonistic relationship in the past, the introduction of ISIS into the Syrian situation caught the attention of the international community writ large and the public as a new terrorist threat.

The fourth possible explanation, that different types of military engagement yield different types of coverage, does not seem to explain the greater degree of attention to Syria. Although it is true that great powers—and regional powers like Iran and Turkey—have greater degrees of military involvement in Syria than in Yemen, including funding for rebels, air-strikes, and ground troops, it is the fact of this engagement itself, more than the type of engagement, that seems to matter more in terms of media coverage. US forces did not become involved on the ground in Syria until 2016, although US troops were sent to Iraq starting in 2014 to help fight ISIS (Mazzetti and Apuza 2016; Thompson 2016). However, the number of articles on Syria was already much higher than that on Yemen in 2014, and the peak reporting on the conflict was in 2016, decreasing in 2017, which suggests that the addition of US ground forces—illustrative of greater diversity of involvement of western powers—was not a driving factor in increased coverage. Comparatively, the US has carried out drone strikes in Yemen throughout this time period, with a range of 11–37 strikes in all years except for 2017, when it carried out 127. However, this dramatic change in the number of drone strikes only has a small correlating bump in coverage on Yemen.

While the media can raise global awareness of humanitarian crises, they also influence which crises receive attention, how much attention is paid to those events, and which ones get ignored. According to Hawkins (2001), media attention to some crises is not necessarily in proportion to humanitarian need. Nevertheless, such coverage of a particular situation can result in audiences putting pressure on their governments to intervene because they perceive that the human cost of inaction would be too high, even if in reality that is not necessarily the case. Additionally, coverage of one crisis can come at the expense of others, which is “particularly problematic when the humanitarian situation in conflicts that are not covered is often much worse than that in conflicts that are” (Hawkins 2001, n.p.).

The conflicts in Syria and Yemen illustrate the way in which some humanitarian crises receive much more attention than others, while at the same time challenging the basic assumption underlying the CNN effect, that media coverage can influence policy decisions for humanitarian purposes. Whether in fact the “CNN effect” has “died” in Syria and Yemen or not due to the overwhelming amount of information available in this era, questions of reliability, and a general sense of hopelessness (Friedman

2018) is not clear, but it is possible that the CNN effect has less of an influence on foreign policy decisions than presumed, especially since external interventions are not justified on humanitarian grounds alone. Moreover, states have been and continue to be intervening in Syria, but those interventions have not been aimed at protecting civilians or shortening the conflict. Instead, the data suggests that great power involvement and national security concerns drive media coverage.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research highlights several policy-relevant questions of particular concern for the humanitarian community that warrant further research. First, it underscores the political nature of humanitarianism and the fact that humanitarian suffering is seen as more pressing when linked to national security concerns. The analysis shows that violations of international law and IHL and humanitarian concerns, while mentioned in articles on both conflicts, were not highlighted to the same extent as the use of force, whether that force was legal, legally questionable, or illegal under international law. Second, the fact that the humanitarian crisis is mentioned at about the same rate in articles on both Yemen and Syria further emphasizes that it is not the degree of need that differentiates between coverage of the conflicts, even though the absolute numbers of Syrians affected by the conflict are greater, but rather, structural inequalities and great power involvement, which determine to a great extent how much airtime each conflict receives. Unfortunately, this means that humanitarian actors should think strategically about how to best frame humanitarian crises in terms of national interests, a daunting task in an era of multiple and competing national interests and the immense economic power of arms-producing corporations relative to humanitarian organizations.

The lack of coverage of Yemen is not simply a data point, but has real-world implications. For example, refugees fleeing states in Africa have arrived on the shores of Yemen unaware of the violence and humanitarian crisis the country is experiencing. Such tragedies only further underscore the structural inequalities in the world system that disadvantage countries like Yemen, which are economically poor, politically marginalized, and racially “other” to the western powers. Given that these structural inequalities further compound disadvantages faced by Yemen due to the fact that it is not of primary concern to the P5, what should the humanitarian community do? One option is to encourage greater awareness-raising events

through social media and alternative news sources given the lack of coverage of “peripheral” issues on mainstream media outlets. Relatedly, simply being aware of the greater need to inform, educate, and advertise the need in more peripheral countries can help humanitarian organizations better allocate resources when determining public relations budgets. Additionally, rather than writing articles drawing attention to the fact that the public is unaware of the Yemen conflict, and to circumvent Saudi- and rebel-induced information blackout, traditional media can do more to partner with the NGOs operating in Yemen to raise the profile of the conflict. NGOs, for their part, can be more proactive about bearing witness to the events in Yemen by releasing stories of what they have observed. Another, longer-term option is to continue to lobby for reform of the UN system to greater democratize the international body, as well as promote awareness of diplomatic and nonviolent alternatives to armed conflict and military might. However, such structural solutions require a great deal of political will and popular mobilization, which are unlikely to occur in the near future.

Although this project focuses specifically on the coverage related to Syria and Yemen, there are countless other examples of conflicts around the world where civilian suffering is underreported. To be explicitly clear, this project is not calling for armed intervention in areas of humanitarian need, but rather underscoring the lack of even attention to areas of severe need. Absent sustained engagement to address the political, security, economic, and social needs of the parties involved, such conflicts will continue. As the Syrian conflict makes abundantly clear, external intervention does not necessarily shorten the lifespan of a conflict or reduce human suffering. However, the presence of citizen journalism and the increased availability of alternative news sources provide possible mechanisms for bypassing the focus on the use of force and great power interests, and for working to change the “if it bleeds, it leads” focus of mainstream media. Future research to better explore the questions raised here may help global citizens better engage with addressing the world’s many humanitarian crises.

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