

Forum: The Economic and Social Council
Issue: The question of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen
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Introduction

Located in the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia, the country of Yemen has been a center of substantial conflict ever since the 2011 Arab Spring protests, a series of anti-government protests in the Middle east and North Africa. After the toppling of longstanding authoritarian leader Ali Abdullah Saleh and the transfer of power to vice president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, the region expected political stability and economic growth. However, in the years that followed, unsuccessful governance coupled with corruption, food insecurity, and political division, rendered the country more vulnerable than ever before. Taking advantage of such weakness, the Houthi rebel movement powered by Shia Muslims seized of the country's capital, marking the beginning of a devastating war.

Conflicts escalated in March of 2015 when Saudi Arabia led a coalition of a dozen states to counter the growing Houthi influence. Since then, the situation has developed into a proxy war with numerous parties involved, creating a stalemate that has resulted in an appalling humanitarian crisis. As of 2020, more than 3.6 million people have been displaced, 24 million people are in need of humanitarian aid (80% of the population) and more than 100,000 have died. Conditions have rapidly deteriorated, with prolonged warfare causing extreme shortages in basic necessities such as food, water, and sanitation in what is already the poorest country in the region. Further repercussions include the deadliest cholera epidemic in human history with over a million cases since 2017, and acute malnutrition that threatens approximately 2 million children under five years of age. In recent months, the COVID-19 pandemic has also added to the crisis. With a collapsing health care system, war-induced chaos and extremely low standard of living, experts warn that the virus will spread quicker, wider and deadlier than ever seen before. What's most alarming is the possibility of severe aid deprivation in the coming months as the United Nations fails to raise the funds needed. As Ruper Colville, UN Human rights spokesperson states, "30 of the 41 aid programs are expected to close without additional funds", leaving Yemen to fend for itself.

Definition of Key Terms

Humanitarian assistance

Refers to the material and logistical assistance of those in need to alleviate suffering and protect human rights during and after man made or natural crisis. The guiding principles of assistance as dictated by the United Nations (UN) are humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Methods of aid include providing essential supplies, provide shelter, or volunteer work. Humanitarian assistance is not to be confused with humanitarian intervention, which is a state's use of military force against another state with the intention of ending violations.

Proxy war

An indirect conflict between two or more states in which the war is fought on a third country's soil. In the Yemeni Civil War, Saudi Arabia and Iran (suspected) are fighting a proxy war for regional dominance in the Middle East. Supporting different parties within the internal conflict, these nations send military supplies, technical assistance and funding to the Hadi regime and Houthi Rebels.

Cholera

A bacterial infection of the small intestine caused by the ingestion of food or water. It is fatal if treatment is not given immediately, with the main symptoms being severe diarrhea and dehydration. Populations in countries with poor health, sanitation and inaccessible clean water are especially prone to cholera.

War Crime

An act constituting a serious violation of the laws of war during an international armed conflict. The concept originates from the early 20th century when the International Humanitarian Law and the Rome Statute Article 8 were established by the Geneva conventions and International Criminal court. War crimes include torture, willful killing, attacking civilians and more. This is important to the Yemeni civil war as countries such as the United States and Saudi Arabia have been investigated for committing numerous war crimes.

Background Information

Historical Context

Although Yemen has had centuries of history, the modern-day Yemeni state was formed in 1990 through the unification of the North Yemeni Arab Republic backed by Saudi and the United States, and the South People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) backed by the USSR. Following the unification, Ali Abdullah Saleh, the military officer who ruled the north since 1978, became the first president. The country faced many problems in the coming years as religious differences, culture, and experience with colonialism polarized the North and South. Domestically, southern separatists, Al-Qaeda, and related insurgent groups captured territories and protested for greater autonomy. Houthi rebels emerging from Zaydi Shiites in Northern Yemen also rose up against Saleh six times between 2004 and 2010 for alleged marginalization. Internationally, Saleh was depicted as an oppressive ruler who ran a corrupt and autocratic government. With the wave of protests brought by Arab Springs in 2011, Saleh stepped out of power in 2012 under escalating pressures and immunity assurances. Vice president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi assumed an interim presidency and began working on the UN National Dialogue Conference (NDC) to form an agreeable constitution. In 2013, a map was made splitting Yemen into distinct regions. This partition was met with strong resistance from multiple factions as it failed to consider socioeconomic and regional stances. Finally, in 2014, the Houthis took advantage of the political unrest and discontent, taking control over Sa'da and other parts of Northern Yemen. By September, they had joined forces with president Saleh and took over the capital Sana'a. Hadi fled the country in early 2015.

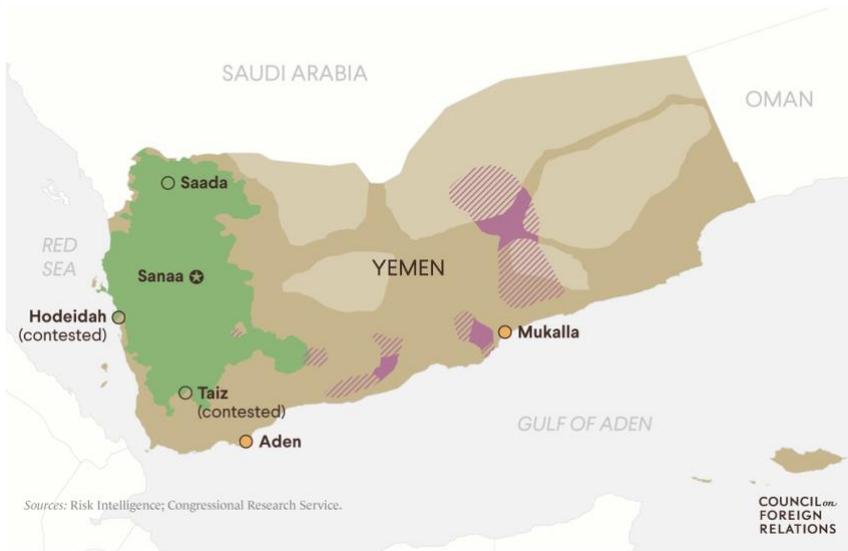
The Civil War

Following the seizure of power by the Houthi government, many countries in the middle east feared a rise in power of a group suspected to be backed by Iran. Thus, on March 25, 2015, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) launched a massive coalition of gulf states to support the Hadi regime. The situation had involved into a proxy war with Saudi backing the Hadi government, and Iran backing the Houthis, beginning a bloody fight for hegemony in the middle east. Various groups have inserted themselves into the chaos, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIL), and dozens of smaller armed groups. On an international scale, the proxy war has extended to become a conflict of power between the United States backing the Hadi government and Russia backing the Houthis, fueling conflict even further. In December of 2017, the Houthis killed their ally Saleh after attempts for peace talks, fueling further division without the insurgent group. Despite years of UN-backed peace talks, little progress has been made in one of the most complex wars in the world.

Yemen's Front Lines

Territorial control and influence as of February 2020

● Government control
 ● Government influence
 ● Southern Transitional Council control
● Houthi control
 ● Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) control
▨ AQAP influence



Humanitarian crisis

Five years of armed conflict in Yemen has had devastating humanitarian impacts, both directly through civilians' casualties and infrastructure destruction, and indirectly through the propagation of famine, cholera, COVID-19 and horrendous living conditions. According to the Human Rights Watch, there have been a total of 20,100 documented airstrikes from the Saudi coalition, an average of 12 per day. The Houthi forces have also fired artillery and ballistic missiles indiscriminately into civilian regions, planted landmines across Yemen, and recruited children into their army. The direct civilian casualties have been estimated to be 12,000 from direct warfare and over 100,000 in total (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)). Both the Saudi coalition and Houthi forces have also been documented to have harassed, attacked and detained journalists and activists, with dozens of cases of forced disappearance and torture. Cases of sexual violence against women have also increased a record breaking 63% since the start of the conflict.

Yet, it is the indirect repercussions of the war that have made this the worst crisis in the world. Prolonged warfare has greatly damaged the function of the economy, destroyed homes, and led to nearly 80% of the population needing humanitarian aid. 3.6 million people have fled their homes, at least 70% lack basic access food, safe water and adequate healthcare and 85,000 have died from cholera. The cause of this is the Houthis confiscation of supplies and humanitarian aid from civilians and the coalition's imposition of both naval and aerial blockades. Indirect impacts of the war also include destroyed infrastructure which has left 7.8 million children unable to access education, 2.4 million children

malnourished and a 50% loss of the country's health care systems. Recently, with the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic, Yemen has been pushed further into a sea of drowning issues.



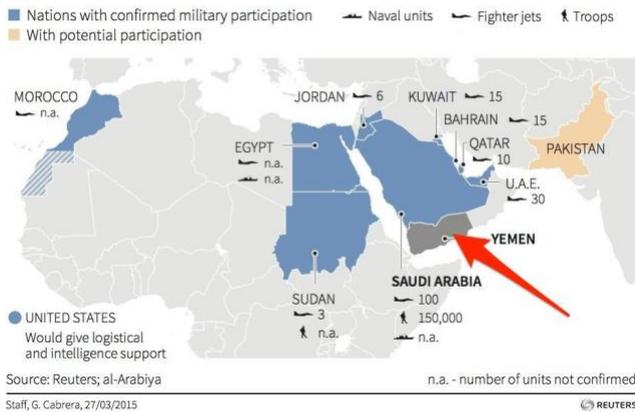
Caption #2: A picture detailing the aftermath of a Saudi Coalition air strike on civilian regions

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has played a significant role in the Yemen crisis, acting as the largest supporter of the Hadi government. On March 2015, it launched a coalition with nine countries from West Asia and North Africa in response to calls from president Hadi. Threatened by the growing Houthi movement and its close relation to Iran, Saudi began a campaign including aerial bombings, naval blockades, and ground forces. Backed with military and technical assistance from the United States and United Kingdom, the aerial strikes have had a devastating humanitarian impact on Yemen. According to the Human rights watch, the coalition has bombed various civilian regions including hospitals, school buses, markets, mosques and more. There have also been 90 unlawful airstrikes documented, making up a significant portion of the 20,000 civilian casualties. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also accused the coalition as the largest contributor of direct civilian casualties, with its acts violating the international laws and punishable as war crimes. In juxtaposition, Saudi Arabia has claimed on many occasions that they have the best intentions and wish to end the war in the region.

Saudi-led coalition against Yemeni rebels



Caption #3: Map detailing the military participation of countries in the Saudi Coalition

United States

The United States has had significant influence on the Yemen crisis, using their political and military power to achieve their own objectives in the region. Backing their ally Saudi Arabia, the US has given full support to a series of relentless air strikes without regard for civilian harm or infrastructural destruction. According to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR)'s Geneva report in 2019, the United States is likely complicit for war crimes in Yemen. In fact, documented sale of dangerous military equipment such as cluster munitions as well as the refueling of fighter planes have violated international laws of sovereignty and war on many accounts. The US has also prompted bombings to target their enemy Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, acting on their own political interests. Aside from the military influence, the US has also exerted their political influence, vetoing a series of resolutions in the UN Security Council on Yemen and Saudi Arabia, stunting the progress towards peace.

Iran

Iran has been suspected of supporting the Houthi Rebels ever since the start of the movement, including the provision of advanced military equipment, training and financial support. As one of the key powers in the middle east, it has been theorized that Iran joined the proxy war in hopes of undermining the influence of Saudi Arabia and gain more dominance in the region. Evidence of Iranian influence in Yemen has been documented from as early as 2011, with the suspicion that they may have even prompted the current civil war. However, it is important to note that there has been no definitive evidence of Iran's engagement in a proxy war against Saudi Arabia.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
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May 1990	Unification of north and south Yemen forms a single state under president Ali Abdullah Saleh.
June 2004-2007	Hundreds die in battle with a Shia Insurgency group led by Hussein al-Houthi in the North, six with Saleh and one with Saudi Arabia.
September 2008	Al Qaeda attacks the US embassy and kills 12 people.
August 2009	The Yemeni army launches an offensive against the Houthi rebels in the North, displacing tens of thousands through armed conflict.
November 2011	President Saleh steps down from presidency and hands power over to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi after months of protests during Arab Springs.
August 2014	Houthi rebels advance south from Saadeh and seize the capital Sanaa in September with help from Saleh.
March 2015	Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of nearly a dozen countries against the Houthi forces in response to President Hadi's requests, aerial bombing and naval blockades are imposed.
October 2016	The cholera epidemic begins in Yemen, cases rise rapidly, and fatalities are high. An estimated 1 person is killed every hour. By June of 2017, casualties are as high as 2,100 and suspected cases are as high as 900,000.
December 2017	Saleh attempts to call for a cease fire and is killed 2 days later, many of his supporters turn against the Houthis.
2018	A military stalemate continues over the port of Hodeidah which controls Yemen's commercial and aid reports, critical to feeding 30 million people. The first ceasefire is created under the The Stockholm Hodeidah truce, facilitating troop withdrawal and prisoner swaps.
2019	Little action has been taken on the truth due to great mistrust between the Houthis who control the Hodeidah port and the Saudi coalition massed on its

outskirts. Violence ensues in other parts of Yemen and the humanitarian crisis remains unresolved.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Agreement on the City of Hodeidah and Ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Isa, January 2019 (**UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement**)
 - *A UN sponsored treaty which was the first truce since the start of the war, and details a ceasefire, redeployment of troops, UN facilitation and more.*
- Resolution 2402, The situation in the Middle East, 26 February 2018 (**S/RES/2402**)
 - *This resolution renewed the sanction, travel bans and arms embargo on Yemen, calling upon parties in the country to comply with international laws and human rights laws*
- Resolution 2505 and Resolution 2534, extended the mandate of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement until 15 July 2021 (**S/RES/2505**), (**S/RES/2534**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Humanitarian assistance

One of the most direct forms of alleviation for the Yemen crisis has been in the form of humanitarian assistance. The United Nations and its partners have actively partaken in lifesaving assistance, civilian protection and the provision of resources ever since 2015. As the greatest contributor of aid, the UN is helping nearly 80% of the country's population with food, cholera, and healthcare. For example, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) distributed 100,000 metric tons of food commodities in more than 5,000 locations, reaching more than 8 million Yemenis each month. Similarly, The World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) have reached more than 300,000 people with cholera vaccine. Aside from the provision of basic necessities and disease combat, the UN has also worked to produce sexual and reproductive health services to 250,000 girls and women. Countries around the world have also echoed the contributions by the UN, with countries involved in the crisis raising 2.6 billion dollars to alleviate the humanitarian impact. Top contributors included Saudi Arabia, the UAE, UK and the US. However, organizations such as Oxfam and the International Rescue Committee have criticized the act as paradoxical, highlighting the act of trying to solve what they have created. Ultimately, as the war prolongs, any form of assistance will merely mitigate the situation at its

surface. Without targeting the root of the crisis as the war itself, it is unfeasible to assume that humanitarian aid will have a lasting impact.

Peace talks

Although various attempts have been made for peace talks, negotiations and treaties, little success has been found throughout the last 5 years. Despite UN facilitation in the region and active efforts at peace, the complex relationships in the proxy war have made progress difficult. One such reason has been the relation between the United States and Saudi Arabia, leading to stagnated progress in the UN Security Council. Countless times, the United States and United Kingdom have vetoed important resolutions about war crime investigations and decisive action out of self-interest. Since Saudi Arabia is a key ally in the middle east to counter terrorism and provide oil, major powers have shielded the nation from any investigations. Not only this, the dozens of different parties within the Yemeni civil war make a perfect solution nearly impossible to achieve. Aside from the Houthis and Hadi regime, there are also armed groups such as the Southern separatists, AQAP and ISIL, all of whom threaten the intricate balance required for peace.

Possible Solutions

In order to resolve the Yemen humanitarian crisis, the solution must be multifaceted, taking into account both direct and indirect repercussions of the war. Evidently, the top priority must be to end the propagation of the armed conflict through peace talks, negotiations and mediation. As the Yemeni crisis is a proxy war, it is important that all parties take decisive measures to end all factors causing war. In a joint statement of five international aid agencies, they stated “We desperately need commitments from some of the very same countries present today to allow unconditional access for humanitarian assistance and commercial imports to all parts of the country. We want to hear world leaders promise to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, and to hold to account those who disregard international law.” Not only this, those selling arms to warring parties in Yemen must also stop these deals and implement strong accountability mechanisms. The United States cannot continue to stand in the corner, profiting off this war as thousands die overseas. The flow of arms must stop for any progress to be made and political negotiations must include all parties.

Partition

One creative and controversial solution is the idea of partitioning Yemen into two distinct parts. This solution may be viable for a few reasons. First, the demographic reality of the region. Due to significant differences in beliefs, societal structure, and religion between the North and South, Yemen has never been able to form a pluralistic society. The origin of all conflict arises from a desire for independence, which can be effectively resolved by a well-designed partition. Another reason resides in

the interests of Saudi Arabia and Iran. By dividing the nation, both countries would be able to regain diplomatic contact and stop the aerial campaigns and blockades. This also resolves the issue of extremist groups in the region as clearly defined areas will minimize political instability. One must exercise caution, however, in the implementation of such a solution as division may cause long term polarization. Furthermore, it is not guaranteed that a division would ease the desire of different parties to expand and achieve greater dominance. There is also the concern that a division may bring new socio-economic issues with the potential division of families, industry and communities.

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Appendix or Appendices

Appendix I - UN Treaties and Hodeidah Agreement

[Hodeidah Agreement](#)
[Resolution 2534](#)
[Resolution 2505](#)

Appendix II – In depth look into humanitarian crisis

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