

The Yemen Crisis

Introduction

The seven-year-old conflict in Yemen is between the internationally recognized government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and Houthi rebels supported by Iran. The country's humanitarian crisis is said to be among the worst in the world, due to widespread hunger, disease, and attacks on civilians. As the UN-backed, two-party peace process has stalled, some experts have suggested that better representing the many parties involved in the conflict would yield better results.

History

The Yemeni Crisis began with the 2011-12 revolution against President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had led Yemen for more than three decades (33 years). After Saleh left office in early 2012 as part of a mediated agreement between the Yemeni government and opposition groups, the government led by Saleh's former vice president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, struggled to unite the fractious political landscape of the country and fend off threats both from Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and from Houthi militants that had been waging a protracted insurgency in the north for years. In September 2014, the Houthi insurgency transformed into a full-blown civil war as Houthi fighters swept into the capital of Sana'a and forced Hadi to negotiate a "unity government" with other political factions. The rebels continued to apply pressure on the weakened government until, after his presidential palace and private residence came under attack from the militant group, Hadi resigned along with his ministers in January 2015. The following month, the Houthis declared themselves in control of the government, dissolving Parliament and installing an interim Revolutionary Committee led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a cousin of Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. Hadi escaped to Aden, where he declared that he remains Yemen's legitimate president, proclaimed the country's temporary capital, and called on loyal government officials and members of the military to rally to him. On 27 March 2015, the BBC reported that Hadi had "fled rebel forces in the city of Aden" and subsequently "arrived in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh" as "Saudi authorities began airstrikes in Yemen". Since 2017 the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) has also fought against the government.

Stakeholders

1. Houthi Rebel Forces
2. Iran (Houthi supporter)
3. Russia (Houthi supporter)
4. Saudi Arabia (supporter of the government)
5. United Arab Emirates (military operations against Houthis)

6. Turkey (supporter of the government)
7. Iraq
8. United States of America (supporter the government)

Geographical Importance

Strategically located on the Bab al-Mandab strait, Yemen has long been at the center of regional geopolitics. The strait separates Yemen and Djibouti, and Asia from Africa, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Given its distinguished location, it is unsurprising that Yemen is key to China's "Belt and Road" initiative, also known as the "New Silk Road." As global attention is directed towards the city of Marib, the center of a grinding war since February 7 between the Houthis and forces backed by Yemen's internationally recognized government, the government forces have tried to thin Houthi forces by engaging them in another battle in Taiz. The Popular Mobilization forces, and other formations of the Islah party supported by Turkey and Qatar, focused their attack on the west of Taiz province, towards the city of Macha and Bab al-Mandab, where there is a small Houthi presence, and a large corps of Emirati-backed forces. These military moves coincided with a direct request made by Sheikh Hamid al-Ahmar, the prominent tribal and Islah party leader, for a Turkish military intervention in Yemen, arguing that it is the only way to restore the legitimate government to power. This seemingly follows the critical role of Turkish intervention in Libya.

Political Instability

Yemen's war was the consequence of a series of events that succeeded one after the other. Violence escalated when citizens grew massively discontent with the political instability of Yemen's transitional government. Once violence became the norm, parties to the dispute quickly polarized, and as violence ramped up, polarization accelerated. This violence intensified due to Yemen's fragile transitional government led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and was further debilitated when Houthi rebels captured Sanaa, forcing the Hadi government to resign. There is widespread instability due to the frequent change in government and the war between the numerous factions within the region. A large number of lives have been lost due to this very infighting. A lot of land has also lost its fertility and is now barren due to constant violence. After civil war broke out, the government was deemed to be incapable of dealing with the situation on their own. Saudi-Arabia, United Arab Emirates and many other countries began intervention in the region by initiating numerous military operations within the region against the rebel groups. Even though the air strikes and attacks were aimed at rebel groups such as the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, many civilian casualties were also reported as a result. One of the most common regional problems are the Zaydis in the north and the Al-Houthi rebellion which has resulted in numerous instances of outbreaks of violence between the Sunnis and the Shia Houthis. A blockade was also put in place by the Saudi government on the docks of the country

where imports and exports could be carried out. The intent behind this was to limit Al-Qaeda activity within the region, however, this also resulted in humanitarian aid not being allowed within the region. In a war-ridden country, the situation worsened as the civilians now could not even receive medical or humanitarian aid to help with the existing water and food crises.

Human Cost

The UN estimated that by the end of 2021, the conflict in Yemen would have caused over 377,000 deaths, with 60% of them the result of hunger, lack of healthcare and unsafe water. It says more than 10,200 children are known to have been killed or wounded as a direct result of the fighting. Yemen has also suffered from one of the largest cholera outbreaks ever recorded, with 2.5 million suspected cases and about 4,000 related deaths since 2016. War in the region has led to about 3.7 million people homeless and displaced. This has led to insecurity regarding housing and a general deterioration in people's physical, as well as mental health.

Financial Situation

Economic conditions continue to deteriorate, and the acute humanitarian crisis persists. The bifurcation of economic institutions by conflicting parties and uncoordinated policy decisions have further compounded the socio-economic crisis stemming from active conflict, now in its seventh year. Donor fatigue, soaring global commodity prices, and adverse climate conditions will continue to pose a serious threat to the already dire socio-economic conditions. Non-oil economic activity continues to suffer from hostilities, interruption of basic services (electricity, telecommunications), and acute shortages of inputs, which were compounded by double taxation and distortions created by uncoordinated policy decisions by the two authorities. The war in Ukraine triggered further increases in commodity prices, heightening threats to Yemen's already dire food access and socio-economic conditions. Economic and social prospects in 2022 and beyond are highly uncertain and hinge critically on a resolution of the conflict and the overall security conditions. In this context, the flare-up of conflict, coupled with surging international oil prices, would be detrimental to the private sector's operational environment. On the upside, robust growth in GCC countries driven by rising global energy prices may boost remittance flows to Yemen. Revenue generation in Yemen as a whole will continue to be deeply challenged by an extremely low tax base.

Past UN Resolutions

1. United Nations Security Council resolution 931:

- Called for an immediate cessation of the shelling in the city of Aden,

- Concern was expressed for the deteriorating situation in Yemen, in particular the humanitarian situation and at the provision of arms and other materiel,
- Ceasefire was demanded from both parties, the government as well as the Houthi rebels,
- Called for heavy weapons to be moved out of range of the city keeping in mind the military assault on Aden,
- Negotiations to be held with both parties to establish a mechanism that would monitor and help to prevent violations of the ceasefire,
- Requested to use all resources to help those affected by the conflict and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid.

2. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2201:

- Demands that the Houthis immediately and unconditionally withdraw their forces from government institutions, including in the capital Sana'a.
- Houthis were required to normalize the security situation in the capital and other provinces, and relinquish government and security institutions as well as safely release President Hadi, Prime Minister Bahah, members of the Cabinet and all individuals under house arrest or arbitrarily detained.
- Militant groups such as the Houthi rebels were to refrain from further unilateral actions that could undermine the political transition and the security of Yemen.
- Demanded that all parties in Yemen cease all armed hostilities against the people and the legitimate authorities of Yemen as well as relinquish the arms seized from Yemen's military and security institutions, in accordance with the Peace and National Partnership Agreement and its security annex.

3. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216:

- Demanded that all Yemeni parties, in particular the Houthis, fully refrain from unilateral actions that could undermine the political transition in Yemen.

- Demanded that the Houthis immediately and unconditionally end the use of violence and withdraw their forces from all areas they have seized, including the capital Sana'a.
- Houthis were required to relinquish all arms seized from military and security institutions, including missile systems and to refrain from any provocation or threats to neighboring states, including through acquiring surface-surface missiles, and stockpiling weapons in any bordering territory of a neighboring state.
- Demanded Houthis safely release Major-General Mahmoud al-Subaihi, the Minister of Defence of Yemen, all political prisoners, and all individuals under house arrest or arbitrarily detained.
- Called on the Houthis to end the recruitment and use of children, as well as release all children from their ranks.

Future Prospects

Considering the widespread issues in the region, partition is a widely considered solution to the problem. The geostrategic environment of the region also encourages Yemen's partition. The resolution of Yemen's conflict would provide an opportunity for rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, thus minimizing regional instability. Also, as North Yemen would be endorsed by the international community as a separate state under Houthi rule, diplomatic contacts between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis could be initiated. This would have two positive outcomes. One is the protection of the Saudi border, and high-profile installations like airports and oil refineries, from Houthi attacks. The second is the permanent halt of Saudi airstrikes, which have killed thousands. Also, the blockade would be removed and international aid would soon follow. Thus, both domestically and regionally, the partition of Yemen could prove to be the key step towards peace in an otherwise volatile region.