The Arab League

The Situation in Yemen

Research Report

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"let us sing songs of freedom together"

Forum: The Arab League

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Introduction

Widely known as the worst active humanitarian crisis in the world, Yemen is struggling with the aftermath of a brutal, nine-year long civil war. Having started in 2014, said conflict continues to endanger the livelihood of an estimated 25 million civilians, or roughly 74% of the current Yemeni population. Yet the situation, as drastic as it is, has come to a standstill, due to UN-brokered ceasefires and other temporary peace agreements. International inaction to resolve or address the enormities committed during the Yemeni civil war is only exacerbating the already terrible situation, one that is creating an inhospitable and destitute living standard for the innocent civilians affected by the war.

Yemen is contingent on the rest of the world to start a paradigm shift in regards to the situation, and is in desperate need for solutions, aid, and cooperation. Yet we still see the reputation and pride of certain countries be prioritised over brokering peace treaties for the region, mainly in relation to the proxy war between the United States of America and Iran. The committee should focus on coming up with creative solutions to provide the necessary humanitarian aid to the civilians caught up in the crossfire between the warring parties, whilst simultaneously addressing the relations between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States of America, so as to diffuse all possible political tensions.

Definition of Key Terms

The Houthis

The Houthi Movement is an Islamist political organisation that arose in the 1990s in Northern Yemen. It follows the ideologies of Zaidism, a part of the Islamic religion. They emerged to oppose the Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, accusing him of corruption and criticising him for having relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States of America.

Proxy War

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a proxy war as “a war fought between groups or smaller countries that each represent the interests of other larger powers, and may have help and support from these.” In this situation, a proxy war between the United States and Iran is exhibited through the different parties in Yemen, which is discussed further below.

Yemeni Peace Process

The Yemeni Peace Process refers to proposals and negotiations to mitigate the crisis in Yemen by arranging a transfer of power within the country and later on organising cease-fires during the civil war. Initially, it was unsuccessful, but it did result in holding new elections in 2012, which allowed for the appointment of President Hadi.

Ceasefire

A ceasefire is an agreement, usually between two armies or countries at war, to stop fighting in order to allow discussions about peace.

Civil War

Stanford University defines a civil war as "a violent conflict between organised groups within a country that are fighting over control of the government, one side's separatist goals, or some divisive government policy." The Yemeni Civil War is between the Houthi Movement and the Hadi government, as both claim to be the official government of Yemen.

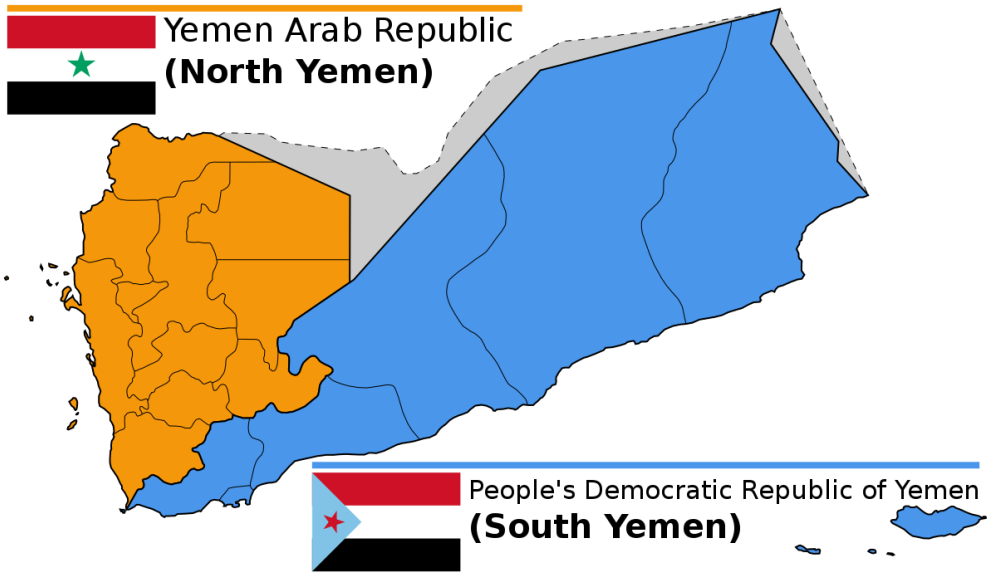
Islamist

Often incorrectly interpreted as someone who follows the religion of Islam, the term Islamist refers to a person or group that believes political systems should be based on the teachings of Islam. In extreme cases, Fundamentalist Islamists can use violence to portray these ideologies, although violence is not a requirement for something to be Islamist.

General Overview

The History: 1990 - 2014

The reunification of the Yemen Arab Republic (Northern Yemen) and the People's democratic republic of Yemen (Southern Yemen) in 1990 was the watershed that set the conflict into motion. The unity (occurred because it was) was beneficial to both regions in relation to oil, tourism, power, and government management. The former president of North Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, became president of the newly formed Republic of Yemen, while his Vice President, Ali Salem Al Beidh represented Southern Yemen. Meanwhile, the religious group from Southern Yemen, the Houthis, was also gaining power.



In the 1993,

relations between the President and Vice President of Yemen fell into dissent. Vice President Al Beidh retreated back to Southern Yemen, refusing to work with the President until tensions between them were resolved. Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi then replaced Al Beidh as Vice President. Following more political instability and distrust between the two leaders, a peace treaty was ratified in 1994, to no avail. Just three months later, a civil war broke out. The fighting mostly took place in Southern Yemen, despite seemingly having the upper hand with access to naval forces and superior air forces. On May 21st of the same year, the Southern leaders seceded and declared the formation of the Yemeni Democratic Republic, but it did not receive any international recognition. These separatists were given funding and support from Saudi Arabia, which was already against President Saleh and his alliance with Iraq and Saddam Hussein. The war lasted just two months, and in early July, the President's military took control of the former capital of Southern Yemen, Aden, and Al Beidh, and his allies fled to Oman. To gain control and reestablish peace in the country, Saleh dismantled the South's military and in 2000, Saleh established borders between Yemen and Saudi Arabia with the Treaty of Jeddah.

After establishing the borders between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, The Houthis rose to power again, beginning a rebellion against President Saleh in 2004. The fighting continued until The Houthis leader, Hussein Badreddin Al Houthi, was killed in late 2004. In 2005, the fighting surged, this time under the control of Al Houthi's brother, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. After hundreds of people died, the fighting ended with an agreement between both sides and the surrender of the Houthis' military leader. This pattern continued throughout the following four years until August 2009, when the Yemeni Military launched Operation Scorched Earth to eradicate the Houthis permanently. Fighting continued, this time between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, and in 2010, both sides requested another ceasefire.

In 2011, protests began, calling for the resignation of President Saleh. At this point, he had been president for 33 years. Supporters of Saleh retaliated with violence and left over 200 people dead. However, in November 2011, he agreed to have Vice President Hadi sworn in as president in his place. In February 2012, Hadi was sworn in as president for two years.

The Civil War: 2014 - Present

Hadi's presidential work ended with a plan proposed by his panel, which proposed a political transition that would split the country into six regions united as one federation. This plan was approved in February 2014, and was a part of a greater process, known as the Yemeni Peace Process, which worked with the intentions of pacifying the Yemeni crisis. Yet still, by August of the same year, anti-government protests were ramping up due to Hadi's controversial decisions to increase oil subsidies, which led to Hadi's dissolution of the cabinet. The ensuing two months saw the Houthi rebels take control of the capital city of Sana'a, with other violent clashes between the rebels and governmental security forces taking place until the new year.

In January 2015, Hadi was forced to resign from his position as president, despite the attempts at reconciliation by the Hadi government prior to his resignation. These attempts included draft constitutions and power-sharing agreements, which the Houthis rejected. With the government collapsed, the Houthis took control to set up their own government, which was immediately condemned by the United Nations. Following this failed attempt at a junta, Hadi fled to the southern port town of Aden, where he then renounced his resignation and claimed the Houthi movement were staging a "coup". The following March marked the first ever major attacks, which were two suicide

bombings that happened at Shia mosques in Sana'a. These bombings came along with the initiation of an offensive militia created by the Houthi movement to retaliate against government forces that opposed their movement.

The following nine years included brutal clashes of power, with unprecedented numbers of casualties from both sides of the conflict. Many innocent civilians were also harmed by the ongoing conflicts, leading to a total estimate of 377,000 deaths, 60% of which were due to food insecurity and a lack of accessible medical attention. Throughout the course of the civil war, both sides are reported to have violated international human rights laws, which only further complicates the situation. Arguably, the situation reached its worst in late 2021- early 2022, with the ongoing attacks on Marib, which was the last stronghold for Yemen's recognised government, along with the retraction of food aid in Yemen due to a lack of international funding. Moreover, attacks on national telecom facilities led to a four-day blackout across the country. Finally, Saudi Arabia announced that all of their military operations in Yemen would be ending by March 30th 2022. This cessation announcement was another watershed, one that allowed for the UN to broker a two-month long truce between the feuding parties; a significant step in the right direction.

By April 2022, a six month ceasefire was brokered by the UN, signifying that both parties were struggling with their military supplies and power. Although the ceasefire expired in October of the same year, and had not been renewed, no significant or high-calibre fighting has been reported since, which marks the generally peaceful status of the region. Further resolutions to the issue were brokered by China and Iraq in March 2023, to resume diplomatic and economic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and also by Oman in April 2023, to try finding a middle ground of peace, as well as a major prisoner swap. With resumed diplomatic relations between the two major parties, peace talks that lead towards a more permanent ceasefire and definitive end to the war are expected to come in following months.

A final note should be made that the civil war in Yemen could also be considered a proxy war between the United States of America and Iran. The two countries have an infamous history of dissension and fighting, which has also exacerbated many conflicts within the Middle East over the past century. Importantly, the United States is in support of the recognised Yemeni government, formerly the Hadi government, along with Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and France. In opposition, Iran supports the Houthi movement, due to similar religio-political beliefs. Due to this, the situation should be dealt with extra care, so as to not further superfluously fuel the proxy conflict between Iran and the United States.

Major Parties Involved

The Houthi Movement

As mentioned earlier, the Houthi Movement is an Islamist group originating from North Yemen, which rose in power due to their anti-governmental ideologies and subsequent protests. They are majorly involved in the issue at hand, as they are one of the two warring parties, the other being the Hadi government. The Houthis fought against the Saudi Arabian-backed government, and took a stance against corruption and embezzlement due to its detrimental effects on the economic affairs of Yemen. It is important to note that the Houthi movement is strongly supported by the Iranian government, and could arguably be a pawn in the aforementioned proxy war.

Iran

Iran, formerly known as Persia, is a country located across the Arabian Peninsula from Yemen. It is not a member of the Arab League, mainly due to its ethnocultural, linguistic, and religious differences from the rest of the Middle East. In regards to the issue at hand, Iran is known to have involved itself in many proxy wars against Saudi Arabia, including civil wars in the neighbouring states of Syria, or more relevantly, Yemen. Although Iranian affairs in Yemen are sometimes clandestine, the country is still a relevant party when questioning the route to resolution for the situation. It should also be noted that Iran has been accused of involving itself in the Yemeni conflict with the intention of continuing its long term proxy war with the United States of America.

Saudi Arabia

With a GDP of 1.732 trillion USD, Saudi Arabia is considered the richest country in the MENA region, giving the country a lot of economic and political power with its neighbouring countries. Regarding the question of Yemen, Saudi Arabia has been feuding with Iran for many years, which has led to their conflict spreading to other countries, such as the aforementioned Syria and now Yemen. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and the United States of America have had a strategic partnership for over eight decades, making the two sides of the proxy war be Saudi Arabia and the United States, versus Iran (represented by the Houthis). During the civil war, Saudi Arabia has played a major role in defending the official Yemeni government against Houthi rebellions, making it a very relevant party.

The United States of America

As mentioned previously, the United States of America has many controversial involvements in the MENA region, mainly with Iran. This has led to many wars and conflicts in the region in the past, of which Yemen is different. Logically speaking, the United States has and will continue to take a diplomatic stance against Iran, and due to their allyship with Saudi Arabia, getting involved in the Yemeni civil-proxy war was an expected decision. The United States provided humanitarian and military aid to the Hadi government and to Saudi Arabia, in order to help fight back against the Iranian-backed Houthis. In doing so, the United States made itself a majorly involved party, regardless of its official extraction of support and aid due to the Biden administration's plan of action.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
September 26, 1962	Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) gains independence
November 30, 1967	The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) is formed
May 22, 1990	North and South Yemen unite
May 4, 1994 - July 7, 1994	A civil war between the Northern and Southern areas of Yemen. It ended when Northern troops invaded the Southern city of Aden
2003-2009	The Houthis (from South Yemen) fight against Yemen's President Saleh in multiple wars, all ending in ceasefires

February 27, 2012	President Saleh resigns as president, Vice President Hadi takes over as interim president
January 2015	Hadi is arrested after attempting to announce a new constitution opposed by the Houthis. Saudi Arabia leads a coalition
September 2016	Citizens of Yemen go hungry as the coalition sets up blockades along the border. Air raids continue to kill civilians, and human rights groups protest against the crisis
December 6, 2018	Peace talks begin in Sweden for the first time in two years. A prisoner swap is organised
April 2022	The warring parties agree upon a 6-month truce which is not renewed, but violence does not continue
March 2023	Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to restore relations, raising hopes of peace in Yemen

Possible Solutions

The first possible solution to the most pressing component of the issue would be to implement an immediate permanent ceasefire for both sides. This truce would ensure that the situation does not escalate back into a violent one during more all-encompassing peace negotiations. Another useful way to relieve the situation would be to request for foreign humanitarian aid, which should then be distributed equitably to all people in need. In doing so, many deaths could be prevented from what would otherwise be food or water insecurity related deaths, as well as deaths associated with diseases. Once these immediate worries are mitigated, the broader situation at hand can be addressed, without the worry of the humanitarian crisis worsening during said long-term solution discussions.

Further solutions to the humanitarian crisis in question should include discussions of getting all affected people to safety, which could be done effectively through emigration. More specifically, requests could be made for countries to open special immigration and refugee offices for displaced persons. In doing so, people who were majorly affected by the conflict could find refuge in safer countries, where they also may be given more opportunities for stability or a better life, whether temporary or permanent. Although a highly debated topic of discussion, migration of this kind has been known to be effective in saving many lives that were endangered in their original situation, thus proving to be a possible solution to the issue at hand, or at least regarding the humanitarian crisis.

A third and more perennial solution for the status quo of Yemen would be to resort back to the pre-unified Yemen, where the Houthis had their own land. Instead of splitting the country into two new official states however, an approach similar to that seen in China or Bosnia could be taken, which is the “One country, two systems” policy. This policy allows for two separate regions to function autonomously under one officially recognised country, as witnessed with China and Hong Kong, or with the three districts in Bosnia. In this case, the full country of Yemen would split back up into its Northern and Southern components, which would each have their own political and economic autonomy. In doing so, the Houthis would get to control their own population and have their own land, in which they can govern themselves and control their own economy. This solution would also

fall in line with the wishes of the Houthi movement, which is for the Yemeni government to share oil profits with them, as well as pay public employees fairly in regions under their control. Having two autonomous entities could prove to be a necessary retreat back to the original set up of Yemen, as separating the two groups might help to diffuse the tensions caused by religious and cultural differences significantly.

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