Research Report

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Forum: *Security Council*
Issue: *The situation in Yemen*

Position: *Chair*

Introduction

Yemen has been facing political difficulties for many years. Now, after the resignation of President Saleh and his successor President Hadi having fled to Saudi Arabia, things look worse than ever.

Definition of Key Terms

Salafists
Are fundamentalists who believe in the old ways of the Islam. "Salafi" comes from 'as-salaf as-saliheen', which refers to the three first Muslim generations. ISIL is a Salafi group.

AQAP
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has staged numerous attacks from its strongholds in the east of the country. In the South-East, AQAP controls a large amount of sea-side towns including an airport at Ar Riyan and a mass of troops at Al Mukalla. AQAP consists of Sunni fighters, making them the mortal enemies of the Houthi.

Shi'ite
is an adherent of the Shia branch of Islam. The Houthi are a Shi'ite group.

The Houthi
A Shia-led (making them the enemies of both AQAP and Sunni Saudi Arabia) group currently controlling vast territories in the Western, more densely populated part of Yemen. The Houthi are said to be backed by former President Saleh, although they took part in the protests and violence that led to increased pressure from Saudi Arabia under which he finally caved and abdicated.

Sunni
A Muslim who adheres to the Sunni branch of Islam, one of the two main branches of Islam, commonly described as orthodox. AQAP is a Sunni group.

The difference between Sunni and Shi'ite is rather complex and goes back to the

first generations of Muslims. In 2014 Professor Cole summed up the differences between Sunni and Shiite this way:
Shiites are more like traditional Catholics in venerating members of the holy family and attending at their shrines. Contemporary Salafi Sunni Islam is more like the militant brand of Protestantism of the late 1500s that denounced intermediaries between God and the individual and actually attacked and destroyed shrines to saints and other holy figures, where pleas for intercession were made.

President Hadi
The president, who is still seeing himself as the rightful ruler of Yemen, even from exile in Saudi Arabia, Mr Hadi's troops control parts of South and most of the Eastern, sparsely populated part of Yemen. However, his territories are divided by AQAP forces that control a huge belt stretching from the North all across to the sea.

General Overview

The main conflict rages between troops loyal to the government led by President Hadi, the Houthi and ex-president Saleh sympathisers, AQAP and ISIL. In the words of the UNHCR: "Since 2011, Yemen's transitional Government has been challenged by political instability and insecurity that have further weakened the country's social and economic situation."[1]
During this conflict, 2100 civilians have already been killed [1]and parts of Yemen have been turned into ISIL and al-Qaeda strongholds and spheres of influence, granting perfect starting points and supply depots for terrorist activity in Arab, African and European states, directly threatening these regions. Therefore, the situation in Yemen is now an international problem which must be addressed immediately.

Furthermore the conflict is often viewed as a proxy war between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran, with the Saudis backing the forces loyal to President Hadi with air strikes and bombardments, being themselves backed by the USA. [2][3]

Like many African and Arab countries, Yemen is divided by the two different interpretations of Islamic teachings which have led to a great many conflicts erupting all over the world. The Shi'ite have been protesting against the Sunni government for a very long time, with the founding of many militant groups and even terrorist organisations eventually leading to open conflict and civil war in 2014.

Despite the violence, Yemen hosts approximately 246,000 registered refugees. Coming especially from Somalia, Ethiopia and Syria, although only 2,000 Syrians had approached the UNHCR by mid-2014.[1] This only worsens the humanitarian

problems the region is struggling with, including a lack of food, fuel and medical supplies and about 21 million people being denied access to life-sustaining goods and basic services.[4]

Major Parties Involved

USA

The United States is already fairly deeply involved in Yemen, regardless of whether the U.S. public has been paying attention. For several years, the United States has been fighting a quiet war there with the cooperation of the Yemeni government, mostly using drones and special forces, against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Many counterterrorism officials see AQAP as a uniquely dangerous terrorist group from a U.S. perspective because it has demonstrated both the will and the capacity to attack U.S. targets. Brookings Senior Fellow Dan Byman wrote a controversial *Foreign Affairs* piece in 2013 arguing that such U.S. counterterrorism efforts were effective. Many other experts, however, including Ibrahim Sharqieh, deputy director of Brookings Doha Center, have questioned whether those efforts have been effective and whether they have rathercontributed to Yemen's instability. The recent collapse of the government under the onslaught of the Houthis (an Iranian-backed Shi'ite militia that also dislikes AQAP) at least suggests they may have a point.

Saudi Arabia

Yemen is located very near, indeed right next to, Saudi Arabia and that matters a great deal. For reasons of history and geography, the Saudis are deeply interested, indeed arguably obsessed, with developments in Yemen. It is simply impossible for them to stand aside while an Iranian-backed militia takes over in Yemen. The Saudi interest engages the United States with Yemen on a level well beyond counterterrorism. Saudi Arabia is far and away America's most important Arab ally left standing. Its critical role in the global energy market as well as its cooperation with the United States in the dual struggle against both Iran and the Islamic State (ISIS) mean that the United States cares deeply about what happens to Saudi Arabia.

Gulf states

The military budget of Gulf states reaches tens of billions per annum. As such, the GCC Peninsula Shield Force might seem to be a viable option for intervention in Yemen. However, it must be noted that Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain are actively contributing to the international coalition against the Islamic State and as such, neither of them seem to be in a position to undertake an extra expedition, be it in Yemen or Syria.

Gulf Cooperation council

If the member-states of GCC can put in place a feasible and operative security strategy, they can easily ward off unwanted Western intervention and simultaneously ensure the stability of an otherwise troubled neighbourhood.

ISIL
A salafi jihadist militant group, the Islamic State recently began further escalating the situation and creating new tensions, with bloody terrorist attacks on civilian sympathisers of all parties involved in the conflict. Most attacks, however, seem to target the Houthi due to their Shia beliefs and apparently which seeks to eclipse AQAP. [2]

Timeline of Events

September 2014	After clashes in the past, Houthi forces have taken control of large parts of Yemen, including its capital in a dramatic change of events. The UN negotiates a peace which leads to the forming of a unified government
January 2015	Unhappy with the constitution, Houthi rebels take up arms once more and clash with national security forces. Open conflict breaks out all over Yemen
February 2015	The Houthi proclaim their own government, being promptly denounced by the Security Council.
March 2015	ISIL enters the conflict with bombing attacks on two mosques, killing 137 Shia worshippers.[8]
June 2015	AQAP leader, Nasser al-Wuhayshi, is killed in a US drone strike in Yemen.
March 25, 2015	A Saudi-led military coalition declares war on the rebel forces.[3]
September 2, 2015	ISIL suicide bomber in a mosque in Sama: 20 people died. [6]UN sources say that the conflict has now killed 2,100 civilians with 21 million people being deprived of life-sustaining commodities and basic services. [4] Also on the 2nd of September, the UN reported that an agreement had been reached with Yemen's government and the military coalition led by Saudi Arabia

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allowing for more humanitarian aid and badly needed goods like food to reach the population.
Qatar has reportedly deployed troops to Yemen, according to al-Jazeera news.

One-thousand ground troops, supported by armoured vehicles and helicopters are headed to to Marib, where 60 soldiers from the Saudi-led coalition were killed by Houthi missile strikes that killed 45 UAE, 10 Saudi and five Bahraini soldiers. Following the attack, Emirati warplanes launched airstrikes on targets across Yemen. [10]

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Saudi Arabia has been flying bombing runs against the Houthi since President Hadi fled to Riyadh, backed by intelligence and resources supplied by the USA.[2] A coalition of states declared that they had begun military operations countering Houthi rebels on the 25th of March, including Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. Apparently, Egyptian ships bombarded a Houthi convoy on the 30th of March and Saudi Arabian forces traded artillery fire with Houthi forces in addition to the bombing runs which, the Houthi government states, have cost numerous civilian lives.[3] A Saudi blockade of Yemen has also been initiated, although its use is controversial since it stops humanitarian aid from reaching Yemeni civilians. [5]

Although forced to move most of their ground troops out of Yemen due to the Houthi advance, the USA has voiced its plans to keep CIA operatives in the field to report on terrorist activity. United States troops had been using Yemen as a base of operations and training ground for anti-terrorism operations targeting AQAP and ISIL.[7]

14th of April 2015: the Security Council issues an arms embargo on both Houthi and former president Saleh forces.

Iran submitted a four-point peace plan to the UN SG outlining a possible end to the conflict and calling for an immediate ceasefire and end of all foreign military attacks, humanitarian assistance, a resumption of broad national dialogue and the establishment of a unified and inclusive national government. The plan was rejected by the Western and remaining Arab world: The Yemen conflict has long been regarded as a proxy war between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran,

making Iran biased and not a viable negotiator.[9]

The UNHCR is currently working on durable long-term solutions to the refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons in the region. In the meantime, the UNHCR is busy giving registration and other training to local authorities as well as providing legal counsel and other means of support to refugees and asylum seekers. [1]

Possible Solutions

Saudi Arabia and its allies have already started taking actions against the rebel forces, even with little effect. Is this the right way to go and should we support these ways? Maybe we should push for a peaceful approach, asking all sides to lower their arms so that negotiations can start?

On the other hand, maybe the people will lay down their arms without further encouraging if simple, life-sustaining commodities are once again available? Can there be peace when the humanitarian situation is as dire as it is in Yemen at the moment?

Useful documents

The UNHCR's profile of Yemen includes a broad array of statistics worth looking into when looking into the situation of refugees and displaced persons.
http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486ba6.html
In addition to that, the BBC also outlines once more the humanitarian situation and Saudi Arabia's blockade resulting in problems.
http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34011187

Is the situation still a little unclear? The BBC has a great article on what's what in Yemen including two videos, one going over the different parties and one explaining the Houthi in detail. The timeline of events in Yemen may also be useful.
http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423
http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704951

More information about the Sunni at:
http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/934#sthash.zPYRKfkp.dpuf

Appendix/Appendices

[1] 2015 UNHCR country operations profile - Yemen
5/9/2015
http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486ba6.html

[2] BBC article on Yemen: Yemen Crisis: Who is fighting whom?

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423

[3]Wikipedia article: Saudi led intervention in Yemen
7/9/2015
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabian-led_intervention_in_Yemen

[4] UN News Centre article: Yemen: UN releases emergency funding for relief efforts in crisis-torn country
6/9/2015
http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51249#.Ve2HxZdMew9

[5] BBC article: Yemen crisis: How bad is the humanitarian situation?
7/9/2015
http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34011187

[6] New York Times article: 20 Yemenis Killed in Bombings at Mosque
5/9/2015
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/03/world/middleeast/yemen-red-cross-workers-shot-dead.html?&moduleDetail=section-news-3&action=click&contentCollection=Middle%20East&region=Footer&module=MoreInSection&version=WhatsNext&contentID=WhatsNext&pgtype=article

[7]NYT article: Out of Yemen, U.S. Is Hobbled in Terror Fight
5/9/2015
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/23/us/politics/out-of-yemen-us-is-hobbled-in-terror-fight.html

[8]NYT article:Suicide Attacks at Mosques in Yemen Kill More Than 130
5/9/2015
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/21/world/middleeast/suicide-attacks-at-shiite-mosques-in-yemen.html?_r=0

[9] Reuters article by Louis Charbonneau:Iran submits four-point Yemen peace plan to United Nations
6/9/2015
http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/17/us-yemen-security-iran-idUSKBN0N823820150417

[10] BBC News article: Yemen crisis: Qatar 'deploys 1,000 troops'
7/9/2015
http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34173544