Yemen is a bloodied battleground today. The Houthi Rebels brandish their swords while the Saudi forces in the name of Allah- the beneficient and merciful, swear to be the protector of the Sunnis preparing their arms. The Government of Yemen? Well, there unfolds the larger story. What has been ensuing on the Yemeni soil for years now are possibly the earliest signs of a civil war. The main fight is between forces loyal to the ousted President, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, and those allied to Zaidi Shia rebels known as Houthis, who forced Mr Hadi to flee the capital Sanaa in February 2015.[[1]](file:///C:\\Users\\Esha\\Desktop\\A38\\Saudi%20v%20Yemen.docx" \l "_ftn1" \o ") Mr Hadi sought refuge in Aden which he subsequently declared to the de facto capital, with the help of Saudi Arabia, who now happens to one of the primary players of the conflict. Mr Hadi’s predecessor, Ali Abdullah Saleh continues to be a vital player and enjoys the support of a faction of the Yemeni Security forces.

The Saudi interest:

The most fundamental question which comes up before us possibly deals with the nature of the Saudi interest in this conflict. Is Saudi’s priority merely ensuring peace across its border or is it something on the lines of a vested comfort at the ideological level. To put it in simpler terms, the Saudi interest seems to be that of keeping the Shiites out of its periphery and maintaining a Sunni dominance in the region.

For all who thought that the black and white players on the chessboard were Saudi Arabia and Yemen, that’s where they fell prey to the mirage of gulf politics. The war today is a Sunni v Shia conflict with the knights, pawns, bishops, rooks and queens on duty. Saudi Arabia, The Hadi government , The Houthis, Iran, United States and of course, the ISIS.

It is of course a factional war, a religious war, yet again to prove the ideological supremacy. But at the heart of this tussle lies the traces of the N-word. The dreaded N-word of international politics. But then again, one may logically argue that they saw it coming. When Iran is here, can the nuclear threats be far behind?  Placing the Iranian angle in a civil war between government forces and Houthi rebels may not be the easiest thing to do. However, on closer inspection of the larger picture, the footprints seem clear.

Saudi Arabia has been arming itself for over the years in anticipation of Shiite entry into the peninsula. This was one of the major reasons for the overwhelming Saudi support to the development of the nuclear programme of Pakistan. Saudi Arabia saw and wanted to nurture in Pakistan a reliable Sunni ally who would effectively counter Iran’s nuclear threats which fall an inch short of international belligerence. Allowing the bordering Yemen to be a Shiite stronghold was something that Saudi could possibly never allow. Costs had to be paid for it. And the kingdom of Saudi Arabia was ready to pay it.

Who are the Houthis?

The Houthis began as a theological movement that preached tolerance and peace and held a considerably broad-minded educational and cultural vision. Houthis belong to the Zaidi branch of Islam, also known as Fivers, a sect of Islam almost exclusively present in Yemen. They are known for being most similar to Sunni Muslims in matters of religious law and rulings. They do however, believe in the concept of an Imamate as being essential to their religion, which makes them distinct from Sunnis.[[2]](file:///C:\\Users\\Esha\\Desktop\\A38\\Saudi%20v%20Yemen.docx" \l "_ftn2" \o ") However, they are also regularly accused, even by fellow Zaidis, of secretly being converts or followers of the Twelver sect, which is the official religion of their ally and backer Iran Houthi leaders such as Issam Al-'Imad have stated as early as 2011 that they are religiously and ideologically influenced by Iran, they bear a striking resemblance to the functioning style of Hezbollah in Lebanon, a piece of information which is surely not a happy one for the US and the Western World at large.

With the Houthi rebels in effective control and on the verge of staging an almost ISIS style takeover, the world seems stiff with worry if not fear. Iran has reasons more than one to be jubiliant with the current state of affairs in Yemen. Though Iran has publicly refused any form of support to the rebels, it is common knowledge that Iran is indeed sympathetic to their Yemeni rebel counterparts and their sympathy is often manifested through a generous supply of weapons and money to the Houthis in Yemen.