

Forum: General Assembly Second Committee

Issue: Protecting the right of non-combatant individuals in the Yemeni Civil War

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Introduction

The nation of Yemen has been experiencing a constant state of disorder and domestic conflict since 2015. The intensive conflict and strife continues to grow and has no sign of decreasing even now in late 2018. According to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the war in Yemen is now the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 22 million people – three-quarters of the population including nearly every child in the country – in desperate need of aid and protection.

The Saudi led coalition, supporting the Sunni pro-government forces, is carrying out frequent and indiscriminate air attacks which have destroyed civilian property and infrastructure. The Houthi rebels have conducted indiscriminate violence while taking over the cities of Aden and Taizz. A predicted battle at the port of Hodeidah is very likely going to cut down foreign aid and supplies for two-thirds of the Yemeni population and cause a full-scale famine in the country.

The civil war has brought disastrous humanitarian crises upon Yemen, especially on civilians. Until March 26, 2018, at least 10,000 Yemenis have been killed in battles and attacks, and more than 40,000 casualties overall. According to an estimate by Save the Children, around 50,000 Yemeni children died in 2017, which means 130 each day. The country is on the edge of famine. Out of the 27 million people in Yemen, about 17.8 million are food insecure. This population is also threatened by waterborne diseases such as cholera.

Definition of Key Terms

Gulf Cooperation Council

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional political and economic alliance formed by six Arabian states — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. The GCC was established in Saudi Arabia, 1981, with the purpose of achieving unity amongst the members, who

share common political, cultural and religious identities. It also has a defense planning council that coordinates military cooperation between member countries. In the Yemeni Civil War, the GCC is in alliance with the Yemeni government.

Non-combatant

A non-combatant is someone who does not engage in combat. In this issue, 'non-combatant individuals' refers to civilians who are not taking a direct part in hostilities.

Houthis

The Houthis are a tribal military force from the Sana'a province in Northern Yemen. They follow a branch of Shia Islam called The Zaidi sect of Islam, which is different from the dominant branch of Islam in Yemen and the Arab world, Sunni. This force is named after their former leader Hussein Al-Houthi.

Sunni

Sunni is the largest (majority) denomination of Islam. Approximately 65% of the Muslims in Yemen are Sunnis and they are located mainly in the South and East. Pro-government Sunni forces are currently in alliance with the coalition.

Shia

Shia is the minority denomination of Islam and has different beliefs to the Sunni branch. The Houthis follow a branch of Shia Islam.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are individuals who escaped from home to find safety. Different from refugees, IDPs have not crossed borders to another country. Although their displacement might be caused by the government, IDPs are still under the protection of their government by law.

Civil War

A war fought between the citizens of one country, in this case, between the Houthis and the pro-government forces.

Coalition

A temporary alliance for combined action. The coalition in this issue refers to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan and Senegal.

General Overview

Historic background

Hostilities between the Houthis and the government had built up for many years before reaching a peak in 2015. The Houthi movement began as a theological movement known as Ansar Allah (the supporters of God) in the 1990s that preached tolerance and peace. In 2004, this group of Shias armed themselves and declared war on the government. To suppress the uprising, the government killed the leader of the Houthis. The nation of Yemen officially accused the Houthis and other opposing groups of Muslims of rebellion and attempting to overthrow the government. However, the Houthi leaders dismissed the accusation, claiming that their actions were self-defense and that they were facing religious discrimination and political marginalization. Ever since the uprising, conflicts have occurred frequently between the government and the Houthis.

In early 2011, thousands of Yemeni people came into the capital, Sanaa, for a mass protest campaign calling for the current president Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down. By November 2011, Saleh finally agreed to sign away his presidency after 33 years in power but held the position for one more year. On the election in 2012, the former vice president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, as the only candidate, was elected to be the new president of Yemen. When Hadi first came to power, he was expected to bring peace and security to the nation. However, the majority of the Yemeni military force was still under the control of the relatives of the former president, Saleh. Soon, the country was besieged by multiple problems that greatly affected its citizens. Financial crises, food shortage, corruption and unemployment spread rapidly. While the new president struggled to keep his country afloat, Al Qaeda attacks took place frequently, and some attacks even targeted government officials.

In July 2014, Hadi's decision to lift fuel subsidies in response to pressure from the International Monetary Fund was the turning point of the situation. This triggered a major outbreak of public protests and outrage. The Houthi rebels were able to use this outbreak for their own interests. By September, the Houthis took control of Sanna, the capital of Yemen, and dissolved the parliament four months later. The Houthis then proceeded to push southwards to the country's second-largest city, Aden. In early 2015, President Hadi was placed under house arrest by the Houthis. In March, President Hadi managed to flee to Saudi Arabia after pro-Saleh forces began bombing the city.

In order to support the government and prevent the Houthis from expanding, a coalition was formed on 26 March, 2015. It was led by Saudi Arabia, consisting mainly of GCC countries. The coalition pushed back the Houthi forces mainly through aerial bombardment and ground troops. This coalition is supported by both the United States and the United Kingdom, who provide intelligence, training, armaments, and munitions. The Houthis also have international allies, being backed up by Iran through similar ways.

Humanitarian Crises

Civilian casualties

Civilian casualties form an extremely large percent of total casualties in Yemen. This is partially due to the large number of explosive weapons unleashed in densely populated areas, such as big cities like Sanna and Aden. In addition, the coalition is responsible for harming civilians through air strikes, and the Houthis are accused of indiscriminately firing artillery into Aden and Taizz. Out of all people harmed by air-launched explosive weapons, 93% are civilians; by ground-launched explosive weapons 94% are civilians; by improvised explosive devices 97% are civilians. As of March 26, 2018, at least 10,000 Yemenis had been killed in the crossfire, with more than 40,000 casualties overall.

Food shortage

Yemen is currently at a risk of a famine that reaches an IPC phase 5, which is the most severe phase out of the five phases. For one area to be categorized as phase 5, it has to meet three criteria: at least one in five households faces an extreme lack of food, more than 30 percent of children under 5 are suffering from acute malnutrition, at least two people out of every 10,000 are dying each day. Yemen is very close to meeting these criteria. It was estimated in 2016 that 17.8 million Yemenis are food insecure (nearly two-thirds of the population). According to UNICEF report, 460,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

Yemen relies heavily on imported supplies; however, the coalition has set up blockades to control the trade routes into and out of Yemen, making it difficult to provide supplies for the Yemeni people. It is estimated that less than 50% of the national required food imports for the Yemenis are actually received. In addition, the food available is extremely expensive. The price of food has become on average 58% higher than before the Civil War.

Water borne diseases and lack of health care

As a result of the ongoing war, out of 27 million Yemeni population, about half do not have access

to basic health care. It is estimated that around 15 million civilians live without access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene services. Of all health facilities in the country, only 45% are still functional. Within the 45%, only a few have access to medicine, medical equipment, fresh, clean water, and sanitation. These conditions caused major outbreaks of water borne diseases, especially cholera. According to World Health Organization (WHO)'s estimation in August 2017, over 440,000 Yemenis have contracted cholera. The harsh conditions have made it difficult to provide humanitarian aid because it has affected the immune systems of the Yemenis. This disease can usually be treated with antibiotics and oral rehydration salts, but it is more deadly for people with compromised immune systems.

Unemployment

The unemployment rate is rising in Yemen. Many workers in northern Yemen, especially teachers, health workers and civil servants are not able to receive income in any form. People in the country now lack the fundamental provisions necessary to sustain their lives.

Accessibility of aid

After the coalition reached Yemen in 2015, Saudi Arabia led the formation of blockades of the air, sea and land borders. In 2017, the blockades were further tightened and limited the import of foreign aids and supplies.

Terrorism

The ongoing war in Yemen creates opportunities for terrorist groups to consolidate power. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and other terrorist groups were able to occupy and control territory and gain more members across Yemen. These forces were allowed to increase their presence and practice terrorist activities in Yemen and its bordering nations. Because of its maturity, large member base and resilient nature, AQAP is a dangerous group. After the collapse of the Hadi government, terrorist groups rose in power and are ruling over some areas in the country. Therefore, the issue of how to deal with terrorism must be considered when planning to protect civilians in Yemen.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UN had been involved with the situation in Yemen recently and frequently. Multiple resolutions relevant to this issue had been passed. The UN was also responsible for holding several peace talks between the two major forces in Yemen.

Relevant UN resolutions:

- UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (Apr 2015)
- UN Security Council Resolution 2266 (Feb 2016)
- UN Security Council Resolution 2342 (Feb 2017)
- UN Security Council Resolution 2402 (Feb 2018)

Timeline of Events

The table below is a timeline for important events in reference to the issue of Yemen, which include rebellion, reformations, peace negotiations and foreign aids.

Date	Description of event
May 22 1990	The Republic of Yemen is created from the unification of North Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic and South Yemen, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. General Ali Abdullah Saleh is elected to be President of Yemen.
May-July 1994	A civil war breaks out between northerners (pro-President Ali Abdullah Saleh) and southerners (pro-Vice President Ali Salim al-Baid). Pro-President Saleh forces win.
January 27 2011	The beginning of protests in Yemen.
September 2011	Over 2 million protesters call on the military to overthrow President Ali Abdullah Saleh.
February 25 2012	President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigns and Vice President Abdrabbuh Rabu Mansour Hadi becomes President of Yemen.
July 2014	Reacting to pressure from IMF, President Hadi cuts off fuel subsidies, causing more protest.
September 2014	Houthi forces take control of the Yemeni capital Sana'a.
September 21 2014	Temporary ceasefire negotiated between President Hadi and the Houthis.
January 20 2015	Houthi rebels take over the president's palace at Sana'a.
March 2015	President Hadi is forced to flee Yemen.
March 26 2015	The coalition strikes Houthi forces by air and blockades (air, land, water) were introduced.
June 2015	UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon attempts to hold talks between delegates of the Yemeni government and the Houthis, but fails.
December 2015	UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed launches direct talks between the Houthis and representatives from Yemen government. Talks later collapse.
April 2016	UN sponsored peace talks held for Yemen with Houthi group and its General People's Congress party allies with the Yemeni government of President Hadi.

November 2016	Houthis forms a new government in the capital.
November 2017	The blockade is temporarily removed to allow incoming aid.
December 4 2017	Yemen's former president Ali Abdullah Saleh is killed by his former allies, the Houthi rebels.
December 21 2017	The International Committee of the Red Cross identifies the cholera outbreak in Yemen as the biggest outbreak in recent history.
February 13 2018	Houthis agree to attend peace talks monitored by Oman.
Aug 4 2018	WHO calls for ceasefire in Yemen to deliver cholera vaccines.
Aug 28 2018	UN accuses the governments of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen of War Crimes.

Possible Solutions

In order to protect the rights of civilians in Yemen, both short term and long term solutions have to be considered.

A majority of the population in Yemen is now experiencing severe food shortage, diseases and lack of shelter. The biggest obstacle that lies in the path of providing humanitarian aid is the naval blockade. It is vital to negotiate with the coalition for the de-escalation of blockade to ensure accessibility of foreign aid. Once it is removed, the next step would be to control the outbreak of famine and water borne diseases. Temporarily, Yemen could rely on imported food, water, and medical supplies provided by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). More economically developed countries (MEDCs) could be encouraged to donate supplies to the Yemeni people as well. It is recommended to provide physical supplies instead of financial support in order to avoid corrupted officials to use the support for their personal interest.

However, without long-lasting peace being achieved in the country, new violations of human rights are very likely to happen in the future. Thus, the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and perhaps the formation of a new government is necessary to eliminate all violations. It is also important to ensure that all parties involved respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and guarantee that protection to civilians is the priority in any actions in the country. After peace has been maintained, NGOs and MEDCs would be able to help with reconstructions in Yemen.

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