

Introduction

The Yemeni Civil War commenced three years ago, and has shown no sign of stopping to this day. The conflict started when the current president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, was overthrown by the Houthis and its allies which were backed by Yemen's previous president, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Since then, the revolution has been morphed into a civil war, sustained by external parties such as the Saudi Arabia Coalition and the terrorist forces including the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

The United Nations Security Council has been intent on alleviating the situation in Yemen since the start of the civil war. Its aims range from reaching a ceasefire to resolving the humanitarian crisis in the region. However, despite the Security Council's persistent efforts, most of the past peace talks have been in vain, and agreements with stakeholders have been short-lived. As the civil war persists, the humanitarian crisis has persisted. It is clear the sheer condemnations are not sufficient to end the crisis, and new concrete actions have to be taken.

Definitions

Houthis: A Zaidi primarily Shi'ite-led religious and later, religious-political movement known officially as Ansar Allah that began in the 1990s, originally based in Sa'dah, northern Yemen

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Also known as Ansar Al-Sharia in Yemen, they are a militant Islamist group swearing allegiance to al-Qaeda and its late leader Osama bin Laden (Raghavan & Almujaheed, 2013). Formed in 2009 after a merger of Saudi Arabian and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda, the group mainly operates in these two countries and is regarded as the most active branch of al-Qaeda today

History of Yemen

Yemen has been plagued with repeated civil wars and conflicts stemming from the divide between Yemen Arab Republic in the North and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the South. The conflicts briefly ended in 1990 with the establishment of the Republic of Yemen. However, about 4 years after, the fighting commenced. Due to perceived biased treatment by the Northern part of Yemen, the Southern part declared the Democratic Republic of Yemen, prompting the first Yemeni Civil War. Despite the Security Council's Calls for peace talks, Saudi Arabia continued with its military intervention, swiftly ending the war and consolidating the Saleh Government. However, the initial discontent in the South was not resolved even though the conflict was resolved, hence the brewing discontent paved way for the Southern Movement of 2007.





Iranian and Saudi-Arabian Involvement

Saudi Arabia and Iran are two of the most prominent powers in the middle east, and are actively competing for more territory in the region. Saudi Arabia is the leader of the Sunni Muslim world, and Iran is the leader of the Shia Muslim world. Though both countries are muslim, they are from different muslim factions, and are hence eager to extend the scope of influence of their ideology in the region.

The long-standing cold relations from the two countries have stemmed from their history of proxy wars in the region, occurring in countries including but not limited to Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

In particular, Iran has had vested strategic interest in Yemen: Yemen's location is on the southwestern part of the Gulf Peninsula near Saudi Arabia. It is poorly governed and challenged by various religious and ethnic factions. Furthermore, Yemen is about 35% Shia, showing that its religious affiliation is similar to that of Iran. If Iran were to gain control over Yemen, it could easily invade Saudi Arabia or at least set up a friendly base of operations there against Saudi Arabia, increasing Iran's tactical advantage in its longstanding rivalry with Saudi Arabia.

Hence, Saudi Arabia will not sit idly and watch as events unfold. The stakes for Saudia Arabia are high and it is intent not to let Iran gain control of Yemen.

Terrorist Groups in the region

Foreign involvement in Yemen is not limited to countries, but extends to terrorist groups as well. Two of the most notable groups are ISIL and Al Qaeda, who have taken advantage of the chaotic situation in Yemen to expand their scope of influence. Both have active bases in Yemen, and in light of the fighting, have sought to gain territory for themselves. There have been numerous attacks by these terrorist groups, leading to civilian casualties, such as the bombing in Aden (A Yemeni City) in which ISIL claims responsibility for the several dozen civilians killed. However, both have suffered immense casualties, owing to the airstrikes from the Saudi Coalition. In particular, ISIL's leader has been allegedly captured in an overnight raid by the Saudi Coalition.

At the same time, these terrorist groups have given countries such as the United States a legitimate reason to enter Yemen to fight against terrorist groups, increasing the number of foreign state actors in the region.

Humanitarian Crisis

As of March 2017, the United Nations estimates that more than 7,600 people (including 4,773 civilians and 1200 children) have been killed and close to 42,000 people have been injured since the conflict between groups loyal to exiled President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and groups allied to the Houthi rebel movement was initiated back in March 2015.

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Even before the civil war began, Yemen was impoverished. According to the UN, almost half of Yemen's population was living below the poverty line, and two-thirds of youth were unemployed. About 16 million people were in need of some kind of assistance.

A report in August 2016 by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, clearly indicated a number of serious allegations against international law and human rights, including but not limited to attacks on residential areas and civilian infrastructure; the use of landmines and cluster bombs; sniper and drone attacks against civilians; detentions; targeted killings; the recruitment and the use of children in hostilities; as well as forced evictions and displacement.

As of March 2017, it is estimated that 18.8 million people needed some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, according to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), including 10.3 million in acute need, who urgently require immediate, life-saving assistance. Approximately 3.3 million people have been displaced since March 2015. As of January 2017, more than 2 million remained displaced - more than six times the number recorded at the end of 2014 - and one million had returned to their homes. An additional 180,000 have fled the country.

Stakeholders

USA

The United States has been taking up an active role in allying with Saudi Arabia to stabilise the situation in Yemen. In particular, it is concerned with the terrorist activity of ISIL and Al Qaeda, which could pose threats to the country as a whole if such groups were to thrive.

As one of the leaders of the international community, it is also eager to offer help in the region because of the human rights violations and destabilised state out of its ideals.

At the same time, its close relations with Yemen and need for oil also means that it has high stakes in the region. If Iran were to gain strategic advantage over Saudi Arabia, its ally, because of its attacking Yemen, USA would also suffer from losses.

Kuwait

Kuwait has hosted peace talks between the Houthis and the Hadi Government, showing that it is a neutral party. It has been acting as a mediator, and hopes for a ceasefire in the region. However, as one of the countries participating in the coalition in support of the Hadi Government, it would likely support a resolution in favour of the Hadi Government.

Russia

Russia stood alone when abstaining from the final document for the resolution 2216 of the UNSC, stating that it did not provide suitable solutions for the crisis, such as a ceasefire of both sides or a facilitation of peaceable negotiations. Russia warned that sanctions may result in intensification of the crisis, calling attention towards civilians injured or killed by coalition airstrikes, condemning Western arms deals with Saudi Arabia in 2016. Nonetheless, Moscow was unwilling to militarily commit due to its current involvement in the ongoing Syrian conflict, in fear of overextending resources.

Past UN Involvement:

The UNSC passed 5 major resolutions pertaining to the Yemeni Civil War - 3 in 2015, 1 in 2016 and 1 in 2017. As of May 2018, none of them have been effective in resolving the conflict. Most of them involve travel and economic sanctions on Yemen. However, the resolutions make no concrete action to stop the ongoing unrest.

In particular, Resolution 2216: passed on 14 April 2015, potentially exacerbated the situation in Yemen. It condemned the Houthis strongly and demanded that they give up all territory claimed, surrender all weapons seized from Yemen, and enforces an arms embargo on all Houthis and their allies. It was seen by the Houthis as a very unilateral action against them, and has made

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Potential Solutions

Elimination of Terrorist Groups:

The existence of terrorist groups poses a great threat to long-term stability in the region. As the SC, the aim is to enforce peace and security in the region. With that in mind, perhaps the target of the Saudi Coalition could be temporarily shifted to the terrorist groups instead of the Houthi forces until such groups are eliminated?

With the temporary shift in focus, the tension between the two parties could also be eliminated in face of a common goal, and peace talks could potentially resume.

Enforced Ceasefire:

With the longstanding instability in Yemen, throughout the terms of several governments, it is imperative that a ceasefire be enforced in the region. Peacekeepers could be a viable option. It is only when a ceasefire is attained that humanitarian aid can be swiftly and easily transported into the region to alleviate the crisis.

Two State Solution:

In light of the opposing forces in the North and South of Yemen, it can be argued that two states could be better than one unified state. This can solve the constant civil wars between the North and the South, and bring peace to the region. However, both sides have been equally appalled by this solution as both want control of Yemen, and will not satisfy for half of it. Furthermore, this would violate Yemen's sovereignty. Perhaps it would be more feasible to simply eliminate foreign intervention to weaken the factions within Yemen, to reduce the risk of future conflicts.

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