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Saudi Arabia and Yemen Conflict: A Humanitarian Crisis

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Yemen is a Middle Eastern country located near the Gulf of Aden, sharing its borders with countries like Saudi Arabia and Oman. The country is currently facing a humanitarian crisis which is described by many as one of the worst humanitarian crises on the planet and it is safe to say that the current crisis is an outcome of continuous civil wars and the emergence of different rebel groups like Houthi rebels who were in favor of former president Ali Abdulla Saleh and responsible for preventing Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi from forming a government and resulting in instability in the political climate of the country. Being the country that shares the border formed a coalition bond in 2015 with different countries intending to help Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to restore his government in Yemen. With the involvement of different separatist groups backed by countries like the UAE and other Islamic terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIL coming into the picture, the country is in shambles and the proxy war in Yemen continues with both sides resisting giving up has forced common civilians to live in anguish.

Keywords: *Yemen, Saudi Arabia, coalition, humanitarian crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

In just 32 years of existence, conflicts, riots, terrorist attacks, and wars had weakened and divided the country that is the poorest country in the Middle East. In the year 1990, the Republic of Yemen known by everyone was formed and Ali Abdulla Saleh was sworn as the president of the country, while Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi became the vice president. We can find traces of

the current crisis from the year 2011, during the Arab spring when the people of Yemen demanded an end to corruption and a healthier government, and lower unemployment. President Saleh who was in that position since the existence of the country tried to clinch power but was eventually replaced by vice president Hadi. Two rebel groups Houthis and the STC (Southern Transitional Council) played a major role during the period of these revolutions. Houthis are one of many major players involved in the current crisis, they are Shia Muslim minorities from Northern Yemen specifically emerging from the city of Saada. They state that they have been marginalized which led to them often rebelling against the government.

It was during this time when one of the most important players in the current crisis came into the picture, Saudi Arabia. The country shares its international borders with the country of Yemen and formed an alliance with the GCCs with the main motive to help to force Saleh out of his presidential role and help Hadi to form a government that could work for the people of Yemen and solves the problem of corruption in the country. But Yemen suffered during the reign of Hadi and after the revolution, the initiatives that had come out from the revolution were brokered down by the gulf power who simply appeared to return the same old elites to power.

By the year 2014, some of the factions began to lose patience, one of them being the Houthis who played a major role in removing the government of Saleh. But after the revolution, they both were sidelined by the Saudi government and the GCCs plans for Yemen's new government which lead to two former enemies joining forces. Houthis with some of the military allies took over Yemen's capital Sanaa in 2014. Which forces Hadi to take shelter in Saudi Arabia, seeing this turn of events the government of Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of different countries to help Hadi return to power. What lead after this was continuous bombing and a campaign of relentless airstrikes by the Saudi Government. Saudi lead forces stated that they have been targeting the enemy but the right moves accuse the coalition of bombing schools and hospitals that killed thousands of common Yemenis civilians, the continuous bombing lead to common civilians in a dire need of humanitarian aid but continuous interventions of the Saudi led coalition and the Houthis had made it difficult for different organizations to provide aid to the ones in need.

After continuously fighting the Saudi-led alliance, in 2017, the alliance created between Saleh and Houthis broke down which led Saleh to change sides stating that he wants to talk to the coalition which led the Houthis to assassinate him. The Houthis currently control the southern part of Yemen including the capital Sanaa which gives them an edge in the war. But the Saudi government thinks that the Iranian government is assisting the Houthi group. Being the biggest Shia power in the Middle East, Iran has shown their open support to the Houthi group but rejects the idea of providing military support to them. The allegations were proven when in 2018, an oil refinery in Saudi was allegedly attacked by Houthis, and remains of Iranian missiles were found by the Saudi government. In the year 2019, the war was in what many describe as a war stalemate. The global pandemic hit the world including the country of Yemen, the Saudi coalition found this a significant opportunity to take a step back amid the Covid-19 pandemic, and in 2022 the Saudi-led coalition was ready to hold peace talks with the other side to hold peacekeeping efforts.

SAUDI INTERVENTION

The intervention of Saudi Arabia was a turning point in the Yemen war, Saudi is one of the most influential countries in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia expressed its three main war aims, It wanted to restore the government of Hadi in Yemen, it wanted to protect its southern border and prevent Yemen from fragmenting and it wanted to contain the perceived growing influence of Iran in the region. Another aspect that motivated the intervention of Saudi was the strategic importance of Yemen, not only does Saudi share its southern border with Yemen, the port city of Aden is the entry point to the red sea which is an essential route for any trade in which Saudi is a part of. If there are instabilities in the country of Yemen it will directly affect Saudi in every way possible.

The interventions of Saudi took place in the year 2014 when the former president of Yemen, Hadi fled back to Saudi after Houthis with the help of Saleh took control over the capital of Yemen. What led after this was dreadful, the Saudis formed a coalition with the GCC(Gulf Cooperation Council) which include countries like Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, and many more. This Saudi-led coalition started an Operation known as Operation Decisive Storm.

Operation Decisive Storm was a campaign of relentless airstrikes targeting the southern region of Yemen because most of the oil reserves and camps of Houthis were located in the southern part of the country making it a target for relentless air strikes, with the alliance of US and using the military support of the GCC countries more than 19000 air strike took place in just four years. Saudi coalition stated that most of the airstrikes targeted military stations of the Houthis but the rights groups in 2018 accused the coalition of air striking the civilian areas of Saana, killing allegedly thousands of civilians. The relentless airstrike was deleterious to the Houthi groups, damaging the oil reserves which were under their control and helping them to finance their military group.

The air strike was not the only means through which the Houthis were attacked, navies from Egypt, the UK, and the USA were also involved in this operation. The naval forces covered the southern marine borders of Yemen which not only attacked the Houthi group but also made a blockade that made it almost impossible for supplies to get in or out. And Yemenis desperately need it. After the amount of damage that the bombing did in the operation Decisive storm, the Saudis announce to end of the decisive storm stating that the main threat to Yemen has been successfully eliminated and the opposite side accepted this move with an open hand, putting a full stop on the Operation Decisive Storm. But much to everyone's surprise, the Saudi-led coalition resumed bombing the civilians of Yemen just after ten days of signing the peace treaty.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Continuous disputes, war, and bombing have led to what many consider the worst humanitarian crisis on earth. According to the UNICEF out of the 29 million population of Yemen 23.7 million are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. The country has become a living hell for the civilians living who have bared the effects of war for the past seven years. According to various United Nations agencies, acute malnutrition among children under the age of five in Yemen has hit the highest levels ever recorded; nearly 2.3 million children under age 5 in Yemen are at risk of acute malnutrition in 2021, Over 10,000 children have been killed or injured in

Yemen since 2015; currently, 4 in 5 children need humanitarian assistance, 400,000 are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, and 2 million are out of school.¹

FOOD AND WATER SHORTAGE

Yemen is a Deserted country with a majority of its area being a desert, shortage of water and lack of natural water sources are common things, but with the war in progress, the civilians are forced to drink sewage water or unpurified water which has led to a cholera outbreak in the region. More than a million cases of cholera had been reported making it one of the worst cholera outbreaks in modern history². The outbreak lasted for six years and one of the reasons that let this outbreak last this long is the challenges faced by the authorities to provide aid to the people in need leading the outbreak to take thousands of innocent life.

The same thing is happening with food supplies, either civilian does not have food to eat and if they have food then they lack the resources to cook it making malnutrition in kids and hunger a huge problem for humanitarian agencies to deal with. Both sides are equally responsible for this misery because the land, air and sea barrier made by the Saudi-led coalition is making it difficult to supply aid to people in need, and on the other side, the Houthi group is also blamed for blocking, destroying, or taking aid that is meant for innocent civilians in need.

The COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN YEMEN

The Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a nail to the coffin because health care facilities in Yemen are non-existing. Data from the World Health Organization from November 2021 indicate a total of 9,806 COVID-19 cases with 1,894 deaths; most health experts believe that these figures vastly

¹ Congressional Research Service, 'Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention' (2021) <<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R43960.pdf>> accessed 14 July 2022

² Lyndia Lisa, 'Disease Management of Cholera in Yemen Among People Displaced by Conflict' (ANA, 3 September 2021) <<https://ojin.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TableofContents/Vol-26-2021/No3-Sept-2021/Articles-Previous-Topics/Disease-Management-of-Cholera-in-Yemen-Among-People-Displaced-by-Conflict.html#:~:text=More%20than%20one%20million%20cases,%5BUN%5D%2C%202017>> accessed 14 July 2022

underestimate the extent of COVID-19 in Yemen³. Nearly 600000 vaccine doses were sent to Yemen and the United Nations has emphasized increasing and providing necessary instruments including test kits, vaccines, medical kits, etc.

WHAT'S THE WAY AHEAD

The most crucial thing in this current moment is to deal with the humanitarian crisis and help the common civilians by providing them aid. One thing that should be done is that the international media look into this matter and report the atrocities currently happening in Yemen. What could happen is that the general public will get to know the current situation and could assist in generating funds which would come in handy because many institutions lack funds.

CONCLUSION

The Republic of Yemen has faced riots and wars since its beginnings but this war was the straw that broke the camel's back. It's a no-brainer that the situation in Yemen is appalling the country needs assistance as soon as possible and humanitarian aid is in full progress. If we look at the structure of war right now, well, it is in a stagnant position and some experts say that the worst is yet to come. But all we can do is to make sure that civilians get their necessary aid. One thing is sure when the war is over all the players of war including Houthi groups, Saudi Arabia, GCC and many more can be held liable for the atrocities in Yemen.

³ Congressional Research Service (n 1)