

Forum: Human Rights Commission

Issue: Improving Human Rights for civilians in Yemen

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Introduction

After the Arab Spring protests of 2011, a failed democratic transition sparked a civil war in Yemen. The uprising of a militia, the Houthis, caused unrest in the country as they took control over a considerable part of the territory, including the capital Sanaa in 2014. The government, widely seen as corrupt, in an attempt to regain its power, became the other warring side. Suspicion that regional enemy Iran backed the rebels by sending weapons, led Saudi Arabia to form an anti-Houthi coalition composed of ten countries and supported by the United States of America (USA). The airstrikes and the blockade imposed were detrimental to an already poor country that depended on imports.

Civilians were severely affected, as the worst current humanitarian crisis developed. Nowadays, about 80% of the population is in need of humanitarian aid, food insecurity is an issue for more than half of the country and risks of famine are increasing. Health is also an issue with half of the hospitals closed and medicine unable to reach the population. In 2017 an outbreak of cholera-infected one million people. The situation in Yemen is unbearable and efforts must be made in order to improve the living conditions of civilians.

Definition of Key Terms

Humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid is the assistance provided to those affected by a natural or man-made disaster. As opposed to development aid, it focuses on diminishing the short term consequences of the crisis by preventing as many deaths as possible, protecting the rights of the victims and their dignity and relieving their suffering. Shelter, healthcare, education, and food are the most common types of aid, although money is also given to people in some cases. It is of paramount importance for the aid to be delivered efficiently since its seizing by militia groups has caused the duration of several conflicts to increase.

Humanitarian aid currently reaches approximately 8 million civilians, but there are 15 million more who need it. (UNOCHA, n.d.)

Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are those who are forced to leave their settlements as a consequence of armed conflict, persecution or natural disasters, but unlike refugees stay within the borders of their home country. In 2017 there were approximately forty million IDPs around the world, two million of which were Yemeni. That number is believed to have grown to more than three million as of January 2019. IDPs vulnerability is caused by the lack of stability and security they face. Therefore it is crucial for them to receive humanitarian aid. Several camps have been established throughout Yemen for these people. (UNHCR, n.d.)

Food security

The term Food Security refers to the capacity of accessing enough food to meet one's dietary needs in order to live a healthy life. This goal can be obstructed by economic, social and physical factors. It can also be used to describe the condition of a group of people or a country. For example, saying that Yemen has food security, would mean that the whole population of the country has access to food. This condition is essential to achieve economic growth and the lack of it represents an unfulfillment of the basic needs and a violation of the 25th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Food insecurity has been one of the main consequences of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. (IFPRI, 2019)

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification is a platform which aims to provide reliable information about food insecurity situations by analysing certain aspects as to determine the severity level or phase using the following classifications: Acute Food Insecurity, Chronic Food Insecurity, and Acute Malnutrition. These classifications are used to reach a consensus about the situation and compare it with others so as to have a better response. More than half of the population of Yemen is currently facing level 3 (out of 5) or higher Acute Food Insecurity. Were it not for Humanitarian Aid, most Yemenis would be under a higher level threat. (IPC, n.d.) (IPC, 2019)

Sunni and Shia

Sunni and Shia are the two major Islamic religious groups. They differ in their beliefs regarding the succession of Muhammad as the leader of the Muslim community, which has led to doctrinal and theological variations. Approximately ninety percent of Muslims are Sunnis, while Shiism is only predominant in Iraq, Iran, and Azerbaijan but minorities are present in other countries. (Ellis, 2017)

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The Gulf Cooperation Council is an economic and political alliance which encompasses Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. It was formed in 1981 and its members have remained the same despite the blockade imposed to Qatar by the other members. In 2011, the GCC made an agreement with Saleh to hand over the presidency of Yemen, but its flaws were some of the main causes which led to the current situation. Moreover, as it includes some of the most powerful Sunni countries, its Member States lead the fight against the Houthis. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

Houthis

The Houthis are a militia formed by the Zaidi Shia minority (a Shia Muslim group mostly found in Yemen) which fought against President Saleh's government on several occasions. In 2011, they were not granted participation in the drafting of the Constitution which they later rejected and began an uprising against Hadi's weak government. They have managed to take control of the capital Sanaa and a large part of Southwest Yemen. Military support has been provided to the Houthi forces by Iran, mostly through the shipping of weapons.

Southern Transitional Council (STC)

The Southern Transitional Council is a separatist movement that intends to re-establish South Yemen as an independent State. They believe that after the unification, resources were unfairly distributed intentionally, and that progress in areas such as education and health was lost. Although they were initially supportive of Hadi's government, infighting has been reported between the two sides and military support by the United Arab Emirates has given them more power and influence in the south.

Proxy War

A Proxy War is an armed conflict in which two (or more) warring sides fighting within a country represent the interests of foreign powers and receive military support. It is an

indirect war between these two powers with no fighting taking place inside the borders of either. The most notorious Proxy War is the Cold War fought between the USA and the USSR in the latter half of the 20th century. The Vietnam War is one conflict of such war, where the North Vietnamese were backed by the Soviets and the South Vietnamese were backed by the Americans. In Yemen, the proxy war is being fought between Iran, through the Houthi Insurgents and Saudi Arabia, through the Yemeni government. This proxy war has caused many of the recent conflicts in the region. (Byman, 2018) (Ellis, 2017)

Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was a series of protests throughout the Middle East which took place in 2010 and 2011 and aimed to replace the long-lasting authoritarian regimes for democratic systems. Protests were violently repressed by military and police forces. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

Background Information

Yemen and recent history

Yemen is located at the southernmost area of the Arab Peninsula, a strategic position because of the proximity to the Suez Channel. It currently has a population of 27,5 million people, who are mainly Sunni (60%) and Shia (40%) Muslims. Both historically and nowadays, it has been the poorest country of the peninsula. The Republic of Yemen is a modern state which was only founded in 1990, when the unification took place. Prior to that, Yemen was divided between the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which held a communist regime, and the northern Yemen Arab Republic. Deep underlying differences remained between North and South, which although did not prevent political unity, made economic, social and cultural unity an almost impossible challenge. (BBC, 2018)

After the unification, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been president of the Yemen Arab Republic since 1978, took charge as president of the recently established Republic of Yemen. His authoritarian rule lasted for 21 years and saw several uprisings fail, including a southern separatist movement in 1994 and a few Houthi rebellions, until the Arab Spring protests in 2011.

Armed conflict

Causes of the conflict

Despite technically being a Republic, Saleh's government was largely anti-democratic with no clear and independent division of powers. In 2011, inspired by the protests taking place in Egypt during the Arab Spring, Yemenis began to take part in manifestations with the intention of ending Saleh's rule of the country. International pressure from the USA, the United Nations (UN), and Saudi Arabia led to the drafting of an agreement for the president to hand over power to his deputy Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi by the Gulf Cooperation Council. After a failed attempt, Saleh came into terms with the GCC's agreement, which was completely indulgent to him since it granted him immunity and permission to stay within Yemen.

In February 2012, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi was elected for a two-year term while dialogue over the drafting of a new constitution happened. However, there were some factors which hampered the transition towards democracy. Hadi's government was perceived as weak and corrupt. Saleh remained powerful as a considerable part of the army stood loyal to him. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula gained control over two governorates and established its own State from which they launched air-strikes to the capital Sanaa, in June 2012 the Yemeni troops, with the backing of the USA, regained possession of such territories. Last but perhaps most importantly, Houthi forces launched a successful uprising against the government in the Northwest of the country, by 2014, they had taken Sanaa with help of Saleh's forces.

Both Houthis and the Southern Transitional Council rejected a constitution that intended to create a federal system since the changes proposed did not contemplate the recent increase in power of both militias. (BBC, 2018)

Escalation of the conflict

The rise of the Houthis, a Zaydi Shia militia, in a predominantly Sunni country represented a threat to some and an opportunity for others to achieve bigger influence in the region. Yemen soon became part of the Proxy War fought in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which have been supported by the United States of America and the Russian Federation respectively. The suspicion that the Houthis were receiving weaponry and financial aid from Iran, which despite the evidence they have not yet admitted, led Saudi Arabia to form a coalition to intervene in Yemen that sought to fight the Houthis and help Hadi take the power back. It was formed, in addition to Saudi Arabia, by the United Arab Emirates,

Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar (until its suspension in 2017). (McDowall, 2018)

The coalition began its actions in March 2015 by launching a series of airstrikes and imposing a blockade to Yemen in order to prevent Iran from sending supplies to the Houthi forces. Furthermore, the UAE dropped ground troops and was followed by other countries of the coalition. (Gambrell, 2015)

Meanwhile, jihadist groups al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula and the Islamic State were benefited by the turmoil that the war has caused. The former has gained control over a large amount of territory, while the latter has conducted a series of attacks against the Shia population within Yemen resulting in more than two hundred casualties. The proliferation of such terrorist organizations raised concerns in western countries that attacks could be organised from Yemen. This fuelled their direct and indirect involvement in the conflict. With the claim of responsibility of the Charlie Hebdo shooting in 2015 in France, AQAP obtained notoriety.

During the later months of 2017, the alliance between the Houthi rebels and the former president Saleh collapsed as the latter sought to take the power back for him and his family. Finally, Saleh was killed in December when he attempted to flee from the capital. Two months later, infighting was spotted in the opposite warring side when clashes between the Southern Transitional Council and pro-Hadi forces occurred after the former had seized control over the city of Aden.

Throughout 2018 fighting intensified in and around the city of Hodeida, which holds special importance as a port. However, after talks in Sweden where all the involved parties were involved, a ceasefire was agreed and it began on the 18th of November. (Edroos, 2018)

Peace prospects

The complexity of the conflict makes a feasible and quick peace agreement seem difficult to reach. Any attempts to end the war must avoid the same mistakes that the agreement by the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2011 made and consider the interests of all sides. (Chatham House, 2015)

The ceasefire in Hodeida has proved to be a positive step towards peaceful cooperation, but it remains to be seen if it can be implemented in other areas. Another positive event has been the posture recently adopted by the USA, since its influence may be crucial in ending the conflict.

Humanitarian Crisis

Causes

Yemen's economy and subsistence is largely dependant on goods imports such as food and water. As an already poor country with a weak economy, Yemen was more prone to collapse. After the Houthi uprising and the following conflict disrupted the country in all dimensions, the blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia was devastating, as it prevented commercial freight from entering the country. Furthermore, the airstrikes have damaged infrastructure considerably, increasing the number of displaced people and have repeatedly targeted civilians, causing more than 60% of their deaths. Last but not least, the battle of Hodeida impaired humanitarian aid from reaching those in need. (UNHCHR, 2018) (Al-Jazeera, 2018)

Many international law violations have been reported on either side. Houthi-Saleh forces have been responsible for drafting children as soldiers, making arbitrary detentions and bombing cities inhabited by civilians, among others. (HRW, 2018)

Consequences

As of the end of 2018, the casualties recorded were 57,000. However, many more have suffered the consequences of the war. 22 million people are in need of Humanitarian aid, approximately 18 million are food insecure, almost half of them are suffering extreme hunger. Malnourishment has affected as much as 7 million people, including children and pregnant women. IDPs have reached three million and about 600,000 people have fled the country. (UNOCHA, 2018)

Health has taken a heavy hit by the lack of imports. Half of the countries' 3,500 hospitals are not working since they do not have enough fuel for their generators to work. The fuel shortage has also taken its toll in the availability of fresh water because pumps are not operative. As a consequence, the worst cholera outbreak in recent history took place last year in Yemen, infecting a million people. Moreover,

70% of the population is unable to access basic medicine. (UNOCHA, 2018)(Thompson, 2017)

Response of the international community

The largest humanitarian crisis in the world receives the largest amount of Humanitarian aid, but it is still not enough. During the past year, more than 8 million have received Food Aid, 9 million have received health care, 10 million have received clean water and 3 million received protection. (Bibbo, 2018)

It is likely that 2019 will hold the biggest budget and the most aid yet, as the UN, along with other organizations, seeks to obtain \$4 billion to reach over 15 million people. (UNOCHA, 2018)

Major Countries or Organizations Involved

Yemen

The internationally recognized Yemeni government presided by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi is one for the sides fighting in the Civil War. However, it has been unable to guarantee the security of its citizens and the fulfillment of their basic needs. It is backed by the Saudi-led coalition with the exception of the UAE.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has intervened militarily in Yemen since 2015, leading a coalition of Arab States which aim to support the government in its fight against the Houthi movement, which they believe is backed by Iran. Saudi air strikes have been responsible of more than half of the civilian deaths in the conflict and have caused the destruction of infrastructure which further deepens the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the blockade it has imposed prevents supplies such as medicine, fuel, and food from entering the country.

United Arab Emirates

Another significant part of the anti-Houthi coalition, the United Arab Emirates which formerly endorsed Hadi's government now support the Southern Transitional Council, which intends to divide the country in two as it was before 1990. This has created greater division among the coalition.

United States of America (USA)

As one of Saudi Arabia’s most important allies, the USA has taken part in the war mostly indirectly through the sale of weapons. They have also contributed to the previously stated blockade. Recently, tensions resulting from the death of Jamal Khashoggi have hindered the american support of Saudi Arabia’s military actions. The Senate recently condemned the action in Yemen and called for the military and financial aid for Saudi Arabia to stop. The USA’s role in opening negotiations for the ceasefire was also crucial.

Iran

Iran has been involved in a Proxy War with Saudi Arabia since the start of the century, as they are the most important regional Shia and Houthi powers respectively and hold many political disagreements. The UN, the USA and Saudi Arabia have gathered evidence that shows that Iran provides weapons and intelligence to the Houthi forces, however, these claims are denied by the government. Iran's alleged involvement is what took Saudi Arabia to intervene according to the latter.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

This faction of the terrorist group founded by Osama Bin Laden in 1988 has been active since the early 2000s and is currently al-Qaeda's most powerful sector, having perpetrated attacks in Yemen, France, USA, and Saudi Arabia. They were immensely benefited by the growing turmoil in Yemen, which allowed them to take control of large areas of territory, raising concerns of western countries. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event |
|-----------------|---|
| November, 2011 | Saleh agrees to hand over power to the vice-president after more than twenty years of authoritarian rule. |
| February, 2012 | Hadi assumes as president amid terrorist attacks and growing tensions between different yemeni groups. |
| September, 2014 | A Houthi uprising begins as a consequence of the lack of dialogue for the drafting of the new Constitution, which they reject. Sanaa, the capital of Yemen is mostly controlled by Houthi forces. |
| February, 2015 | Hadi’s government is forced to move to the city of Aden. |
| March, 2015 | 137 people are killed due to the first attack by the Islamic State in Sanaa. |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| | The Saudi-led coalition begins its intervention by launching air strikes and imposing a blockade. |
| June, 2017 | The spread of cholera infects an estimated 900,000 and kills 2,100 people. |
| December, 2017 | Ali Abdullah Saleh is killed by Houthi forces. |
| January, 2018 | Southern separatists gain control of Aden. |
| February, 2018 | Houthis agree to be present at peace talks, monitored by Oman. |
| August, 2018 | A ceasefire is called by World Health Organization (WHO) in order to deliver vaccines to fight against cholera United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen governments were accused of War Crimes |
| December, 2018 | A ceasefire in Hodeida is implemented which included the later withdrawal of troops. Clashes seem to end the ceasefire. |

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Security Council Resolution 2402, 26 February 2018 (S/RES/2402)
- Security Council Resolution, 14 April 2015 (S/RES/2216)
- Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, 13 September 2017 (A/HRC/36/33)
- Human rights situation in Yemen, 24 September 2018 (A/HRC/39/L.21)
- Human rights situation in Yemen, 5 October 2018, (A/HRC/RES/39/16)

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

As it was previously stated, Yemen is currently receiving aid from many NGOs that are trying to stop famine and provide clean water and healthcare. Even though billions of dollars have been spent, the response has not been enough.

This happens mainly because of the obstacles for any type of freight to enter the country, since the blockade by the coalition and the battles for Hodeida have taken place. Since then, the UN has called Saudi Arabia to stop the blockade and in November 2018 an agreement was made over a ceasefire in Hodeida.

Resolution 39/16 of the Human Rights Council approved in October 2018 addresses the issue of the Human Rights situation in Yemen by taking measures such as condemning

arbitrary detentions, the recruitment of children soldiers and violations of humanitarian law; recalling the obligation of the State of Yemen to guarantee Human Rights to their citizens; and requests that aid is allowed to enter the territory without any impediments.

Possible Solutions

In order to solve the humanitarian crisis, it is essential for the armed conflict to stop. Were this not the case, measures could be taken to momentarily improve the conditions in which civilians are living.

Supplies such as medicine, food, and fuel are crucial for the conditions to improve. Therefore, the blockade which hampers them from entering the country should be lifted. Although food and medicine do not pose a threat to the warring sides, fuel does as it could be used belligerently. Moreover, the port in Hodeida has to remain open because it provides necessary goods for two-thirds of the country.

Another crucial and perhaps the most obvious solution is to increase the aid shipped to Yemen. This proves to be beneficial as the UN data shows that humanitarian help approximately 10 million people in need. However, bureaucratic procedures should be reduced in order to increase the effectivity considering that getting any product to enter the country takes many delaying procedures.

Giving too much aid has the potential danger of making Yemen too dependant on it. So if commercial goods are allowed to enter, giving cash and other forms of monetary aid could be the best way to re-establish Yemen's economy by revitalizing the internal market.

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