

Political Conflict Foreign Intervention and Crisis in Yemen

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Abstract

Yemen is in a state of crisis. The warring factions have devastated the country and destroyed the very social fabric of the society. The civil war in Yemen has led to comparisons between Yemen and Afghanistan. Just like Afghanistan, Yemen is now the hotbed of terrorist and sectarian organizations. The current state of affairs in Yemen has undermined its position in countering terrorism and stopping its spread to neighbouring states. Its proximity with the Bab al-Mandab strait has attracted powers like the USA and Russia as well. Iran's support for the Houthi rebels also invited Saudi Arabia and its allies into the Yemen crisis. Yemen is now experiencing a myriad of problems that are very far from being resolved. These problems and interests of foreign countries have made Yemen a failed state. It is highly unlikely that Yemen is going to become a useful member of the international community anytime soon.

Yemen: The Next Afghanistan?

Located at the peripheries of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Yemen is a relatively small and deprived country with great geopolitical and strategic significance in the international community. In recent years, Yemen has seen unrest and turmoil that revolves around the struggle for power and resources. There have been six major instances where armed clashes have been witnessed. These clashes were initiated by both the State of Yemen and the Houthi Rebels in the north. As a result of the clashes, thousands have died, and countless have been made into refugees. Other parties to the conflict include separatist entities in the south as well as terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). These conflicts have been further aggravated by the various tribal and military factions.

The conflict escalated to a full-scale civil war, which has ravaged the entire country. The major portion of the conflict is confined to the forces loyal to the struggling President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and the Zaidi Shia Houthi Rebels, also popularly known as Ansar Allah. The Houthis, followers of the Zaidi branch of Shia Islam, ruled the northern regions under a system of Imamate for almost 1000 years under their former leader, Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi. They first rose as a threat in 2004 when they started an uprising to preserve their Shia faith and traditions along with greater autonomy for Saada Province. Meanwhile, Houthi was killed, but his family continued to lead five more rebellions till a ceasefire was announced in 2010.

In 2011, the Houthis joined the protests against Hadi's predecessor, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and took advantage of the power vacuum to expand their influence in Saada and the neighbouring province of Amran. In 2014, they opposed a plan by President Hadi to divide Yemen into a federation of 6 regions. Later, the Houthis seized power in January and took over the capital, Sanaa, forcing President Hadi to flee the country. They established their own governing council. President Hadi requested the Saudi Government to launch airstrikes against the rebels and still considers himself the rightful ruler of Yemen. The crisis is further complicated due to the presence of AQAP that are against the Shias and Houthis and the involvement of Islamic State (IS).

The Stakes Involved

The Shia-led Iranian leadership and the Sunni leadership in KSA have been at odds as a result of this conflict. Saudi Arabia is a major stakeholder in this conflict as it shares a direct and long border with Yemen and accuses Iran of funding and supporting the Houthi rebels against the government to instigate Shia movements in the region, an allegation that Iran vehemently denies, increasing tension between the two states. (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.)

For the rest of the world, the regional tension has important repercussions. Yemen is situated on the Bab al-Mandab strait, which links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, a crucial corridor for oil shipments for much of the world. This brings world powers like the USA and Russia into conflict as they look to secure their energy needs. A Houthi takeover can threaten the passage through the strait and oil trade of KSA, Egypt, the US, Russia, etc., something their economic structures depend upon. Therefore, the stakes are high, not just for Yemen but numerous countries around the globe that will be affected as a result of the conflict, directly or indirectly. Pakistan has also been forced to get involved, based on a long-standing friendship with Saudi Arabia and a great number of Pakistani settlers situated in Yemen, which had to be evacuated at short notice once the situation became too dangerous and unpredictable.

Steps Taken to Resolve the Crises

Due to the magnitude of the conflict and the impact it has, a lot of diplomatic activity has been surrounding this crisis. The UN has emphasized the need for negotiations between all actors. UN Secretary-General of the time, Ban Ki-moon, called for all parties to negotiate with each other to reach a reasonable agreement acceptable to all. He also called for the protection of civilians and taking concrete steps to resolve the refugee crisis. Furthermore, he argued that UN workers should be allowed to deliver humanitarian aid to the people. Ban Ki-moon was critical of the Saudi-led coalition and urged for a peaceful resolution of the matter. He was against the military operation, arguing that it would further deteriorate the situation.

Iran's Rouhani and Turkey's President Erdogan, both countries having major stakes in the conflict,

met earlier this week and discussed the issue, among other negotiations to solve the Yemen crisis diplomatically. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024) They agreed upon strengthening trade, a positive step towards external mitigation for the conflict. UN Deputy Secretary-General, on his 4-day visit to China, expressed gratitude towards the local authorities for their generous assistance and stated that it was a significant humanitarian crisis that needed to be resolved soon and that there was a need for a political process for a solution to be reached.

Yemen, another Afghanistan?

Yemen is no longer a viable option in countering terrorism as it is becoming similar to Afghanistan. Over the next five years, there would not be much difference between the two states. There are already many similarities between the two states, which is why we can say that Yemen is a failed state. I am 100% confident about the statement that Yemen is becoming the next Afghanistan. My conclusion is based on various reasons, which are discussed below.

Many countries are looking to fulfil their own interests, which is contributing to the deteriorating situation in Yemen. Regional players like [Iran](#), [Saudi Arabia](#) and Turkey are all vying for regional hegemony and, as a result, are trying to propagate their own interests in the country. These issues are similar to the issues Afghanistan has been facing since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Yemen is undergoing the same fate as that of Afghanistan: worsening humanitarian crises, refugees, the devastation of the economy, warring factions, thousands of dead and much more. In Afghanistan, the USSR tried to install its own puppet government, whereas the US attempted to counter their efforts. In Yemen, the situation is similar as Iran is vying for the establishment of a Houthi government. Saudi Arabia is countering Iran's efforts. The clash of conflict between the two states has greatly affected the stability of the Yemeni state.

Similarly, like Afghanistan, Yemen occupies a very significant strategic position. Just as Afghanistan is the key to the energy needs of major powers, Yemen sits in a key position as far as the oil trade is concerned. The Gulf of Aden is located at the waterway, which leads to the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. The strait is responsible for the trade of 11% of the world's oil. This means that, just like in Afghanistan, world powers are vying to establish dominance over the country. As a result of their policies, it is unlikely that peace will be established in Yemen anytime soon. No country would accept the authority of the other country. Therefore, they will adopt policies which will ensure that no country is able to exert control. The end result is that the country will continue to suffer.

Yemen is one of the world's poorest countries. The recent civil war destroyed what was left of Yemen's economy. It has opened the door for the black economy in the country, just like Afghanistan. Oil is the backbone of Yemen's economy, but Yemen's oil reserves are set to run for the next fifteen to twenty years. This means that Yemen will depend solely on foreign aid, hampering its ability to become an independent state. The same has happened and is happening in Afghanistan. Another similarity between the two states is demographics. Both the countries have a youthful population,

which is a cause for concern. The faltering economy has left the youth to exploitation by various sectarian and terrorist outfits. This exploitation is resulting in the destabilization of the country. Afghanistan is faced with a similar situation. The disheartened youth have no other avenues to earn and thus turn towards such outfits.

These factors inhibit Yemen's ability to effectively counter any terrorist activities in the country. Unless the fundamental issues plaguing Yemen are resolved, the world cannot rely on it for countering terrorism. World and regional powers are themselves responsible for the vacuum Yemen has created and the growth of terrorist activities in the region. The conflicting interests of other states and their efforts to secure their interests are evidence of their role in destabilizing the country.

Conclusion

The interests of regional powers and world powers will inhibit the peaceful resolution of the Yemen crisis. All of them are vying for their self-interests in the country, making sure that Yemen remains a failed state. Similarly, the economy is in tatters, which further destabilizes the country. The demographic trends further present us with a cause for worry. The resolution of the Yemen crisis requires sincere efforts on the part of the regional and world powers. It seems highly unlikely that world powers would see eye to eye on the Yemen crisis anytime soon. Unless world and regional powers put aside their issues, the Yemen crisis cannot be resolved. As a result of which, Yemen is the next Afghanistan and cannot be relied upon anymore for countering terrorism.

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