

Lidya Tadesse

East High School

Sioux City, Iowa

Yemen, Political Conflict

Yemen: Weaponization of Food Leaves Civilians Hungry

Yemen is a country in the Middle East that is one of the oldest in the world and dates back more than 3,000 years. The country has a rich history and gained its independence from the Ottomans in 1600. Then, in 1839, Britain occupied South Yemen. Ten years later, in 1849, the Ottomans returned and took control of North Yemen. In 1918, the Ottoman Empire lost control all throughout the world and they were unable to keep control of Northern Yemen. Britain finally left South Yemen in 1967. North Yemen had been led by Imam Yahya and then his son when he was assassinated, but he was overthrown, and North Yemen became an Islamic Republic. South Yemen took on a communist government, and the two nations began having border disagreements which lead to fighting. In 1990, the two nations compromised and agreed to come together and form the Republic of Yemen (Yemen Profile - Timeline).

Yemen has a population of approximately 29.8 million people; of those people about 37.8% of them live in urban areas and the remaining 62.2% live in rural areas (Yemen Demographics). The government used to be a parliamentary republic where people chose members of parliament, with some religious influences, but now the government is in an uncertain state because of the 2014-2015 coup where the government was overthrown. A regular farm in Yemen is approximately 1.1 hectares which is about the same size as the inside of a racetrack. Yemen's climate is mostly dry and desert like; there is usually low amounts of rainfall, but that can depend on what part of the country one is in. In Yemen, 34% of the land is used for agriculture. However, only 3% of that land is arable, meaning it is suitable for growing plants. Out of that 3%, less than half of that is currently used to grow crops (Yemen, Land Links). The middle eastern nation is bordered by Saudi Arabia, Oman, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Sea. Yemen's top exports respectably are crude petroleum, gold, refined petroleum, and fruits. The country mainly exports to Oman, China, and India. The countries that Yemen imports items from the most are China, Turkey, India, and Oman. The top imported items to Yemen are wheat, refined petroleum, raw sugar, iron, and rice (Waddington).

The typical family in Yemen consists of six to seven people and the average mother has seven children (Household). With such large family sizes, there must be a way for people to provide for their families. The regular woman in Yemen does not work; she usually does tasks around the house and takes care of the children. As of 2019, only 5.83% of women contributed to the workforce. That is a decrease from 1999 where 21.79% of women had jobs. Most men in Yemen have jobs and in 2019, 70.87% of men were employed. However, the percentage of men with jobs also decreased; in 1999, 73.86% of men had jobs (Yemen Female Labor Force). The reason for this decrease in employment rates for both men and women was the civil war and the unstable government. The typical yearly salary for someone who works in Yemen is \$2,213. In a home, up to three people share a room and extended families often live together because a sense of community is very important in Yemen. The most common meats are chicken, mutton, and goat. Fish is common in coastal cities and towns, but pork is not eaten because the majority of Yemeni's are Islamic, and the religion prohibits the consumption of pork. Bread is commonly eaten, and unleavened bread is also eaten often. The national meal is saltah: a stew that can be made with or without meat, and other ingredients are fenugreek and other vegetables.

Health care in Yemen needs a lot of improvement. There are not enough qualified healthcare professionals, and there are not enough funds for public health programs. There are a few places one can go and receive professional healthcare, but those places are mostly run and created by foreigners (Manfred and Burrowes). The citizens of Yemen have access to education, but many people are not able to take advantage of it. Many teachers are not qualified to teach, and the number of children make it so there are not enough teachers or resources in general. Few of the female population is able to go to school and that shows in the literacy rate, where only one-third of all women in Yemen can read compared to the two-thirds of men who can read. Most people think that toilets are something everyone in the world has, but in all actuality, only one-third of Yemen's population have access to toilets. Those toilets are not like the ones we are used to in the U.S.; they are holes dug into the ground (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene). In 2014, little more than two-thirds of the population in Yemen have access to electricity. Solar energy is a big source of energy, as more than half of the people in Yemen use it for lighting.

The stem of all Yemen's food insecurities is conflict. It is a conflict that led to malnutrition and water insecurity. The civil war is fueled by greed from many different sources that all want power and resources for themselves without any care about how it affects civilians or others. The problems arose in 2011 when Yemen was led by Ali Abdullah Saleh who had been president at that time for 33 years. The citizens of the country, including the Houthis a Shiite Muslim minority in Yemen, felt oppressed and had enough, which led them to protest for a change in the country. They protested the unemployment levels that were growing and the government's corruption, forcing their leader to resign and give up his position to the vice-president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, on November 12, 2011, until the next election. Then in 2012, there was an election with only Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi's name on the ballot; he was then sworn in as president on February 25, 2012. However, Adb Mansur Hadi was unable to improve the economy or maintain order in the country. While the government was struggling, the Houthis saw that as a weak spot and they took it as an invitation to gain power against their government, but they lacked military power. Saleh, the former president, also saw how unstable the new government was, and he saw this as an opportunity to regain his authority as President. He and the Houthis agreed to work together; Saleh would provide them with the military that they needed, and he hoped to regain his former title. In 2015 the Houthis were able to take over the capital of Yemen: Sanaa. The President, Hadi, fled to Saudi Arabia and the Prime Minister resigned (Riedel). Once the country was virtually ungoverned, other groups decided they wanted some of that power, and that made for even more instability and fighting. Saudi Arabia and other foreign nations got involved in the conflict and took sides with Hadi and the government. That had horrific effects on the civilians, and by the beginning of the war, Saudi Arabian forces launched more than 210 bombs, killing hundreds of people including 27 members of a single-family (Targeting Saada: Unlawful Coalition Airstrikes on Saada City in Yemen). This was not the end of it, as airstrikes are still happening and a third of all the airstrikes are targeted at civilian sites including schools, hospitals, mosques, and even funerals (McKernan). Al Queda and other groups have also taken advantage of the situation and have expanded their foothold in these countries. While they are not an official part of the civil war, they play a role in this conflict. This led to the United States getting involved, trying to push the terrorist groups out. The United States joining also had horrible consequences, even though they were trying to ease the problem. In 2017, Saleh, who was working with the Houthis, went on national television and ended his alliance with the Houthis and switch sides, supporting the Saudi backed coalition. The Houthis felt betrayed and two days later, Saleh was killed. The Houthis admitted they were responsible for his death and even aired pictures of his corpse on live television broadcasts. (Edroos) The civil war is not just another war. Many consider it to be a proxy war because there are so many other countries that are involved, mainly Saudi Arabia and Iran, but other countries like the UAE, Egypt, and the United States also play a role in the fight (Foster). There are no signs that this war is coming to a halt

or an end anytime soon. But, like many wars all around the world, the civilians are the ones who are paying the price.

This war has been devastating and continues to be devastating for the civilians of Yemen. Since the official start in 2015, over 17,500 people have died and thousands more have been injured. The country's existing infrastructure has been significantly damaged, including historical sites such as archeological sites, mosques, and churches (Khalidi). Bridges, schools, hospitals, and over 400,000 homes have also been destroyed, leaving many with nowhere to go, leaving 2,650,000 Yemenis displaced in their own country. Airstrikes have no care for what they are hitting, leading them to strike markets, funerals, and busses with refugees (McKernan). In this war, the fighters are doing anything and everything they can to win, including using food and water as weapons. Around ninety percent of food consumed in Yemen is imported. Saudi Arabia has air and sea blockades all over the country, highly limiting things that go in and out. Houthis have inflated the prices of food to finance their war efforts. With no food coming in for large amounts of time and the increases in prices, very few Yemeni's can afford food for themselves and their families. As of 2018 more than 85,000 children under the age of five have died of starvation. These numbers show no signs of slowing down and now more than 20 million people are starving with ten million at risk of famine (Targeting Saada: Unlawful Coalition Airstrikes on Saada City in Yemen). These people now rely on aid from outside sources for nutriment but getting aid to come into the country is almost impossible. Ships have to wait many days before getting permission to dock, then when food gets transported on busses, they often get attacked or run out of fuel. When food finally arrives, it is often not enough, and many people are unable to get to places food is available. Virtually everyone is affected, but some are hit harder than others. The elderly and children are weaker and more susceptible to diseases like cholera, which is common because of the outbreak that started in 2016 but is still ongoing. Older people are not the main focus and they do not receive the help they need; they are also unable to access healthcare they need (The Yemen Crisis: How Older People Are Affected). Women are being widowed, rape is increasing, and many women do not get the nutrition they need to breastfeed their children (Yemen's Civil War Hits Women and Children Hardest). Many men have lost their jobs and homes and are now unable to provide for their families. Most people have relocated to refugee camps where living conditions are only slightly better.

This is a very complex problem, that in share, requires solutions that are just as complex. Before continuing a fight between sides in politics, the civilians should be the first to be focused on. After all, without citizens, there would be no nation to govern. Before anything else continues to happen, all sides must stop fighting and ceasefire until they can come to a compromise to benefit not only those fighting, but most importantly the civilians. Incentives would be needed to convince them to stop, each side would be guaranteed a voice to speak on future matters. Next, previously blocked ports should be opened again for food, medicine, and fuel to be brought back into the country. With food and medicine coming in the malnourished can gain strength and the sick can be healthy again. Also, organizations such as the Red Cross and the United Nations Food Program should make efforts to provide as much food and medical support as they can. People in other countries that have the means can donate to these organizations that are doing work in Yemen. They should continue to do so until the civilians and those affected by this are stable enough to provide for themselves.

After people have what they need to survive, they should start rebuilding damaged infrastructure and clear debris to return order and re-establish the country's former façade. Doing so would create employment opportunities for the unemployed and would give them a source of income to be able to get back on their feet. Other countries and organizations such as the Belt and Road Initiative would also need to help with rebuilding the infrastructure since Yemen does not have all the resources to do it themselves. They should also educate the people of Yemen on safe building procedures, so they can continue to improve their

countries infrastructure without outside help. When bridges, roads, hospitals, and homes are rebuilt, people living in refugee camps would also start to be able to return to their homes. This is going to take years to rebuild, but with the cease of fighting and the aid of many, people's lives will be able to return to normal.

Jobs must also be created, and to do this, the United Nations should support farmers and business owners so they can also support themselves while also creating jobs for others who could work with them. Now that the ports are open and since Yemen has natural resources such as oil, seafood, coal, etc., they can export these things easily which will also create jobs. Factories that produce items such as clothing home goods and more should also be opened. With all these jobs and export opportunities being created and maintained, Yemen's economy will soon begin to recover, and civilians will be able to support themselves and their families again.

After life goes back to normal for the citizens, the government and all the parties involved in the war should then meet in front of the United Nations and make a compromise. All foreign nations that are currently playing a role in this war must step back. If they are unwilling to, countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia should be pressured by other countries in their areas and their allies to do so. Perhaps the government needs to reform. By reforming, all ethnic groups and regions would get a certain number of representatives, so everyone's voice is heard in future conversations. Wars in the past like the Korean War and the Sudanese Civil war lead to the countries separating. Ultimately this might happen in Yemen if they cannot find a way to unite and reform. Countries that have strong governments can advise Yemen's leaders and its people that help things get sorted out and back to normal. Elections must truly be democratic to ensure that the citizens are getting their voices heard. Without it, another uprising will be inevitable in the future. There should be people appointed by the United Nations to make sure that the system is not becoming corrupt like it once was and to make sure that everything is running smoothly. After the war has ended and infrastructure has been rebuilt, Yemen must make sure to never return to the state it is currently. One way to ensure a peaceful state is to educate the citizens. Programs that teach illiterate adults to read should be taught, so they can form their own opinions and gain knowledge, should be created. With the ability to read they can educate themselves on proper sanitation, good nutrition, and fair government systems. With all of this done, Yemen can grow to become prosperous once again and become even stronger than it was from the start of all of this.

Right now, Yemen is a suffering nation with the worst humanitarian crisis on this earth. As a result of the war, many people have lost their lives and will continue to lose their lives. The economy and infrastructure have crumbled and need to be restored. People are starving with few sources of medical support. In a war where there are many players, the civilians are caught in the middle. Yemen has the potential to be a Middle Eastern powerhouse; all that is needed is peace. Too many people have died: parents have lost their children, children have lost their parents, and no one is invincible. People will continue to die if something is not done right now. It is time for a change. It is time to stop this war and to save lives of the innocent. People that did nothing wrong, and their only fault is being born in a war-torn country.

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