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Yemen: Conflict

Suffering in Yemen

If the world is unable to feed one thousand hungry people, feeding one would begin considerable changes. Yet, thousands throughout the world struggle to obtain constant nutrition and supply of resources. One of these countries, The Republic of Yemen, continues to fail to provide to their people due to the ongoing war. Families go hungry every night, and lack the right resources to live a fulfilling life. Although many agreements and ceasefires have been set in place, Yemen struggles to maintain peace. Without peace, the people of Yemen have to endure hardships and are unable to progress to a more fruitful future. The people of Yemen are suffering through an extreme humanitarian crisis due to conflict among different groups within and without the nation.

The Republic of Yemen is located in the Middle East, bordered by the Red Sea and the Bab-el Mondey strait in the West, Saudi Arabia in the North, and Oman in the Northeast (Waddington). Ever since the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) merged with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), Yemen was born. It established itself as a country in 1990 (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). Yemen has been one of the poorest countries in the Middle East and North Africa, constantly affected by the 2015 war between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia's coalition. (*Yemen Overview*). There are no permanent watercourses running throughout the country. Most of the land is mountainous and arid, while there are areas with enough precipitation for agriculture (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

Only three percent of the country's land is arable, while about one-third is available for animal grazing. Soil can vary from sandy to fertile but lacks organic matter and is vulnerable to erosion. This places a limit on agricultural options. Terraces are commonly used to cover mountains and enrich compost over centuries (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). Agricultural land within the country is distributed by about 1.2 million landholders. Usually, sixty-two percent of farms are less than two hectares in size. Women have the right to inherit land from male family members. Now, however, neglect and civil conflict are affecting the land since eighty percent of disputes are land-related (Caldwell).

Only about fifty percent of health facilities are fully functional. Eighty percent of the population faces challenges with access to food, water, and health care (*Health Sector in Yemen*). The other half of health facilities are damaged, completely destroyed, or dysfunctional. It is taking a deteriorating effect on Yemeni health. This includes high levels of malnutrition in children, outbreaks of communicable diseases, and low immunization rates. Maternal care is also being impacted as less than fifty percent of births are managed by health personnel. The conflict is also causing weak governance in the health sector. Financing has dropped drastically and leaves Yemen's healthcare system at risk. There are constant disease outbreaks. Most of which are preventable such as cholera, diphtheria, and chicken pox, and are magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic (*Health Situation in Yemen*).

Primary school is normally compulsory. However, access to education can be difficult. Females and people living in rural areas are less likely to engage in education. Most are unable to complete primary school. Other than that, the education cycle includes primary education for nine years and three years of secondary education. Students enroll in primary school at the age of six to fourteen, and secondary school from fifteen to seventeen. The Ministry of Education controls and oversees the education system, and has the responsibility to deal with implementing governmental policies throughout the schools (*Education*).

Most Yemenis are devoted to Islam. Muslim individuals include ninety-nine percent of the population, with sixty-five percent being Sunni and thirty-five percent being Shia. The rest religions practiced by Yemenis include Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Baha'i (*Yemen, World Factbook*). Most divisions within the population are caused by tribalism, geography, and religion. Each can affect politics in Yemen and constantly lead to violence (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). Loyalty to God and family are the most important aspects of the traditional society of Yemen. Most family members live under one roof or near each other. The average number of children per family is about three or four. Bigger families live in rural areas. Men in the household are expected to support their children until they leave. Mothers influence the morals and education of their children. Young children are expected to respect and follow their parents' wishes (*Yemeni Culture*).

After North and South Yemen united in 1990, Ali Abdullah Saleh came into power and most of the population within the country wanted justice. Rising fuel prices, corruption, and unemployment kept Yemenis unhappy with leadership. Many Yemenis rebelled against him in 2011. Once Saleh was pushed out of power in 2014, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi was put in charge, but Yemen still suffered. The Houthis, a political and armed group consisting of Shia Muslims coming from the Houthi tribe, had once joined forces with Saleh to take over Sanna, the capital of Yemen. Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia. The latter wanted to keep Hadi in power. Eventually, Saleh's alliance with the Houthis broke in 2017 after he publicly announced he sided with the Saudi coalition on national TV. The Houthis found him and killed him. In 2015, Saudi Arabia put up a barrier around Yemen to terminate the aid coming in from the UN and other organizations. Currently, Houthis control over eighty percent of livable areas with most of the country's population, while the rest are controlled by Hadi. He is still sanctioned in Saudi Arabia. There are some big players helping Hadi such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to keep Hadi the head of Yemen. This Saudi coalition is backed by some powerful states such as the U.S., and the U.K., as well as France, Canada, and Germany. All groups are supplying them with weapons, logistical support, and aid (*Why is Yemen At War*).

Saudi Arabia has purposefully aimed airstrikes toward civilians. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait in Yemen links the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, a critical point for oil shipping. Saudi Arabia wants to ensure they keep this area free from Houthi control. Even before this impacting conflict, Yemen was struggling with weak human development, high population growth, local conflicts, food insecurity, and uncertain political transition (*The United Nations in Yemen*). Yemen is undergoing armed conflict and political unrest, with ever-increasing intensity since 2015. As of now, the unrest conflict has displaced four million people, increased cholera outbreaks, and decreased medical facilities and aid. Over the course of the war, an increasing number of Yemenis have left the south and sought safety and economic stability in Houthi-led territory. In 2022, both parties signed a ceasefire to decrease fighting until October 2022, in which they failed to maintain (*Yemen's Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering*).

One of the first solutions Yemen should take action to implement in the country is restricting supply from more developed countries. In the recent past, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have signed peace treaties. No matter what was agreed upon, both parties seemed to break these alliances. On the other hand, the United States, United Kingdom, France, and other Western countries have provided military support and weapon sales, which has been helping the Saudi-led coalition. After some investigation, it was found that a substantial amount of air raids were by U.S. jets and had American pilots (Motaparthly & Wilson). Even after America's leader, President Biden, announced the U.S. would end support in Yemen, there has been no clear change thus far. America is still providing warplanes that perform airstrikes and is enforcing air and sea blockades along Yemen. This alliance leads back to the 1940s when President Roosevelt agreed to help Saudi Arabia with security assistance in exchange for Saudi's oil supply. Since then, the agreement has continued, but the relationship is debilitating as the U.S. imports less than seven percent of petroleum from Saudi Arabia. So far, the U.S. has conducted three hundred seventy-six drone strikes within Yemen, and have killed about nine-thousand people in total. The Houthi forces in Yemen have carried out some violations of human rights by interfering with humanitarian assistance. They kidnap humanitarian aid workers, carjack automobiles with necessary aid, and prevent women aid workers from providing help to Yemenis (Msuya).

Houthis also engage in drone and missile attacks toward Saudi Arabia. If the Saudis would stop their bombardment and blockade of aid for Yemen, Houthis would no longer engage in these attacks. It is very unlikely that Yemen would continue its attacks against Saudi Arabia. Even though the United States has addressed Houthi violations, abuses by Saudi-led forces have not received any sort of sanction. They continue to receive military aid. Iran has sided with the Houthis, yet Iran does not spend billions of dollars like Saudi Arabia has on this assistance. Most of the time, Houthi groups generate weaponry by looting Saudi-led army stockpiles, defeating Saudi forces, and purchasing weapons from the black market. Most of those factors are uncontrollable. Saudi Arabia's approach to tightening the blockade in Yemen has only increased the hostility and attacks of Houthis. It is imperative that the United States and other Western countries stop providing military aid in Yemen. That way, Saudi Arabia is thwarted from punishing the rest of the civilians who are struggling to live in harsh circumstances and can have access to necessary assistance (*The Saudi-led War in Yemen*).

The United States accounts for two-thirds of aircraft maintenance for the Royal Saudi Air Force. Without this support, the aircraft in Yemen would rapidly be impractical. Providing Saudi Arabia with more weapons and military aid will end up harming more innocent people than helping the situation. Saudi Arabia has been held back from airstrikes since the truce with Yemen's Houthis in March of 2022. Yet, the threat of Saudi airstrikes remains. At the same time, Houthis have attacked oil export facilities in the southern parts of Yemen, where land is controlled by Saudi Arabia. If these transborder attacks are initiated, Emiratis and Saudis will resume airstrikes, with significant help from the United States. The original objective of the Saudi-led coalition was to expel Houthis from Sana'a and restore President Hadi to power. Yet, this "air war" has become extremely futile. No longer is this war about expelling Houthis from Yemen; this war is about Saudi Arabia's protection of its economy and reputation. Saudi Arabia is taking precautions to defend its oil facilities as Houthis gain more power than ever before (Sheline & Washington).

In this case, most people are living under Houthi territory; they are fleeing to the “rebels” of Yemen, as perceived by Saudi Arabia. On top of that, a poll revealed that seventy percent of Americans disagree with selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, regardless of their political party. It is recognized that many Americans do not agree with the humanitarian risks this brings to the people of Yemen (Cohen & Allen). At this point, failure to reach peace for Yemen could cost the international community about twenty-nine billion dollars if the war continues for another five years (Wintour). There are some estimates that withdrawing the United States military aid from Yemen would cost about one billion dollars per week (Amman). Although extremely costly, it is imperative that the United States enforce action to retreat all sorts of military aid and sales to Saudi Arabia to improve the current crisis in Yemen.

The second step Yemen should work on executing is releasing tension in the Saudi Blockade surrounding the country. For nearly eight years, Saudi Arabia imposed a blockade around Yemen. Both air and sea restrictions. Thus, restricting important aid to the population within and tightening exports to other countries. In 2021, the United Nations estimated that over sixty percent of deaths were due to disruptions in basic needs such as access to water, food, and medical aid. Saudi Arabia has restricted fuel imports and hindered shipments. On top of that, commercial flights from Sana’a Airport have been paused since 2016, stopping critically ill Yemenis from reaching vital medical supplies and medicines coming into Yemen. Most Yemenis with chronic health troubles have suffered and died waiting for these medicines. Both types of restrictions have caused an increase in medicine prices, inaccessible for most of the population. The UN has proved that Saudi Arabia limits the fuel going into Yemen. Only about three percent of the fuel Yemen needs each month was restricted by Saudi Arabia in November of 2021. Then only five percent in December. These factors jeopardize the health of all Yemenis. After Saudi-Arabia releases tension around the borders of Yemen, millions of Yemenis will have access to much-needed assistance, blocked by Saudi Arabia, from international countries and the UN (*The Saudi-led War in Yemen*).

The Republic of Yemen is in need of relief from the Saudi Arabia coalition to keep the Yemeni population healthy. Under the current conditions, Yemen is failing due to malnutrition and lack of assistance. Saudi Arabia has proven to have a strong, negative impact on the lives of Yemenis. Enforcing Western countries to decrease the amount of weaponry and military support given to Saudi Arabia will allow the ongoing conflict to come to a stop. Implementing relief from a blockade created by Saudi Arabia on Yemen’s border will allow the much-needed humanitarian assistance to reach the most vulnerable within. The eighteen million without water and sanitation and the sixteen million with food insecurity and malnutrition will face justice for being punished through the persistent, military unrest between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis of Yemen. Although there is a great challenge to provide complete support to the people of Yemen, the most important action to spark positive change is to feed and assist at least one person.

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