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Yemen, conflict

Yemen: the world's worst humanitarian crisis under the impact of a political game

Introduction

Serving as a playground for both internal and external powers, Yemen has since 2014 been suffering a civil war resulting in devastating, long-term consequences. Yet, behind this catastrophe, there are Yemenis still looking for a glimmer of hope despite the lack of political solutions and the failure of the military. Can peace even be achieved?

Land and family

The Republic of Yemen is a social republic with Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi as the head of state since 2012. The country is located in the Middle East with a population of 31.6 million people. The latest statistics, from 2020, show that about 62% of the population live in rural areas and 37.9% in urban areas.

Yemen's climate varies with the altitude above sea. The west is hot and humid with infrequent precipitation, meanwhile the rainfall is even more sparse in the inland and desert areas. Nonetheless, 34% of Yemen's land is classified as agricultural and the majority of it is pastures and farmland. What is actually cultivated makes up less than half of the 3% of the land that is considered arable. 62% of farms cover less than two hectares. Cereals such as millet, corn, wheat, barley, and sorghum are the most common crops. Along with that, cotton and many fruit trees are also grown. However, an expanding proportion of land is being transformed from food production to growing qat, a stimulant-releasing psychoactive plant.

An average family in Yemen consists of 7 members, who share one room. Generally, bread and tea make up breakfast and dinner for a Yemeni family, while lunch is either rice or aseed, a traditional dish made with wheat, water and salt. The majority of employees in Yemen work in agriculture, which is a limited working sector considering its relatively low share of GDP. Another common occupation is being a shop salesman. Furthermore, the unemployment rate is remarkably high, 13% as of 2020.

Despite the fact that Yemen's internationally recognized government provides a free universal and mandatory education for those of ages 6 through 15, the Data World Bank shows that the school enrollment rate has decreased to roughly over 70% as a result of the ongoing conflict. As well as the education system, the war has had a negative effect on health infrastructure whereas only 50% of health facilities are fully functional.

Access to water differs between urban and rural areas, with the latter being in the worse condition. Electricity on the other hand, was available for 72.8% of the population in 2019 leaving 53.7% of the population with mobile cellular subscriptions.

Challenge and impact

The conflict in Yemen is the major barrier to nutritious food. The war that started in 2014 has its roots in a failed attempt to bring political stability to the country during the Arab Spring 2011. It mainly plays out between the Yemeni government, later with the support of a Saudi-led coalition, and an Iran-backed Houthi movement. Along that, a separatist movement that sprung up during the war, demands the independence of South Yemen. There are basically three wars in one.

The situation is seen to be worsening this year. Even though the government has control over the geographically bigger part of the country, the Houthis control northern Yemen where the majority of the population lives. In 2021, The Houthi rebels launched an offensive to seize Ma'rib, a central province rich in oil and gas and it is the last stronghold of the Yemeni government. With it falling to the Houthis, the government's presence in North Yemen would shrink even further. This will pave the way for the Houthi militia's control, which means moving to another phase of the war that may go towards a long-term forgotten war, and this may push towards the disintegration of the country.

According to the World Food Program, conflict is the biggest driver of hunger in the world today. In Yemen, 20.1 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance, 16.2 million people are food insecure and 4 million are displaced as well as cases of malnourished children being the highest ever. OCHA services say that Yemen has fallen into a deeper crisis as a result of escalating conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate catastrophes, disease outbreaks, economic collapse, reduced aid and more. The UN will need about \$3.9bn this year to be able to help because fundings have been decreasing since last year.

The conflict has negatively affected the larger part of the population, however the rural areas where hostilities are actively continuing, are specifically in need of the extra assistance. Urban regions have become overflowed with refugees. In accord to the Humanitarian Response Plan 2021, women and children make up more than 70% of IDPs. Furthermore, this displacement has destructive effects on children's education and other services. In addition, the discrimination against the marginalized ones, Yemen's Muhamasheen minority, has not faltered since the fighting was initiated. Other than being cramped in slums with few economic possibilities, limited access to clean water and education, their lack of identity contributes to their inability to receive food distributions or aid of any other form.

Undoubtedly, the environment has also fallen as a victim to the war. With prices being extremely high and the lack of cooking gas, Yemenis' cooking methods have taken a more traditional turn which involves the destruction of vegetation and therefore heightens the risk of deforestation. The conflict in the country has also led to Yemen's coastal strip being turned into military sites.

Solutions and recommendations

"We need to establish an inclusive, internationally supported political process that can provide an adequate basis for peace." stated Hans Grundberg, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, indicating that the situation in Yemen cannot be settled without a political solution. Thus, the main focus should be diplomatic efforts.

Has the world just been watching the country collapse? Certainly not, the UN has since 2015 been on the ground providing lifesaving aid and protection. Likewise, the WFP has prevented catastrophe in Yemen and helped millions of people to survive. However, endless funding is not the answer.

For sustainable results, encouraging the parties of the war to settle on an agreement is essential. Evidently, this is difficult to accomplish and the presence of a third unconditional party to ensure the prospect of peace, is needed. All the sides of the war must agree to disarm and demobilize to then be able to negotiate on a settlement that shall include a power-sharing arrangement. Thus, increasing the intervention of UN peacekeeping forces in Yemen could be a step closer to a ceasefire. After all, the parties are more likely to compromise in case of military stalemate. The peacekeeping forces are already in the country, working to provide security and driving the Houthis away from Hodeidah and other Red Seaports. Through military pressure, enabling the Houthis from winning in Ma'rib, could be possible. Using the resulting influence of the loss to end the fighting and getting the parties to agree on a peaceful settlement could result in the end of the civil war. The UN peacekeeping forces are funded by contributions of member states to the OSESGY, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen. Moreover, this is not a completely new and questionable recommendation and it does not require new sources of capital. On the other hand, this solution can be controversial in terms of post-conflict conditions.

On the ground, opening roads is an important part of getting various sorts of movements in the country. Blocking ways to prevent aid from reaching the inhabitants is a common strategy in wars to increase pressure and damage. Yemenis' freedom is restricted due to these restrictions on roads, ports and airports. Reopening them plays a big role in citizens obtaining the help needed. Other than that, it is crucial for the movement of the military. This could also be done by the UN peacekeeping forces or other organizations working in Yemen, for instance FSAC. These types of foundations are likewise funded by donations, which need to rise. There are various commercial techniques to do that, for example, making it more accessible by using mobile optimization, painting a picture through images and stirring emotions, using numerous platforms and much more. This would benefit the population, the UN forces and these varied organizations. Regardless of the benefits, the downside is the effort and capital demanded for this solution to work.

The proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran is affecting the war in Yemen and its civilians are paying the price. Both sides are providing a big amount of money and resources, allowing the conflict to escalate and continue in a way that it would not otherwise. According to the UN, Saudi Arabia has even committed war crimes involving the Yemeni scene. Yet, neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran are directly impacted by the conflict. This external involvement has to stop. Internationally decreasing economic support to impose cost on the pair could help to make them reduce their intentions of continuing the war. Although, one shall also consider not causing unbearable harm. Nevertheless, for this to work, it will demand global action and that is challenging to attain. It would also lead to foreign influence, which in turn can further complicate the situation.

Furthermore, the United Nations and the international community must be aware that these conflicting parties and fragile party forces represent a part of the solution, and cannot be all of it. Therefore, It is important to work on changing the tools that managed to create the Yemeni scene, which were major reasons for the failure to achieve a peaceful political transition during the Yemeni Revolution 2011-2012. The current state of war in Yemen is a natural result of aborting the peaceful civil revolution, and therefore this war would not have exploded without the undeclared alliance between the forces of counter-revolutions locally, regionally and externally, which requires re-reading the scene anew. Moreover, drawing a new map that stands on the factors of disability and how they can be overcome, creating a new political equation based on overthrowing the coup first, and rebuilding a map of new national alliances to restore and build the state again, could be a solution. This can only be done by a national agreement under the auspices of the United Nations to end the war and preserve the republic and unity, without any other external involvement since the foreign engrossment is what helped bury the revolution and blow it up from the depths so that it would not be established for those in charge of the country in the future.

Aid is not only significant for solving the conflict, but it also plays a huge role in recovery. The damage that has been caused both directly and indirectly by the war, will leave imprints on the development of the country and the upcoming generations for a long time to come. Still, a fragmented recovery is possible and involving women in the readjustment is extremely important.

Food insecurity will assuredly be one of the most complicated challenges to overcome. The problem in Yemen is not availability, it is affordability. While it is inherently difficult to reach economic stability under these circumstances, a new 'coupon' system could be created to allow the citizens to obtain their basic needs. The government offering money to the Yemeni population would be less convenient than a controlled distribution system that would also be beneficial for Yemen's marginalized ones since it would not require identification. In addition, the difficult economic situation and the collapse of the currency that Yemen is facing, plays an important factor in the effects of the conflict and the economic division between government-controlled areas and Houthi-controlled areas. Adapting this system would contribute to evening out the differences between these regions and make room for economic movement. The 'coupons' could work as gift cards, where they are worth a certain amount of money to enable Yemenis to purchase basic necessities, which would hopefully reduce the amount of food insecure people and be a part of the solution for hunger. In order to establish this system, Yemen needs help from the World Bank and from UNICEF or other organizations or authorities willing to do the practical work needed and to make sure that the money is going to the right people. Economic stability can later be achieved through measures for GDP growth and increasing investments, both domestic and foreign, like for example reactivating the glass and cement factories that are available in Yemen.

In the coastline areas, seaweed could be developed to become edible which would be beneficial considering its potential to serve as an abundant source of macronutrients. Funding research on how these plants act in plantations and how they could be genetically modified to prevent food loss, is therefore required. On land, the use of zeolites, which in Yemen is available in large reserves, in agriculture could be advantageous since they can function as nutrient carriers and for freeing nutrients in order to improve nutrient utilization efficiency. In addition, they can also be exported due to the large demand in the global market. For this, taking advantage of Yemen's coastline for international trade is effective. Other agricultural investments can aim to decrease qat production, improve yields, develop techniques like intercropping to improve growing conditions and reduce infestation among crops etc. As we have witnessed throughout history, better crops will lead to more food and therefore reduce starvation.

Conclusion

To conclude, The Republic of Yemen is a country in the Middle East that is in need of acute aid. The conflict of regional powers, coupled with their excessive support for the parties to the conflict in Yemen, has tragically contributed to turning Yemen into an open battlefield and Yemenis with it into cheap tools of war. It has even pushed the country to the edge of famine. The only thing that would bring continuous results is a globally supported political solution to the current civil war. Thus, it is necessary to yet again mention and call to overcome grudges, disagreements and hatreds, and adhere to the national constants to get out of this dangerous juncture. Can we care enough for the life of those whom we have never met and never will meet to achieve long-lasting peace?

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