

Background- careening towards the precipice

One of the poorest countries in the Middle East has become a theatre of the cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Yemen has been in a state of Anarchy since President Hadi was forced to flee the capital and seek exile in Saudi Arabia. However, he continues to remain the internationally recognised head of Yemen. The conflict in Yemen has become increasingly protracted and has possibly reached a stalemate. Like any other armed conflict, the heaviest cost of this civil war turned proxy war, was borne by the poor civilians of the country.



Yemen's at least 70 percent of the population lack access to food, safe water and adequate healthcare. The breakdown of health care systems, particularly in the southern port of Aden, has led to the resurgence of deadly diseases like dengue fever. Last year, more than a million people in Yemen, including health workers were affected by the cholera outbreak. Several children are born malnourished. In a country where malnutrition is rampant, diseases become more lethal. The war in Yemen has forced millions to flee violence within

and across borders of Yemen. More than 2 million refugees have also entered Yemen from Somalia and Ethiopia, according to UNHCR estimates.

While Yemen appears to be careening towards the precipice, there still remain opportunities to end the war and prevent the humanitarian crisis from worsening. Initiatives for serious negotiations have to come from within as international players can only broker a peace deal. Oman is strongly seen as a potential mediator as it has maintained positive relations with all key sides—internal and external—in Yemen’s ongoing conflict. Oman is Yemen’s neighbour to the west and has a deeply vested interest in maintaining some modicum of peace in the region.

Presently, there is a deadlock between the two parties with regard to Resolution 2216, which conditions Houthis to withdraw from captured cities. UN’s budget for humanitarian aid has fallen short due to the economic slowdown during covid19 pandemic. As all this happens, the instability in Yemen serves as the breed ground for terrorist organisations.



Image source: CNBC

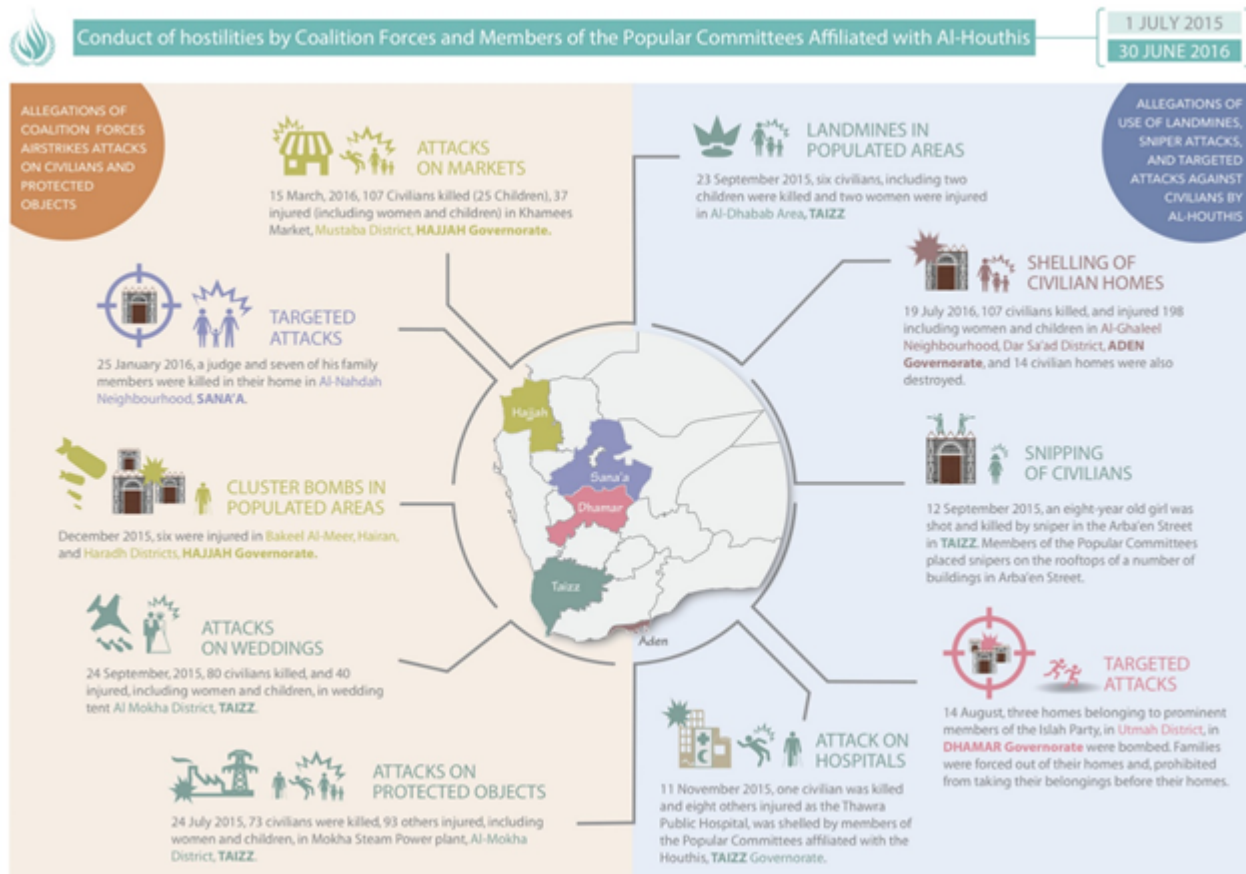
The Stakeholders’ “Pervasive Lack of Accountability”

United Nations Human Rights Commission formed a group of eminent experts (GEE) on the region of Yemen to look into possible crimes at the hands of rebel forces, the state and Saudi Arabia. The report states that all stakeholders and affiliated popular committees have enjoyed a “pervasive lack of accountability” for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The fighting has left over 1500 civilians dead, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates.

The airstrikes, indiscriminate shelling, snipers, landmines, as well as arbitrary killings and detention and torture has taken a priority over the very survival of the 24 million civilians in need. Starvation, sexual and gender-based violence and the impeding of access to

humanitarian aid may have been a method of warfare, as these only exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Both sides target civilian populations and targets such as factories, weddings and other places where people gather to terrorize the opponent as much as possible. The terror amongst civilians also stirs up empathy for terrorist groups like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. This dynamic has been so far ignored by international stakeholders.

Mr. Kamel Jendoubi, chairperson of the Group of Experts on Yemen says that there has been a lack of international action to hold all parties to the conflict equally accountable. UK, USA and France may have been calling for a halt on armed aggression. However, they continue to supplying weapons to middle eastern countries which feeds the never-ending cycle of violence. The United Nations Security Council has extended the arms embargo against the Rebel Forces. The one-sided Embargo was criticised as it in a way legitimised airstrike on Yemen. Which goes against the collective responsibility that all parties have for the humanitarian crisis. The [Stockholm agreement](#) has achieved only moderate success in the city of Hodaydah till now. It itself cannot be expected to cease military offence with Rebels. The violence continues, so does the humanitarian crisis.



During the reporting period of 2019, OHCHR noted that in the prisons, humanitarian needs, such as access to food, drinking water, medical care, the appropriate conduct of law enforcement officials were absent. [Amnesty International](#) examined 60 individuals between December 2014 and March 2016, revealing how the Houthi forces have led a crackdown against those who have opposed their take-over of government institutions. Arbitrary, detention, forced disappearance, torture and custodial deaths, however, take place in both Houthi and Saudi controlled prisons. [Human Rights Watch](#) reports show that prisons are lawless places and have become just another means of torturing those from the other side of the conflict.

With COVID-19 now spreading rapidly, Yemen is facing an emergency within an emergency. Sanitation and basic equipment like masks and gloves and oxygen are in short supply. Only half of the health facilities are functioning, and many health workers have not received salaries or incentives.

The children were already out of school before the pandemic. Now the violence and disease rob them from their futures and healthy life. The collapse of a social and legal system has had a devastating impact on young girls and women. After the war, many girls as young as 10 were married off against their will. Domestic violence has also become rampant and women are left with no recourse to justice. There are very few shelter homes where women can seek refuge from violence. Dowry payments are seen as a means to cope with other conflict-related hardships. Many women have lost their homes, spouses and parents to war leaving them without financial support and shelter.

Yemen, which was already the worst country to be a woman or child, their futures will be at even greater risk as COVID-19 spreads throughout Yemen. Even as the virus spreads, UN Agencies and NGOs are forced to cut aid to Yemen. Due to the economic slowdown coupled with the fear that the Houthis are blocking aid to reach the needy, donors have stopped making payments. The UN has fallen short of \$ 1 billion out of the \$ 2.41 billion required. The World Food Program has cut aid by 50%. UNICEF demanded urgent funding of 54.5 million to save the 23,000 children at risk of dying because of acute malnutrition. The circumstances have never been worse.



Image source: Reuters

Brokering an End to The World's Worst Crisis

The people, especially children, women and the youth of Yemen have seen the worst of humanitarian crisis and apathy of international organisations and foreign countries. For the humanitarian crisis to end, attempts to restore peace must be made. Peace would ensure ideal conditions for humanitarian, legal and economic structures to prosper. These are an essential prerequisite for ensuring justice, freedom and transparency in the country. For peace to exist in Yemen, it should not be used as a proxy for any other regional reasons by any regional power. To show that, they need to keep their connection with Yemen exclusive to the state. The involvement of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen's domestic conflict only adds a sectarian flavour to the conflict making it more intractable.

A peaceful society can only be built from the ground by engaging, locals, tribal groups, civil societies and activist. Houthis have been marginalised in the internal politics of the country for a very long time. they surely enjoy significant support of the common public. Therefore,

an attempt to restore peace cannot be made without bringing their demands to the table. The grass root level needs of tribal groups must be given their due share in governance. Yemeni authority and International players have so far failed to distinguish between terrorism and insurgency. The current instability then ends up being exploited by malicious groups like Al-Qaida, Al Nusra, Boko Haram, among others.

The humanitarian crisis shows us that those who suffer the most in a war are the unarmed, non-combatant civilians. The repercussions are more painful than the war itself because they leave a long-term impact on society and its people. UNSC and other agencies must look beyond sanctions. The humanitarian aid is only temporary and the long-term solution would come from the positive political engagement between the Yemeni authority and the various tribal groups along with the Houthis. The dialogue must be on equal terms and free from foreign interventions.

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