



The Middle East Impasse: The Human & Political Cost of a Faustian Bargain of the Gulf Armageddon on Yemen

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Costantinos Berhutesfa Costantinos, PhD

Trustee, Africa Humanitarian Action & Professor of Public
Policy, www.africahumanitarian.org

Abstract

Yemen was for centuries the centre of civilization and wealth on the Arabian Peninsula whose cities brimmed with all sorts of goods and provided the major link between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean world. Today, it has been devastated by a war between forces loyal to the internationally-recognised government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement. Tens of thousands have been killed and injured since March 2015. The conflict has its roots in the failure of the political transition that forced Saleh, to hand over power to Mr Hadi, his deputy, in Nov 2011. The Houthi movement took advantage of the new president's weakness by taking control of their northern heartland and disillusioned with the transition, many ordinary Yemenis - including Sunnis - supported the Houthis and entered the capital, Sanaa. Alarmed by the rise of a group they believed to be backed militarily by Iran, Sunni Arab states began an air campaign aimed at restoring Mr Hadi's government, which believes the solution to Yemen's 2½ year-old civil war will likely come through military rather than political means.

Other writers believe the route to sustained stability requires active engagement of all stakeholders in the conflict and a complete abandonment of the 'no negotiations' stance that has all too often plagued the conflict. The UN must initiate an immediate ceasefire and start the peace negotiations in a multilateral context in order to establish an inclusive government in the war-torn country. The conflict in Yemen can be resolved. A key move to this end involves Western countries ending their support of the Saudi military intervention, and also increased pressure on the Saudi monarchy to understand the necessity of change in the country. Riyadh must accept the fact that Yemen cannot return to its pre-Arab spring form and reality. It is necessary to help foster a Yemeni state with sufficient legitimacy to permit a sustained rebuilding process. An inclusive regional agreement may be the best path to do so because Yemeni leaders do not trust one another. Of course, regional leaders do not agree either, but there may be no other path to peace. Most observers agree that there is no military solution to the conflict. If there is no military solution, there appears to be no peaceful solution either. A regional settlement that includes Russia and Iran on the side of the Houthis and Saleh, and the US and Gulf states on the Hadi side, is one way to give enough confidence to local actors to the effect that peace is possible. The only region in the world without a security framework must at long last set about the task of creating one that can give due consideration to harmonising the mandate of the regional security framework with the UN Charter, while ensuring that the framework has enough teeth to thwart aggression and react to security threats against its members.

Key words: Yemen, the Gulf Coalition, Houthis, Peace & Security Architecture

Indeed, the frustration for the well-meaning international humanitarian community is that the Yemeni peace suggests itself seems within reach only to elude and appears readily practicable only to resist realisation. It submits itself, seems within grasp only to elude, and appears readily doable only to resist fulfilment
(Costantinos, 2016)

1. Introduction

Yemen — which means South Arabia in Arabic — was for centuries the centre of civilization and wealth on the Arabian Peninsula. The Romans referred to the area as Arabia Felix, or *Happy Arabia*. Its once fertile plains were irrigated with the aid of the great Ma'rib Dam built around 700 B.C. by the kings of Saba — biblical Sheba. Bustling market towns along the coast thrummed with activity. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a chronicle written by an anonymous 1st century AD Roman mariner, speaks of the land as *Frankincense country*, whose cities brimmed with all sorts of goods and provided the major link between the Mediterranean world and the fabled Indian ports of Muziris on the Kerala coast and Barygaza in Gujarat (TIME, 2010:1).

Islam came to Yemen soon after its rise in the 6th century AD as much of the Middle East fell under the sway of a succession of powerful caliphs. Imams from the Shi'ite Zaidi sect installed theocratic rule in the northern part of Yemen by the 9th century, a political order whose influence has lasted effectively into the past century, notwithstanding a few interruptions by marauding Turkic warlords. The Zaidi teaching that one has the right to overthrow unjust rulers animates contemporary insurgencies. By the 19th century, Yemen's modern political contours were taking shape with the region a chess piece in the hands of foreign powers. The Ottoman Empire extended its control over Arabia south from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, seizing Sana'a and nearby towns. In 1832, soldiers of the British East India Company captured Aden, which they saw as a strategic waypoint between Europe and their colonial possessions in India. In 1904, the Ottomans and the British agreed on a boundary separating their spheres of control, carving Yemen into an Ottoman North and a British South. When the Ottoman Empire crumbled at the end of the First World War, its slice of Yemeni territory became an independent kingdom led by a Zaidi imam. Arab nationalists toppled the ruling monarchy in 1962 with Egyptian help to found a republic but a civil war with Saudi-financed royalists raged for almost a decade thereafter.

The British protectorate endured until 1967 when it was pressured out following five years of violent insurgency. After a faction of radical Marxists took over in 1970, South Yemen became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and was propped up by a host of communist backers, the Soviet Union chief among them. The two Yemens eventually formed a united republic in 1990, but their politics had been marked for decades by infighting, assassination attempts and the spectre of military coup. Not long after unification, disputes over power sharing led to leaders from the South declaring a separate state, but a swift and ruthless campaign in May 1994 quashed this rebellion. Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ruled North Yemen from 1978 before heading the united republic, has over the years spent most of his political capital consolidating his position rather than knitting together a stable, democratic state. Poverty, corruption and the hopelessly weak rule of law form the backdrop to al-Qaeda's entry into the country, signalled most strongly in the 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole off Aden's harbour. Much of the country is still divided along local tribes, which further complicates dealing with the rebellions of separatists such as the Shi'ite Houthis, who are allegedly backed by Iran. Within this chaos, the U.S. has reportedly embarked on a CIA-led covert war, using drones and elite units of Special Forces to target al-Qaeda operatives. But If Washington believes it can wholly guide Yemen away from dysfunction, it has its hands full — as in Afghanistan, foreign intervention here has little record of success and, invariably, has caused more harm than good.

Yemen, one of the Arab world's poorest countries, has been devastated by a war between forces loyal to the internationally-recognised government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the *Houthi* rebel movement. More than 7,600 people have been killed and 42,000 injured since March 2015, the majority in air strikes by a Saudi-led multinational coalition that backs the president. The Saudi-led coalition has attacked the positions of the *Houthi* militia and loyalists of the former President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, allegedly supported by Iran (Saudi Arabia and the United States claim, denied by Iran), in response to a request from the internationally-recognised but domestically opposed Mr. Hadi (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016 & Al Arabiya English, 2016 in Wikipedia, 2017).

The lecture posits that there are possible solution scenarios to this 21st Century human distress.

2. The Gulf Armageddon and the Yemen Story

2.1. The Houthi Rebel Movement

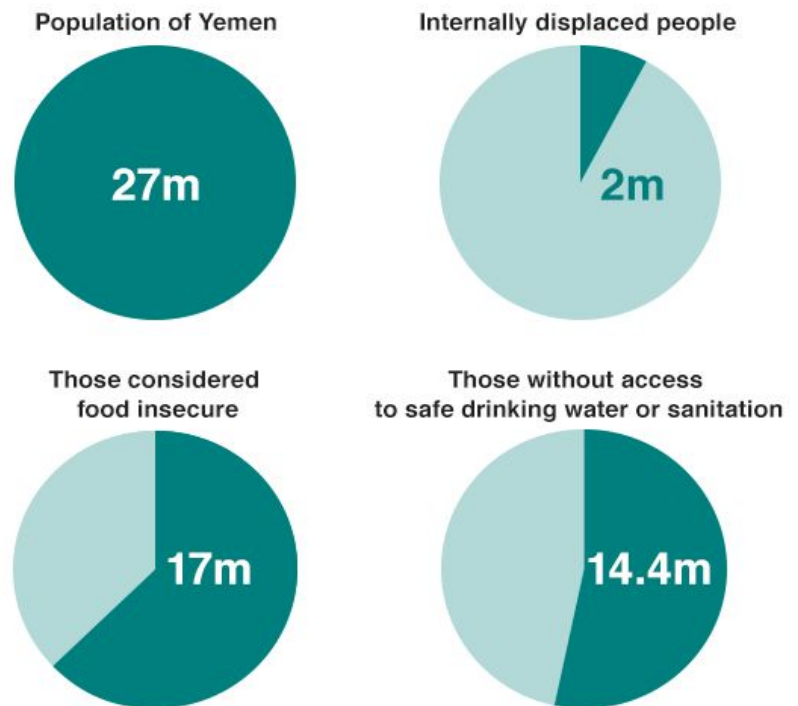
The conflict and a blockade imposed by the coalition have also triggered a humanitarian disaster, leaving 70% of the population in need of aid (BBC, 2017)

The conflict has its roots in the failure of the political transition that was supposed to bring stability to Yemen following an uprising that forced its long time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to Mr Hadi, his deputy, in November 2011. Mr Hadi struggled to deal with a variety of problems, including attacks by al-Qaeda, a separatist movement in the south, the continuing loyalty of many military officers to Mr Saleh, as well as corruption, unemployment and food insecurity. The Houthi movement, which champions Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority and fought a series of rebellions against Mr Saleh during the previous decade, took advantage of the new president's weakness by taking control of their northern heartland of Saada province and neighbouring areas. Disillusioned with the transition, many ordinary Yemenis - including Sunnis - supported the Houthis and in September 2014 they entered the capital, Sanaa, setting up street camps and roadblocks. In January 2015, the Houthis reinforced their takeover of Sanaa, surrounding the presidential palace and other key points and effectively placing Mr Hadi and his cabinet ministers under house arrest. The president escaped to the southern port city of Aden the following month. The Houthis and security forces loyal to Mr Saleh then attempted to take control of the entire country, forcing Mr Hadi to flee abroad in March 2015.

Alarmed by the rise of a group they believed to be backed militarily by regional Shia power Iran, Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states began an air campaign aimed at restoring Mr Hadi's government. The coalition received logistical and intelligence support from the US, UK and France. After two years of fighting, no side appears close to a decisive military victory. Pro-government forces - made up of soldiers loyal to Mr. Hadi and largely Sunni southern tribesmen and separatists were successful in stopping the rebels taking Aden, but only after a fierce, four-month battle that left hundreds dead. Having established a beachhead, coalition ground troops landed in Aden that August and helped drive the Houthis and their allies out of much of the south over the next two months. Mr Hadi and his government returned from exile at the same time and established a temporary home in Aden. But since then, despite the air campaign

and naval blockade continuing unabated, pro-government forces have been unable to dislodge the rebels from their northern strongholds, including Sanaa and its surrounding province. The Houthis have also been able to maintain a siege of the southern city of Taiz and to continue firing missiles and mortars across the border with Saudi Arabia. Jihadist militants from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and rival affiliates of so-called Islamic State (IS) have meanwhile taken advantage of the chaos by seizing territory in the south and stepping up their attacks, notably in government-controlled Aden.

Scale of humanitarian crisis in Yemen



Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

BBC

The Saudis who have expressed strong support for the president are staunchly anti-*Houthis*. In 2009, the oil-rich kingdom launched air strikes against the Shia *rebels* in Saada province. And last year they declared the *Houthis* a terrorist organisation. Officials in Riyadh blame the *Houthis* for being Iran's proxy in the region. With their massive wealth and political influence the Saudis will continue to play a major role in Yemen. Iran is widely seen as the main backer of the *Houthis*. The government said in the past it had seized weapon shipments sent by Iran for the *rebels*. In the context of the strained ties between Saudi Arabia - the most powerful Sunni country in the region - and Iran - the most powerful Shia country in the region - there are concerns Yemen may be dragged into a devastating sectarian war (BBC, 2017)..

2.2. The Saudi-led Coalition

A military intervention was launched by Saudi Arabia in 2015, leading a coalition of *nine African and Middle East countries*, to influence the outcome of the *Yemeni Civil War* in favour of the government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Code-named *Operation Decisive Storm* (*Amaliyyat 'Asifat al-Hazm*), the intervention initially consisted of a bombing campaign on *Houthi rebels* and later saw a naval blockade and the deployment of ground forces into Yemen.

Fighter jets and ground forces from Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Academi mercenaries also took part in the operation. Djibouti, Eritrea and Somalia made their airspace, territorial waters and military bases available to the coalition (Ahmed Soliman & David Styan, 2016 & Raxanreeb Online, 2015 in Wikipedia, 2017). The United States provided intelligence and logistical support, including aerial refuelling and search-and-rescue for downed coalition pilots. It also accelerated the sale of weapons to coalition states. U.S. & Britain have deployed their military personnel in the command and control centre responsible for Saudi-led air strikes on Yemen, having access to lists of targets (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016 & Al Arabiya English, 2016 in Wikipedia, 2017).

Pakistan was called on by Saudi Arabia to join the coalition, but its parliament voted to maintain neutrality. On 21 April 2015, the Saudi-led military coalition announced an end to Operation Decisive Storm, saying the intervention's focus would "shift from military operations to the political process". The kingdom and its coalition partners said they would be launching political and peace efforts, which they called Operation Restoring Hope (Amaliyyat 'I'adat al-'Amal). However, the coalition did not rule out using force, saying it would respond to threats and prevent Houthi militants from operating within Yemen. Qatar is now not allowed to be a part of the team, because of the current crisis. The war has received widespread criticism and had a dramatic worsening effect on the humanitarian situation that reached the level of a humanitarian disaster or humanitarian catastrophe. After the Saudi-led coalition declared the entire Saada Governorate a military target, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen and Human Rights Watch said that air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition on Saada city in Yemen were in breach of international law (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2015 & Miles, 2015). On 1 July UN declared for Yemen a level-three emergency – the highest UN emergency level – for a period of six months (IOM, UNHCR, 2015).

2.3. The Yemen Story

Human rights groups repeatedly blamed the Saudi-led military coalition for killing civilians and destroying health centres and other infrastructure with airstrikes. The de facto blockade left 78% (20 million) of the Yemeni population in urgent need of food, water and medical aid. Aid ships are allowed, but the bulk of commercial shipping, on which the country relies, is blocked. As of 10 December, more than 2,500,000 people had been internally displaced by the fighting. Many countries evacuated more than 23,000 foreign citizens from Yemen. More a million people fled Yemen for *Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Oman* (IOM, UNHCR, 2015). The UN has organised three rounds of peace talks. There was hope of a breakthrough at the last round, which opened in Kuwait in April 2016, with both the *Houthis* and the Saudis seemingly under pressure and willing to negotiate.

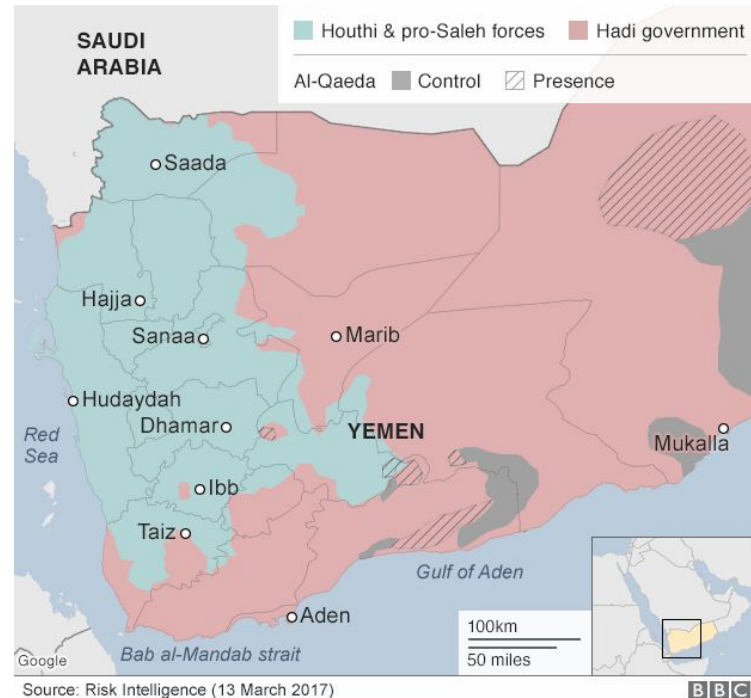
However, the talks collapsed three months later, triggering an escalation in the fighting that the UN said resulted in the number of civilian casualties rising dramatically. Mr Hadi's government says the political process can only proceed if UN Security Council resolution 2216, which calls for the rebels to withdraw from all areas they control and lay down their arms, is fully implemented. What happens in Yemen can greatly exacerbate regional tensions. It also worries the West because of the threat of attacks emanating from the country as it becomes more unstable. Western intelligence agencies consider AQAP the most dangerous branch of al-Qaeda because of its technical expertise and global reach, and the emergence of IS affiliates in Yemen is a serious concern. The conflict between the Houthis and the government is also seen as part of a regional power struggle between Shia-ruled Iran and Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia. Gulf Arab states have accused Iran of backing the Houthis financially and militarily, though Iran has denied this, and they are themselves backers of President Hadi. Yemen is strategically important because it sits on the Bab al-Mandab strait, a narrow waterway linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, through which much of the world's oil shipments pass (BBC, 2017).

Recent fighting between *Houthi rebels*, who took control of the Yemeni capital in September, and the army has thrown the country deeper into chaos. Hashem Ahelbarra, an Al Jazeera correspondent who has reported extensively from the country, explains what is at stake and who the key players are in the conflict. *When pro-Houthi militias abducted Ahmad Awad Bin Mubarak, the Yemeni president's chief of staff, President Hadi gave orders to the army to take over the security of the capital. This was seen by the Shia Houthis as a government plot to dismantle their Popular Committees. The committees are pro-Houthi militias which were deployed on the streets of the cities that were captured by the rebels last year. They set up checkpoints around government buildings, at the international airport of Sanaa and near the presidential palace. The Houthis had initially agreed to pull out their fighters once a government was formed. They later backtracked saying that withdrawing their fighters from the capital would lead to more instability (Ahelbarra, 2015).*

President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who was elected in 2012, is supported by the international community. As a Sunni he will continue to have the backing of the Sunni majority in Yemen. But he is widely seen as weak and inefficient. The *Houthis* are no doubt the most powerful and organised political and military group in northern Yemen. They control a huge area that stretches from Saada in the north to the south of the capital Sanaa. Their leader is Abdulmalik al-Houthi. Ousted by a popular revolt in 2011, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh still retains huge influence among Zaidi tribes - from which the *Houthis* belong - in the north and top military commanders. Some of the well-equipped elite Republican Guard units are still loyal to him. President Hadi sees himself as the legitimate leader, while the *Houthi* leader is considered a saint by his followers. The former president tells visitors that Yemen under his rule was much better and more secure.

The *Houthis* have established themselves as group that no one can defeat - at least for the time being. They are the ones who pull the strings. The president cannot make decisions without consulting with them. Officially, the *Houthis* say that their aim is to establish a vibrant democracy where minorities including themselves have a political representation in the government. But when you talk with their supporters they are adamant it's their leader who is entitled by virtue of his *descending from the House of*

Who controls Yemen?



the Prophet to be Yemen's strongman. But as the *Shia Houthis* expand, the *Sunni majority* feels threatened. They accuse the *Houthis* of implementing an Iranian agenda in the region. This raises the spectre of sectarian divide in a country beset by violence and poverty.

3. The Yemen Stalemate

3.1. Yemen - Bonds start to splinter (EIU, 2017)

After two and a half years of devastating but indecisive civil war, there are growing signs of tensions within both the government and rebel camps. A complex break within one of the alliances on either side might change momentum in the war, breaking the current stalemate. But it would be more likely to transition the war into an even more multidimensional and intractable conflict, adding to the suffering of the Yemeni people from cholera and famine, and worsening the chances of a peace deal. The civil war has forged unlikely alliances. On the rebel side, the *Houthi* movement is allied with the previous president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was their mortal enemy for most of the last decade of his presidency (1990-2012). In recent months differences between the two have been aired publicly. On the other side, the Southern Movement (also called *Hirak*) played a key role in driving the *rebels* from the south, but it has a very different vision for the future than its supposed ally, the current president, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi—specifically a desire to secede from the north. The longer the war continues, the greater the divisions in both alliances will become.

On August 19th Abdelmalek al-Houthi, leader of the Houthi movement, made unprecedented criticisms of its partner, Mr Saleh, and his loyalists in the General People's Congress (GPC) party. In a speech, he complained that the Houthis hold only around one-quarter of the senior positions and just 1% of overall administrative positions in the rebel government, making them very much the junior partner to Mr Saleh's GPC allies. This is not surprising, given that the GPC has ruled Yemen for decades and the Houthis only partnered with it in 2015. Nevertheless, it marks a significant uptick in public tensions in the rebel alliance. (There have probably always been tensions behind closed doors.) Moreover, Mr Saleh responded by blaming the Houthis for the non-payment of public-sector salaries—a particularly pernicious accusation given the widely unpopular nature of such a move and the rebels' lack of resources to deal with such a problem as a whole. Even more seriously, some Houthis have accused Mr Saleh of conducting secret negotiations with the UAE, the major foreign power operating in south Yemen and therefore a key opponent of the rebel axis—although Mr Saleh has denied such allegations. The tensions escalated into violent clashes in the Hadda district of the capital, Sanaa, on August 26th, after the Houthis set up a checkpoint close to the home of Mr Saleh's son. Two Houthis and a GPC official, the deputy head of foreign relations for the party, were killed. Houthi leaders and GPC officials have since announced an effort to mitigate tensions and called on supporters to focus their energy on fighting Mr Hadi and the Saudi-led coalition.

However, with the rebels under financial and military pressure (forces loyal to Mr Hadi are now pressing the rebels on three fronts), and a cholera outbreak and severe food shortages ravaging much of the territory under their control, it is increasingly unlikely that they will be able to prevent old grievances and disputes from reappearing. For the time being both sides still need each other, but in the long run they will both probably look to undercut each other in any proposed peace talks. There is a key fundamental fissure in the alliance fighting against the rebels. Hirak ideally wants an independent, or at least highly autonomous, South Yemen. Mr Hadi, despite being a southerner by birth, played a key role in defeating the last serious attempt at southern independence, in 1994, and aspires to rule the entire country himself. These differences were set aside when the Houthis were on the verge of capturing the major southern city of Aden in 2015, but now that most of south Yemen has been recaptured—with jihadi groups such as al-Qaida and Islamic State, rather than the Houthis, now being the main threat in southern provinces—the southerners have little appetite to continue the war in order to help to reconquer the north. Instead, they will probably prefer to consolidate their status and position in the south.

With a few exemptions of short-lived signs of progress, the civil war has been locked largely in a stalemate for two years, with 7m people at risk of famine and half a million infected with cholera. The peace process is likely to remain stalled, perhaps until a new UN envoy is appointed, and will be further

complicated by internal divisions on both sides. Although there are some scenarios in which a break in one of the alliances could help negotiations—for example, Hirak negotiating with the *Houthis* on a return to the old North-South borders—it is more likely that fragmentation will just increase instability and play into the hands of jihadi groups. It no longer looks likely that a peace deal can be established in the short to medium term, and even if it were, the range of actors involved would most likely be unsatisfied with its result—particularly Hirak—meaning that it would fail to bring a sustainable end to the country's complex conflict.

3.2. Qatar blockade by the GCC thwarts Yemen peace (EIU, 2017b)

The diplomatic dispute in the Gulf over Qatar is adding a new dimension to the already complicated civil war under way in Yemen. As well as distracting the attention of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in support of the Yemeni government, the crisis has also led to Saudi Arabia banning Qatar from participating in the coalition. Moreover, the dispute also splits some of the Yemeni factions, forcing them to choose sides. On June 5th Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other countries announced a break in diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar over a wide range of complaints related to its independent foreign policy, particularly its cordial ties with Iran and support for Islamist groups across the region. The Aden-based Yemeni government led by the president, Hadi, was one of the first to support this move, making allegations that Qatar had been supporting the *Houthi rebels*, despite Qatar committing troops and planes to Mr Hadi's cause as part of the coalition that joined in early 2015.

Qatar has an extensive history of involvement in Yemen, largely as a mediator during a series of earlier wars between the *Houthi* movement and the state under the then president, Ali Abdullah Salehⁱⁱ.

However, the extent of Qatar's involvement in the coalition was fairly limited. As such, the loss of Qatar will have little impact on the strength of the coalition's forces, but will, nevertheless, prove distracting and disruptive. Yemeni reactions to the Gulf blockade was supported by Mr. Hadi. Mr Hadi's government immediately cut diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5th, alleging Qatari support for the Houthis and extremist groups, presumably referring to jihadis such as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State, which are separately fighting against both the government and the Houthi rebels. Qatar has previously been accused of giving financial support to jihadi groups in Syria, which it denies, but not in Yemen. Confusingly, a list of alleged terrorists supported by Qatar, released by the embargoing countries, included a Yemeni, Abd al-Wahhab al-Humaiqani, who lives in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. He is there as a representative of Mr Hadi's government, despite being accused by the US of links to AQAP. Emphasising the confusing and divisive nature of the Qatar crisis, the accusations against Mr Humaiqani led his supporters in Bayda province to withdraw from the fight against the Houthis in protest.

Although Qatar does have past links with both the Houthis and Mr Saleh, given mediation efforts in 2007-11, these relations were strained during that process and do not appear to have been rebuilt. Certainly, it seems unlikely that Qatar would have provided support to the Houthi rebels while its troops were fighting against them and dying on the battlefield. The Houthis did express sympathy for Qatar in June, perhaps unsurprisingly backing the enemy of their enemy, but a spokesman for Mr Saleh welcomed the embargo, criticising Qatari support for Islah, the Yemeni affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood. Islah is one of the key actors in Yemen and, although the UAE and Egypt oppose it, given that both consider the Brotherhood a domestic threat to their regimes, Saudi Arabia has had a complicated on-off relationship with it and over the last two years has seen it as an important ally in fighting the Houthi rebels. Qatar also has relationships with Islah, including supporting some of its media outlets, meaning that the group has been split over the current Gulf crisis. Mohammed al-Saady, the assistant secretary-general of Islah and the planning minister in Mr Hadi's government, said that he supported the action against Qatar. However, other members of Islah have expressed support for Qatar or neutrality.

4. Impact on civilians

4.1. The Human Toll

Civilians have borne the brunt of the fighting and repeatedly been the victims of what activists have described as serious violations of international law by all parties. Half of Yemen lives below

poverty line. They have endured decades of wars and instability. Economy is declining and the future looks uncertain. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula may take advantage of this situation to further expand in Sunni areas where anti-Houthi sentiment is on the rise (Ahelbarra, 2015).

By 26 March 2017, at least 4,773 civilians had been killed and 8,272 others injured, according to the United Nations. With just under half of the population under the age of 18, children constituted a third of all civilian deaths during the first two years of the conflict. The destruction of civilian infrastructure and restrictions on food and fuel imports have also pushed Yemen to the brink of famine. Some 17 million people are considered food insecure and 6.8 million severely food insecure. About 3.3 million children and pregnant or breast-feeding women are acutely malnourished, including 462,000 children under five who face severe acute malnutrition. The UN says 2 million Yemenis are internally displaced and 180,000 others have fled the country. Only 45% of the 3,500 health facilities surveyed by the UN in November were fully functioning (BBC, 2017).

4.2. Yemen's health system another victim of the conflict – UN health agency (UN, 2017)

Acute shortage of critical medicines, limited fuel for electricity and specialised medical staff having left Yemen have put innocent lives in danger, the United Nations health agency has warned. According to the UN WHO, *only 45% of the country's health facilities remain fully functional and accessible and at least 274 have been damaged or destroyed during the conflict. On top of this, drastic budget cuts have left health facilities without funds for operational costs and health care workers without regular salaries since September 2016. One such example is the 320-bed Al-Thawra Hospital, the main functioning health facility in Al-Hudaydah and neighbouring governorates. Many health facilities in the area have already closed. Staffed by more than 1,200 employees – many of whom have not received their salaries for many months – the hospital provides care to some 1,500 people every day, a five-fold increase over the numbers in 2012 due to the influx of people displaced by ongoing conflict.*

Most of the patients who arrive are unable to pay the minimal fees for hospital services. Despite this, no one is turned away from Al-Thawra Hospital and medical staff provide care to everyone, regardless of whether they can afford to pay, noted the WHO news release. Recently, however, the hospital had to stop providing food for inpatients due to lack of funds. But there are fears that recent arrivals of thousands of displaced women, men and children in the governorate could overburden the already weakened health facilities and vulnerable host communities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) assists us by providing fuel and medicines for emergency interventions, and supporting the hospital's therapeutic feeding centre. WHO says since escalation of the conflict in March 2015, health facilities across Yemen have reported more than 7,600 deaths and close to 42,000 people injured. Malnutrition rates are also rising: almost 4.5 million people in Yemen, including 2 million children, require services to treat or prevent malnutrition, a 150 per cent increase since late 2014ⁱⁱⁱ (BBC, 2017).

5. Quo Vadis Yemen

5.1. Martial scenarios

A solution in Yemen's two and-a-half year-old civil war will likely come through military rather than political means, the country's Saudi-backed president said, blaming the Iran-backed Al Houthis of obstructing chances of peace. Speaking in New York on the side-lines of the UN General Assembly,

President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi also told the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya channel that a plan to hand over control of the country's main port to a neutral party remained blocked by Al Houthis and their ally, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. "The military solution is the more likely one for the Yemen crisis in light of the intransigence of Al Houthi and Saleh coup militias which continue to take orders from Iran," Hadi said in the interview, according to a text provided by the Yemeni state-run Saba news agency. Despite that, the legitimate government continues to extend its hand for peace because it is responsible for the Yemeni people and for lifting the suffering from it. More than 10,000 people have been killed in the war, which began in March 2015 when Al Houthis advanced on Hadi's interim headquarters in the southern port city of Aden, forcing him to flee the country and seek Saudi military help. A Saudi-led coalition has since joined the fighting in a war that has also caused one of the world's worst humanitarian crises and shows no signs of ending soon (Al Batati, 2017).

5.2. Peace options

Hardeep Puri, a former Indian diplomat who served as Permanent Representative of India to the UN in Geneva and also in New York. He is the author of *Perilous Interventions: The Security Council and the Politics of Chaos* says the Yemen solution (Puri, Barzegar & Schmitz, 2017)

...cannot be left in the hands of the conflict's wilful perpetrators. A solution is urgently needed. The US administration under President Trump and the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres must spearhead a new initiative to bring all of the warring sides to the negotiating table. An immediate cessation of hostilities is required in order to provide long overdue assistance and relief in what is one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time. The route to sustained stability requires active engagement of all stakeholders in the conflict and a complete abandonment of the 'no negotiations' stance that has all too often plagued the conflict.^{iv}

Kayhan Barzegar, Director of the Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies in Tehran, Iran, and the Chair of the Department of Political Science and International Relations in the Science and Research Branch of Azad University proposes (Ibid)

The UN must initiate an immediate ceasefire with the help of the international community, and start the peace negotiations in a multilateral context in order to establish an inclusive government in the war-torn country. The Yemeni crisis is an internal, multi-party conflict that started after the Arab Spring in 2011. It is rooted in the expectations of the people and different political factions for change, and growing opposition to the corrupt regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Subsequently, the failure of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Saleh's Deputy, to adjust the political transition to the country's new political and social realities led to intense political divisions within Yemen.

The reality is that the military intervention by Saudi Arabia has complicated the internal conflict in Yemen. Riyadh's main justification for bombing Yemen is to restore the balance of power in the country – out of Iran's influence and in favour of Saudi Arabia. This intervention was welcomed by the US, the UK, France and Saudi Arabia's regional allies. Yet, despite all of the intelligence and military support provided by these countries, Saudi Arabia has not yet achieved its goal of controlling Yemen or taming it to its advantage. The main reason for this failure is that Riyadh ignores the fact that this is a multi-layered conflict, and that the Houthis' continued resistance is based on deep-rooted aspirations. The conflict in Yemen can be resolved. A key move to this end involves Western countries ending their support of the Saudi military intervention, and also increased pressure on the Saudi monarchy to understand the necessity of change in the country. Riyadh must accept the fact that Yemen cannot return to its pre-Arab spring form and reality.

Charles Schmitz a professor at Towson University, and vice-president of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies recommends (Ibid)

It is necessary to help foster a Yemeni state with sufficient legitimacy to permit a sustained rebuilding process. An inclusive regional agreement may be the best path to do so because Yemeni leaders do not trust one another. Of course, regional leaders do not agree either, but there may be no other path to peace. Most observers agree that there is no military solution to the conflict. After almost two years of war, the Saudi-backed forces have failed to penetrate the populous western highlands of Yemen where the capital is located – although they have absolute air superiority and have blockaded all of Yemen's ports. Even if the Saudi-backed coalition succeeds in retaking the capital by force, those aligned with Saleh and the Houthis will retain control of much of the highlands, and will not trust the Hadi government in Sanaa. Yemen would therefore remain ungovernable. For their part, the Houthis and Saleh have shown no willingness to negotiate a political settlement that the other parties in the country can trust, while these same parties see the Houthis and Saleh as dictators who rule by force of arms.

If there is no military solution, there appears to be no peaceful solution either. The Trump administration will likely agree with the Saudis to continue with the military pressure, but it is not clear that military pressure can convince the Houthis and Saleh to negotiate a real settlement. The country and economy are on a wartime footing, and those profiting from war are in command on both sides. A regional settlement that includes Russia and Iran on the side of the Houthis and Saleh, and the US and Gulf states on the Hadi side, is one way to give enough confidence to local actors to the effect that peace is possible. The inclusion of Iran and Russia would give the Houthis

and Saleh some confidence that their interests will be preserved, and allow them to relinquish their military advantage. For Iran, Yemen is not a vital security interest but rather a card to play in their struggle with the Saudis. The Iranians may therefore not be disinclined to negotiate.”

5.3. Founding a regional security structure (Shoamanesh, 2012)

The Gulf is the only region in the world without a security framework. It must at long last set about the task of creating one. The regional security structure in the Middle East would have to give due consideration to harmonising the mandate with the UN Charter, while ensuring that the framework has enough teeth to thwart aggression and react to security threats against its members.

The security framework for the Middle East must adopt founding principles in order to bind the parties to a collective security vision. Fortunately, there are plenty of precedents to review in creating a custom-made set of guiding principles and norms for the region. In addition to the principles of the UN Charter (i.e. prohibition against the use of force, non-interference in the sovereign affairs of member states), the Decalogue in the Helsinki Final Act (1975) or the Ten Principles of Bandung, the various past and even extant Track II efforts focussing on security in the Middle East have all generated useful material that should be consulted. The Track II diplomatic efforts led by Cherif Bassiouni in the late 1990s for a sub-regional security framework involving Egypt, Jordan and Israel can be particularly helpful in this regard. Two considerations are apposite in respect of the form that a regional security framework ought to take – that is, as between collective defence and cooperative security. First, both collective defence and cooperative security structures can co-exist in the Middle East, just as they have in other regions of the world (consider Europe, where NATO and the OSCE work in concert on the Old Continent). Second, in view of some of the current inter-state tensions in the region, a cooperative security regime may be the more realistic first step in creating a region-wide security framework. Once established and mature, the region’s collective security culture and norms could eventually create the conditions for the start of formal collective defence security discussions and negotiations (as a second step, as it were).

As intimated, not all regional states need to participate in the first diplomatic summit or be involved in the overall project ab initio (from the beginning). What is important is that the undertaking commence with a cocktail of core and smaller regional states – a critical mass that should be ever-expanding – in order to send a transparent message to the effect that the project is not targeting or seeking to exclude any particular state, and that its raison d’être is to create greater security for all states in the Middle East. There is great symbolic value in this message alone. States can join the ‘conversation’ when they are ready to do so. The traditional concept of security in international relations theory, at least in the realist school, posits that the only way to ensure one’s security is to increase one’s power at the expense of other states. This conventional wisdom is practiced with perfection in today’s Middle East. The general insecurity in the region is the result of this logic. New ways of thinking about state and regional security must be tried in this new century. An inclusive regional security framework in the Middle East, while not necessarily eliminating inter-state competition altogether, has real potential to bring greater stability to the region. Preliminary indications obtained from some of the region’s most senior diplomats and policy-makers suggest that there is broad agreement on the need for such a framework, and that the timing may just be right.

The need to stop the civil war in Yemen and the Gulf Coalition bombing of civilians and destruction of infrastructure is long overdue. The UN Security Council, Western powers, Russia and China seem helpless to bring peace although they are all important stakeholders and may even partake in the support war except China.

Indeed, the frustration for the well-meaning international humanitarian community is that the Yemeni peace suggests itself seems within reach only to elude and appears readily practicable only to resist realisation. It submits itself, seems within grasp only to elude, and appears readily doable only to resist fulfilment (Costantinou, 2016).



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ⁱ *This difference became more formal in July when Hiraḳ's newly formed Transitional Political Council met for the first time, as a prospective southern rival to Mr Hadi's government, incorporating governors from most of the southern states. At the same time, tens of thousands of people rallied in Aden on July 7th, on the 10th anniversary of Hiraḳ's foundation. Mr Hadi then responded by sacking some of the dissident governors. The war has provided Hiraḳ with its best opportunity for independence since its founding. Moreover, it has exacerbated divisions between north and south. As a result, given Mr Hadi's unwillingness to give up greater control to Hiraḳ, we think that it is likely that a further conflict will break out in the medium term as Hiraḳ rallies southern tribes to fight for independence against Mr Hadi's government.*

ⁱⁱ *Qatar stepped in as a mediator in 2007, on the invitation of Mr Saleh, and was viewed as a neutral party given its good relations with Iran, which was long seen as an ally to the Houthis. Qatar hosted a series of mediation meetings, which led to a temporary ceasefire in June 2007 and then a fuller peace agreement in February 2008, supported by a Qatari pledge to invest significant sums in rebuilding Saada, the Houthis' home territory. In the early days of the 2011 Arab Spring, Qatar attempted to step in again as a mediator, as part of a broader Gulf initiative. Joining the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis, who are now in pragmatic military alliance with Mr Saleh against Mr Hadi's government, in 2015 therefore marked a major departure for Qatar from its previously diplomatic approach to Yemen, and was done largely as a means of pacifying Saudi Arabia, following a diplomatic dispute in 2014 (Ibid).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Of special concern are almost 462 000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and at risk of life-threatening complications such as respiratory infections or organ failure, said WHO. With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse. Responding to the crisis, the UN agency has established 15 therapeutic feeding centres in seven governorates, and plans to open 25 more as the numbers of malnourished children increases across the country, but its efforts are challenged by lack of funds. In 2017, UN agencies in the country and non-governmental organisations have appealed for \$322 million to support health care in Yemen, of this amount WHO has requested \$126 million (Ibid)*

^{iv} *The oscillating role of the US in Yemen – from backing the governments of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and current President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to then supporting the Houthis and, finally, backing the Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthis – has cemented the leading world power as the necessary but absent leader in the peace process. Although US involvement in the conflict was initiated by its misguided mission to subdue the threat of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), its promiscuous approach to alliances among the warring parties in Yemen means that, ultimately, the US must be heavily involved in the negotiations. The unlawful intervention of Saudi Arabia and its allies in Yemen – a blatant violation of international law, and a catalyst for the significant civilian death toll – should be a trigger for swift action by the UN Security Council. The Council has demonstrated its failure to date in this regard, but still has ample opportunity to prove its effectiveness (Ibid).*