

A Modern-Day Tragedy: What is Happening in Yemen?

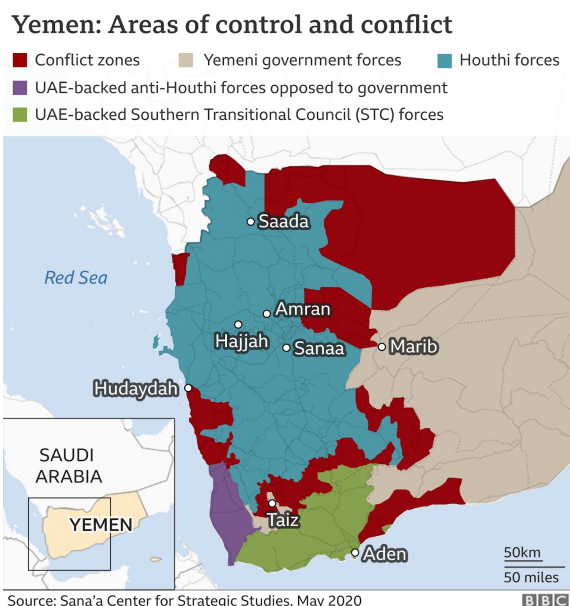
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Either in the news or social media, we see that there is an ongoing war in Yemen. Aside from knowing why there is a war in this Middle Eastern country, most of us do not even know where Yemen is. However, it is a fact that one of the worst humanitarian crises of the modern world is now taking place in this country. Having cost thousands of lives and a nation's future, what is the story behind this civil war?

The conflict has its roots in 2011, Arab Spring. Ali Abdullah Saleh was an authoritarian president and was in office since 1990. The uprisings in the country in 2011 forced Saleh to hand over his power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Having taken over the position of the president, Hadi had a country that needed immediate reforms in hand. While a part of the military and other security forces were still loyal to Saleh, Hadi had to deal with attacks from jihadists, corruption, food insecurity, and separatist movements. This political instability led to several groups gaining power in the country, most notable of them being the Houthis.

The Houthi movement generally consists of the Shia minority in Yemen. The movement had already initiated a series of rebellions against Ali Abdullah Saleh in the previous decades. Following Saleh's replacement by Hadi, they took control of Saada province and the neighboring northern area of the country. Their power, influence, and territorial gains increased gradually. As they had support coming from the ordinary citizens of Yemen, including the Sunnis, the Houthi movement eventually took control of the country's capital Sanaa in September 2014. Mansour Hadi's government declared Aden to be the temporary capital.

In this process, decade long enemies the Houthi movement and Ali Abdullah Saleh openly allied as they both had the aim of gaining power against the internationally recognized president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. With this cooperation, Houthis gained access to the military and security forces loyal to Saleh. They attempted to take control of all of the country and forced Hadi to resign and escape Yemen in 2015.



The escalation between the Houthis and the government of Hadi also had consequences in the international landscape. It is believed that Iran is supporting the Shia Houthi forces militarily by the Sunni Arab states. Thus, in order to prevent an Iran backed Shia group from gaining power in the country Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Sunni Arab states formed an air coalition directed at Houthi forces in Yemen. They had the aim of restoring the Hadi government and ending the Iranian influence in Yemen. This Saudi led Sunni-Arab coalition received military

support from the Western powers of the US, UK, and France. The coalition forces landed in Aden in August 2015 and repelled Houthi forces from most of the southern part of the country.

In December 2017 Saleh declared his withdrawal from the coalition with the Houthis. After his withdrawal, he again sided with his former enemies, namely Hadi, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. As a result, Houthis accused Saleh of treason and he was found dead days after. Houthis admitted having executed the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

In June 2018, the coalition attempted to take control of the coastal city of Hudaydah by launching a major offensive against the Houthis. As the city provided the basic supplies to the two-thirds of the Yemeni population, the United Nations warned the port's destruction would mean massive life loss due to famines.

In July 2019, UAE announced its withdrawal of forces from the Yemeni war. A month later, there has been fighting between Saudi-backed coalition forces and the Southern Transition Council, who is majorly supported by the UAE.



As of June 2020, the war has caused the displacement of millions of people within the country. Millions of children are out of school and face food insecurity. Hadi's government managed to establish temporary headquarters in Aden with the help of the coalition, however due to the lack of security Hadi generally resides in Saudi Arabia. The Houthis are still in control of the Northern parts of the country and the capital Sanaa. They launch regular missiles to Saudi Arabia and the coalition forces.

In September 2019, Houthis managed to hit the eastern oil fields of Saudi Arabia which represented nearly half of the oil production of the country. It accounted for 5% of global oil production. Even though the Houthis bore the attacks, the US and Saudi Arabia held Iran accountable.

As a scene of the struggle of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East, Yemen saw one of the worst tragedies of the 21st century so far.

References:

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