

The Yemen War

Actors, Interests and the Prospects of Negotiations

Introduction

Fabian Blumberg

Recently, there have been important developments in the war in Yemen; a war which has, according to the UN reports, created the worst humanitarian disaster of the 21st century. On the one hand, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) withdrew significant part of its military forces from Yemen declaring the time has arrived for a peace settlement to the conflict. On the other hand, militants of the South took control over Aden from the internationally-backed government amid a fierce armed confrontation between the forces of the two sides leading to a crack in the Arab Coalition that is fighting the Houthis since March 2015. News also has erupted as the Houthis claimed that they managed to attack Saudi Arabia's largest oil facilities at the 19th of September.

Back in March 2019, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) had organized a workshop in Cadenabbia, Italy, to discuss the prospects of peace in Yemen after the Stockholm agreement between the international recognised government and the Houthis. Entitled "Yemen's War: Actors, Interests and the Prospects of Negotiations", the workshop was attended by experts on Yemen from Europe, Germany, US, and Yemen who provided informed opinions about the conflict in Yemen and on the best way to advance peace among the warring parties. Building on that, KAS has asked experts to write down their analyses on the situation and their recommendations on how to bring about peace in Yemen. They also provide ideas for the contribution German foreign policy could provide.

Christian Koch, Senior Advisor at Bussola Institute takes a closer look at the interests and current issues related to Saud-Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in regard to the conflict in Yemen. Gerald M. Feierstein, Senior Vice President of the Middle East Institute (MEI) and former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, discusses conditions for ending the conflict in Yemen and also discusses the Saudi security perspective. Adam Baron, International Security Program Fellow at New America, examines Europe's role in the conflict and on which areas Europe could focus. The local security forces in Houthi-held al-Hodeidah are the topic of the analysis of Mareike Transfeld, Associate Researcher at the Yemen Polling Center (YPC) and CARPO. Taking a closer look at the Stockholm agreement, she discusses the relation between the security establishment and Houthis in al-Hodeidah and asks to which "local forces" the city could be handed over. Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, Non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute and political advisor in the European Representation of the Southern Transitional Council in Berlin explains in her piece the connection between the UN-led Peace Talks for Yemen and the Southern Cause. Finally, Abdulsalam al-Rubaidi, PhD Candidate at the University of Erlangen and Research Associate Fellow at CARPO describes the different identities in Yemen and what follows for the conflict: the need for recognition and representation.

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Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the Conflict in Yemen

Christian Koch

Developments in Yemen in the summer of 2019 have once again underlined the complexity of the current conflict. In addition to the partial withdrawal and re-deployment of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced in July, the widening conflict between southern secessionists and the government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi further fractures the internal political landscape, in turn also complicating the search for an eventual end to the ongoing civil war. In this context, the role being played by the Arab Coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is bounded to also shift with the shifting realities on the ground.

Interests

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the key elements of the Arab Coalition that intervened in Yemen in 2015 in support of the legitimate government of Yemen. Their main objective was to prevent the complete collapse of the government of President Hadi and at the same time not allow the Houthi group that overthrew the government in September 2014 from extending its reach and consolidating its hold throughout the whole country.

From the very outset, the intervention was considered by Saudi Arabia and the UAE as one of necessity and not one of choice. From their perspective, they simply could not allow for an ideological group such as the Houthi to takeover Yemen from which the group could threaten the strategic interests of both countries. The main conviction in both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi was that had the Houthi being able to take over the port city of Aden during their campaign in 2015, it would have been next to impossible to dislodge them.

In addition, there was the concrete concern that once in control, the Houthi would broaden their relations with Iran, an opportunity that Tehran would have found hard to resist given their success with groups such as Hizbollah in Lebanon or the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in Iraq. Thus, a Houthi takeover was equated with Iran being able to establish a permanent presence directly on Saudi Arabia's eastern and southern border.

In the above context and despite all the criticisms about the war strategy pursued by the coalition, Saudi Arabia and the UAE largely achieved their immediate objectives. The Houthi were not only prevented from controlling Aden but subsequently were largely pushed out of the entire south of Yemen. Iran also was not able to gain a strong foothold in Yemen and their support for the Houthi has been restricted to political backing and covert weapon supplies. In addition, the government of President Hadi was maintained and some semblance of government control was secured throughout parts of the country.

Still, other key objectives were not reached. The coalition failed to bring about a political solution through the use of military pressure. While both in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi it was always more or less accepted that the Houthi would have to be part of an eventual political settlement in Yemen, at no point was the coalition able to exert sufficient pressure to bring the Houthi to the negotiating table. Instead, the coalition found itself being increasingly drawn into the conflict and being blamed for the mounting humanitarian disaster taking place in Yemen.

Current Issues

With prospects for a resolution to the conflict fading, the coalition has been confronted by rising internal differences. While the UAE continues to push forward with its vision of a secular government for Yemen while at the same time voicing doubts about the competence of the Hadi government, Saudi

Arabia held on to the notion of a Hadi-led solution and an ultimate military defeat of the Houthis. Seeing themselves as unable to decisively influence the course of events on the ground, the UAE subsequently announced a scaling down of its military involvement and a shift in strategy to something more pragmatic and achievable. The UAE Minister of State Anwar Gargash has been clear in that the UAE "is not leaving Yemen. While we will operate differently, our military presence will remain." Yet, there is a clear realization in Abu Dhabi that the current approach is ineffective, that the Yemen campaign has come at a severe reputational cost for the country, and that the current environment required a political strategy rather than new military tactics. With Saudi Arabia not having reached the same assessment, the future of the Arab coalition is unclear.

The UAE's re-orientation leaves a vacuum in Yemen that Saudi Arabia will find difficult to fill quickly. In the meantime, developments on the ground are imposing new realities as fighting between government forces and the Southern Transitional Council in the south could lead to "a civil war within a civil war" as stated in a recent report by the International Crisis Group. In this context, even if Saudi Arabia were to join the UAE in announcing its own scaling down of operations, this by itself would not end the war in Yemen.

Scenarios

Given the realization that a military victory over the Houthi is not imminent, coupled to capacity issues faced by both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, both countries want to see the international community take the lead on Yemen. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi support efforts by the US and the UN to push all parties to engage in a dialogue process aimed at bringing about a political solution. For Saudi Arabia, there will also have to be a deal on border security that eliminates the missile attacks on its territory by the Houthi. However, what the political solution looks like is unclear. While Saudi Arabia is clear that they will only accept a solution based on a unified Yemen, the UAE is looking more into the direction of a North-South confederation with substantial autonomy for the south. In the meantime, a complete breakdown of Yemen resulting in Houthi expansionism or a strengthening of extremist Islamist forces could force the UAE and Saudi Arabia back into the conflict.

Recommendations

Given Germany's long and continued involvement in Yemen and in light of the fluid positions of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Germany should consider the following policy tracks:

- Along with other EU member states, hold a regular dialogue with the GCC states on bringing the Yemen conflict towards a political solution. The EU in its EU-4 format has held discussion with Iran on the situation in Yemen. While Germany and other EU member states should put pressure on Iran to withdraw from the Yemeni theatre (also as a good will measure to the GCC states in their bilateral relations), the EU needs to implement a format through which the GCC states feel engaged and involved. A part of the discussions could involve considerations for a new UN resolution on Yemen. Another part could also focus on post-conflict reconstruction requirements.
- A continued effort needs to be undertaken to, as best as possible, coordinate humanitarian assistance as well as reconstruction and stabilization programs. Saudi Arabia and the UAE remain critical in terms of humanitarian assistance and will also be key to any reconstruction and rebuilding programs. Given that there is little understanding of the daily crisis management and stabilization work undertaken by coalition forces, it is essential that a dialogue between the coalition and the international community and especially European aid agencies and NGOs is maintained.
- Two issues require particular attention: border security and countering the war economy. Persistent dialogue on both issues should take place between Europe and the GCC states.

Conditions for Ending the Conflict in Yemen

Gerald M. Feierstein

Since their intervention in the Yemen civil conflict in March 2015, the Saudis have been clear about the reasons for their intervention and have articulated the conditions for their acceptance of a resolution of the fighting. The Saudis supported the political transition that began during the Arab Spring in 2011. They engaged constructively in the negotiations that produced the GCC Initiative and Implementing Mechanism. In fact, the late King Abdullah was instrumental in forcing Ali Abdullah Saleh to sign the document in Riyadh in November 2011. Although Saudi engagement in Yemen declined after completion of the GCC Initiative, the Saudis remain supportive of the political transition. Their position is consistent with the core elements of UN Security Council Resolutions 2216 and 2451 including a political resolution to the current civil conflict based on implementation of the GCC Initiative and the outcomes of the National Dialogue. The Saudis have been clear that they are committed to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Thus, while the Saudis cast their 2015 decision to intervene in the Yemen conflict as a result of the Houthi occupation of Sana'a and overthrow of the transitional government under Abd Rabo Mansour Hadi, the reality is that the principal motivating factor in their decision was their perception of the Iranian threat. Belying claims that Iran's support to the Houthis came in reaction to Saudi intervention, Iranian training and assistance to the Houthis began to expand significantly in 2012, at a time when the majority of Yemenis remained fully committed to the implementation of the GCC Initiative. Iranian support for the Houthis grew at a much faster pace in the period after the Houthi entry into Sana'a in September 2014. In combination with Houthi threats against Saudi Arabia's southern border, Iran's expedited military support, including materiel as well as The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hizbollah advisors, convinced the Saudis that the Houthi move against the Hadi government would give Iran a foothold on their southern border, constituting an existential threat to their security. In that context, the Saudis will measure any outcome of the current conflict against three requirements:

- the security of their southern border;
- no IRGC or Hizbollah presence in Yemen; and
- a government in power in Sana'a that is not hostile to their interests.

Importantly, the Saudis have been clear since early in the conflict that they are not opposed to Houthi participation in the government as a political entity. But they are deeply concerned by any suggestion that the Houthis see their future role in Yemen as a Hizbollah-like politico-military force that could exercise veto power over the Government of Yemen and pose a persistent security threat to Saudi Arabia. Within that framework, the Saudis would likely find acceptable a new government in Sana'a that included participation by the Houthis and their allies but required that the Houthis surrender their heavy weapons and accept the security supremacy of the Government of Yemen.

While Saudi aims in the Yemen conflict have been reasonably clear, Houthi war aims have not. In part, this is a consequence of the lack of a clear decision-making capability within the group. Further, while all of the Houthi leaders profess to follow the guidance of Abdul Malik al-Houthi, in reality there are a number of different factions pursuing diverse and often contradictory aims. There are certainly elements within the Houthi movement that seek a greater voice for the Houthis in Yemen's political and economic frameworks. Nevertheless, others continue to see prospects for a military victory that would leave the Houthis and their allies in control of the Yemeni government, some for Zaydi millenarian goals and others that have profited from the war economy and want to sustain their grip on power. For that reason, it remains unclear until now whether the Houthis are even prepared to engage in a serious negotiation to end the conflict. Certainly the experiences of 2016 in Kuwait and 2018 in Geneva and

Stockholm don't give reason for confidence. It's also unclear the degree to which Iran influences the Houthi negotiating strategy.

Should the Houthis commit to a political resolution of the conflict, their starting point for an acceptable outcome would almost certainly be the terms of the UN-brokered Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) that they signed in September 2014 and then refused to implement. In addition to the requirement for a new prime minister and the establishment of criteria for new cabinet appointments, the PNPA established committees to implement recommendations of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) and supervise the political transition. One of the critical issues raised by the Houthis at the conclusion of the NDC involved the definition of the newly constituted states of a federalized Yemen. The Houthis will likely insist that those internal borders be re-negotiated as part of the political transition. Beyond the PNPA, the question of Houthi disarmament will be a major issue and could lead to an agreement on a Disarmament/Demobilization/Reintegration (DDR) program for the Houthis that could include some absorption of Houthi military formations into a reconstituted Yemeni military as well as economic development assistance for Houthi-dominated territories. Beyond that, an agreement between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis along the lines of previous negotiations between the two might help facilitate a political resolution. Such an agreement could include Saudi commitments on reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-damaged areas of Sa'ada governorate, reiterated acceptance of Houthi participation in the Yemeni government, and financial assistance to the populations in the northern border area.

Recommendations

Germany is generally seen as a positive interlocutor by the Houthis and can engage Iran but will have more difficulty working with the Saudi-led Coalition as a result of the German position on arms sales to the Coalition. (The Hadi government will be less of an issue. President Hadi is generally supportive of Germany's role in Yemen.) Given that context, it would appear that German engagement can be a force multiplier for a broader international response to the Yemen crisis. As such, Germany might:

- Continue, broaden and intensify the dialogue and consultations between the Yemeni factions and engage them on developing a political strategy for negotiations.
- Use existing channels to press Iran to play a constructive role in assisting the UN negotiations – it's not clear whether UN Special Envoy Griffiths or other senior UN personnel are visiting Tehran or meeting with Iranian decision-makers.
- With the U.S. and UK, develop a coordinated international approach using the Friends of Yemen group to support the UN negotiations and develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing post-conflict needs. Yemenis need to see a positive economic horizon to encourage moves to end the conflict.
- Germany has been a leader in Yemen's economic and social development, especially in the field of education. Re-establishing the education system, including curriculum, after the conflict will be a major challenge. Germany can lay out a vision for the education sector going forward.
- Offer to help re-negotiate the details of the National Dialogue Conference proposal on federalism.

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Europe's Role in Yemen

Adam Baron

European powers have long had a significant interest in Yemen even if they are overshadowed by other regional and global actors. In some sense, it's understandable: they lack the significant footprint or much of the sway of, say Yemen's GCC neighbours or the United States, but nonetheless, play a key role in diplomacy and development alike. These ties date back decades, if not centuries. Nonetheless, they've grown increasingly institutionalized since the start of the new millennium owing the rise of the "Friends of Yemen" and Group of 19's architecture both during and before the transition.

But while Yemenis and Europeans alike may occasionally refer to Europe as a monolith, different countries - and the European Union - often have different agendas and assets that they bring to the table. This represents a potential source of conflict, but also a potential asset moving forward. And while differing views on issues like arms sales to the coalition may threaten to deepen splits, there nonetheless remain enough wider shared interests to the extent that working towards a more unified European policy on Yemen remains a valid policy goal.

While different European actors certainly have their own valuable assets and relationships, their power is undeniably stronger when pooled and harmonized. Thus, on the widest level, a key goal must be coordination - both internally and, when appropriate, with the United Nations Special Envoy's office and other key stakeholders. A lack of coordination risks the thwarting of actions even when carried out with the best of intentions; simultaneously, careful coordination allows for strengthened messaging.

This is only underlined by European actors' general ability to reach out to a wide-ranging series of actors inside and outside of Yemen - and inside and outside of the general peace process. This has two general implications:

On the first hand, coordinated European's message can help to further shared policy aims with regards to advocacy with regional and mainstream Yemeni stakeholders. At some point, it is about risk aversion: when the pieces fail to come together, the results can be dire, with European policy cleavages intersecting with Yemen's varied tensions, the risks of widening the gaps would be higher. At its best, this can help to bridge gaps and convert greater trust into the process - this, for example, can be cast as a key element for the coalescence of the bulk of international and local actors around the implementation of key elements of the 2011 GCC initiative and the subsequent transitional process.

On the other hand, however, is the ability to bring figures outside of the process in from the cold. European actors can - and have - played a key role with building channels between figures ranging from tribal actors to the Houthis. This is particularly true of European actors seen as maintaining less self-interest in the conflict, even if that also often means they lack comparative leverage. In some ways, it's a matter of instrumentalizing neutrality - that is, capitalizing on the ability to talk to everyone while being viewed as non-partisan to achieve policy goals. But merely talking is not enough: it is crucial for European actors to maintain a wider strategy for inclusion, one that takes into account the long-term trends towards decentralization driving dynamics in Yemen.

In many regards, areas of focus are obvious, most notably with regards to aiding the track one peace process, which has remained largely stalled since the signing of the Stockholm agreement in late 2019. Nonetheless, it is imperative to remain cognizant of the dire need to combat the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing Yemen, in addition to avoiding a blinkered view that allows the fallout of the current crisis to eclipse longstanding development needs. Particular benefit can be gained from focusing on areas that lie on the intersection of these issues, most notably by focusing on efforts to improve the

functionality of Yemen's divided banking sector. Simultaneously, while pledges and humanitarian appeals are certainly laudatory, follow up is similarly key: it is crucial for such actions to be grounded in a wider, longer term strategy rather than simply falling into a pattern that treats aid as a mere stopgap.

Finally, European actors should continue to press for greater women and civil society inclusion in the peace process, with particular focus on transitioning longstanding calls for greater representation into action. Ongoing activity like that led by the EU with regards to meetings by key women's representatives in Cairo and civil society in both regional and European capitals offer opportunities to build further. This is not simply a means of fostering inclusion, but also idea generation - women and civil society actors often offer key sources of input regarding the political process.

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Police, Aqil and Supervisors: Local Security Forces in Ansarallah-held al-Hodeidah¹

Mareike Transfeld

The Stockholm agreement brokered between the internationally recognized government under President Hadi and Ansarallah (also known as Houthis) in the Swedish capital in December 2018, raised hopes of a possible political solution for the Yemeni conflict. More than 8 months after the Stockholm agreement was struck, the deal's implementation is making no progress. Even if the parties to the conflict had a genuine interest to withdraw, the deal's success hinges on factors that weren't clarified prior to implementation. It is important to review the requirements of the agreement in order to learn from mistakes. The first step of the implementation of the agreement is the redeployment of troops from the major ports in al-Hodeidah. Ansarallah has announced twice its redeployment of forces from the ports; a move that was not accepted by the internationally recognized government, as the latter views Ansarallah as having handed the ports to its own forces.

The withdrawal of the forces is to be followed by the redeployment of troops belonging to both sides of the conflict from the city of al-Hodeidah. The agreement mandates that all parties should "commit to remove any military manifestations from the city", while security "shall be the responsibility of local security forces in accordance with Yemeni law." Further the text states that "legal lines of authority shall be respected and any obstructions to proper functioning of local state institutions, including supervisors, shall be removed." The requirements of the UN Agreement on the City of Hodeidah and Ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Isa raise the question of the status of the police as a "local security force" in the governorate of al-Hodeidah. The pre-Ansarallah security arrangement was composed of state and non-state actors, particularly the Aqil and to a lesser extent sheikhs. The question with regards to a successful implementation of the Hodeidah-Agreement is: how deep did Ansarallah penetrate local security structures?

Al-Hodeidah has been under complete control of Ansarallah for over four years; however, since 2018 parts of the governorate are controlled by the forces supported by the Saudi-coalition. Throughout this time, the police remained an important security actor in urban areas. Ansarallah entered al-Hodeidah with eyes on the country's largest port in October 2014, immediately after their takeover of the capital in the previous month.

The group relied on the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's networks in the military and other state institutions to take control of the governorate of Al-Hodeidah. Since Saleh's death in 2017, Saleh's supporters either shifted their loyalty to Ansarallah, or - if they were not imprisoned or killed - switched to the Coalition's side. The group took over the institutions that were in place and adjusted them to serve its own purposes. Ansarallah relies on its supervisor system, which the group inserted into the semi-formal institutional arrangement, as a mechanism of control.

It is important to differentiate between Ansarallah and Ansarallah-loyalists in order to understand how Ansarallah penetrated local security institutions. The former is part of the group based on their family and tribal ties or their geographic origin. The latter is loyal to the group because of salary-payments, personal benefits, coercion and the Saudi "aggression." They are, however, not completely trusted by Ansarallah leadership. Ansarallah is gradually taking over state institutions more directly, as supervisors are not just shadowing, but taking over positions.

¹ The research for this paper was conducted by the author together with the Yemen Polling Center in the framework of the project "Rebuilding Peace and Security," funded by the European Union.

Supervisors are from Ansarallah and within state institutions, these supervisors have absolute authority, exceeding that of the ministers and governors. All major decisions have to be run by the supervisor who answers only to the governorate-level supervisor. These supervisors are mostly dispatched by the Houthis to al-Hodeida city from northern areas, predominantly Saada and Hajjah. They do not use their regular names, but refer to themselves with their nom de guerre following the format of Abu Mohammed or Abu Kareem (father of Mohammed or father of Kareem). Security and civic figures interviewed by Yemen Polling Center (YPC) underline the repressive nature of the supervisor system. Accordingly, the supervisors arrest without justification anyone who appears to be a dissident, and pass intelligence to their superiors. Phones are searched for evidence of dissidence (for example photos of officials aligned with the Saudi-coalition). If citizens attempt to resolve any security problem without involving supervisors, they put themselves at risk of being arrested.

The police are no exception to the Houthis' takeover of state institutions. Most officers that were not either loyal to Saleh or Ansarallah were forced to leave the city. Police officers who remained in the city who are not loyal to Ansarallah have to act neutrally or they risk arrest. Other officers' compliance with Ansarallah's rules is the result of their loyalty to the state in the face of foreign aggression of the Saudi-alliance, rather than their loyalty to Ansarallah. Police officers interviewed by YPC confirmed that the old leadership is mainly in place, but added that it is too weak to take any decisions and acknowledged the presence of appointed supervisors in the institutions. All police officers said that the police has in fact become weak and marginalized under the rule of Ansarallah and that the "real" role of the police should be restored. A police officer whose answers were more favourable towards Ansarallah explained that "due to the emergence of the other party [Ansarallah], the police entered a joint leadership." He added that Ansarallah did not take over the police institutions, but shares with the police the responsibility to provide security to the community. On the community level, the Aqil, as a link between state security providers and the community, is an important component of security provision. Aqils are community-level authorities who are selected by neighbourhoods. In the past, Aqils cooperated with local police stations in providing security services to the community.

Under Ansarallah-rule, the Aqil continues to play a vital, albeit a changed role. According to interviews with Aqils, as well as observations of YPC researchers, Aqils – next to distributing propane gas and humanitarian aid in the communities – have become particularly important with regards to mobilization of fighters for Ansarallah and sharing intelligence with supervisors. The position of the Aqil before the take-over of Ansarallah can be briefly described as a community figure that is associated with providing services to and functioning in favour of the community, while acting as a link to state institutions. In the Ansarallah system, the Aqils are empowered by Ansarallah and work as informants and as a mechanism of control, but have less authority to serve the community. In short, Aqils have become more powerful; they are, however, seen as spies by the communities and are less trusted.

Ansarallah governs al-Hodeidah through state institutions. Due to their past weakness, these institutions are easier to control than tribes and other social structures. As a result of this approach, state institutions are strengthened. Supervisors, who are trusted members of Ansarallah, are clearly identifiable individuals that can be removed from the institutions, as well as neighbourhoods and districts, and – given the political will of the Ansarallah leadership – redeployed to different areas. However, in the current political context, the manner in which the police and Aqil in the city of Hodeidah function renders them "Ansarallah-security forces." As a result of the symbiotic relationship that developed between the security establishment and Ansarallah, and as long as formal and informal security providers benefit from the current situation and see themselves fighting against Saudi Arabia, without prior reform or re-arrangement there are no "local forces" that Ansarallah could hand over the city to.

The UN-led Peace Talks for Yemen and the Southern Cause

Anne-Linda Amira Augustin

The war in Yemen is often portrayed and analysed as a conflict between the Hadi government and the Houthis or as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The so-called Southern Question, i.e. the grievances in South Yemen, which originate from the marginalization of South Yemenis since Yemen's unification in 1990 and the subsequent war in 1994, is usually given little attention among diplomats, policy makers and the media, and is, therefore, overlooked. However, the outcome of the Southern Question will have a decisive impact on the future of the Republic of Yemen. This paper will question why it is important to include in the UN-led negotiation process for Yemen, stakeholders who are partisan to the reestablishment of an independent state on the territory of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).

Institutionalization of South Yemeni Actors

Since 2016, political and military structures have been established in South Yemen to prepare for reestablishing an independent state on the territory of the former PDRY. In order to curb the spread of the various militias that fought in 2015 under the umbrella of the so-called Southern Resistance against the advancement of the Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdallah Salih to South Yemen, the southern militias were institutionalized with the help of the military coalition, and particularly, the United Arab Emirates. Composed of tens of thousands young Southerners, most of them advocating for an independent state in South Yemen, these militias are under the command of the Saudi-Emirati military coalition. These paramilitary units consist of the Security Belt Forces, which are responsible on the security of the governorates of Aden, Lahij, al-Dhali and Abyan; the Shabwani Elite Forces in the Governorate of Shabwa; and the Hadhrami Elite Forces in Hadhramawt. They have managed to force Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to retreat from Southern governorates. However, the Giants Brigades of these paramilitary forces, amongst others, fight at the frontlines.

Another institutionalization in South Yemen took place in 2016 when new elites emerged from the Southern Resistance and the Southern Movement – the independence movement of South Yemen, which emerged in 2007 and called for establishing an independent state in South Yemen. President Hadi had dismissed South Yemeni governors and Cabinet ministers in April 2017 including Aydarus al-Zubaydi, Aden's Governor. He accused them of being close to the Southern Movement. Mass protests demonstrated against these dismissals on 4 May 2017. As a result of this mass rally, the creation of an entity was declared that shall represent the Southern Question regionally and internationally. Aydarus al-Zubaydi then began to establish the Southern Transitional Council (STC), "a self-styled breakaway southern government in waiting."² It currently consists of, amongst others, 24 members in the presidency council, a general secretariat with 12 departments, a National Assembly of 303 members, local councils from the governorate and district level, and seven foreign representations. The STC is not the sole representative of the independence aspirations of the South Yemeni population but is currently the largest and most institutionalized political actor representing the Southern Question regionally and internationally.

The above-mentioned security forces in South Yemen are aligned with the STC in the call for reestablishing an independent state. Over the long term, these political and military structures might ensure greater autonomy and, finally, an orderly transition to an independent state.

² International Crisis Group (2019): Crisis Group Yemen Update #5. In: International Crisis Group, 22 February 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/crisis-group-yemen-update-5> (Access 2 April 2019).

The UN-led Peace Talks for Yemen

Based on the UN Resolution 2201, the peace process for Yemen focuses on only two warring parties: the Houthis and the Hadi government. The focus on two parties in the negotiation process does not reflect the real status on the ground where numerous actors are engaged in war. Since the beginning of the war in 2015, Southerners – civilians and armed groups – have been often involuntarily involved in the war. As many Southerners wish to regain an independent state, they do not recognize President Hadi and his government as their legitimate political representative. However, the UN-mediated peace talks and preliminary talks for Yemen in Geneva (2015), Kuwait (2016), and Stockholm (2018) only involved the Hadi government and the Houthis and have so far excluded all political actors representing the Southern Question from the negotiations.

From a South Yemeni perspective, the Southern Question is considered central to solving the war in Yemen. Therefore, since 2018, the STC has been trying to get a seat at the negotiation table in order to achieve the right of self-determination for South Yemenis through peace talks. The Hadi government, like the Houthis, has rejected the participation of the STC and other pro-independence South Yemeni representatives in Stockholm. Both of them have the right of veto as they are considered the sole warring factions according to the UN resolution. In particular, the Hadi government, whose mandate was supposed to end in 2014, is strengthened by the UN resolutions despite its little presence and support in the country and is, therefore, able to oppose an inclusive peace process.

The UN Security Council could push more than it has been hitherto for an inclusive peace process. However, the importance of the Southern Question for peace in Yemen is still underestimated, as is the significant role the South Yemeni soldiers are playing in the war. Furthermore, the international community, as well as the Hadi government or actors from the North look at and portray the Southern Question as a national problem. The representatives of the Southern Movement however see it as a struggle between two former states, the PDRY and the Yemen Arab Republic, which were united in 1990, but not as a national cause that could be resolved in a unified country.

Recommendations

- Due to the war, the fragmentation of Yemen is more severe than ever. Germany should consider the local conditions and structures that have emerged in Yemen since 2015. These conditions and structures will make it impossible to return to the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference of 2014.
- Groups advocating for the independence of South Yemen are better organized than they were a few years ago. Therefore, they will also have an important role to play in deciding the future of Yemen. In view of the establishment of quasi-state structures in South Yemen, it will be essential to involve stakeholders from South Yemen, who are in favour for independence, in the peace process in order to guarantee a lasting peace in the region. Germany should take into account that a majority of the Southerners does not consider the Southern Question as a national cause that can be solved in a unified Yemen.
- The peace process will not succeed unless all the Yemeni parties involved in the war are included in the political peace process from the beginning. In this regard, Germany should work with its partners to expand the political process to include these actors.

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Identities in Yemen: The Conflict and the Need for Recognition and Representation

Abdulsalam al-Rubaidi

In the following, I explain the regional, religious and ethnic identities in Yemen and their connections to the ongoing war. I conclude by recommendations on how to make the negotiations inclusive in order to overcome the repercussion of divisive identities.

Regional Identities

In the past as is of today, Yemen is marked by its division into two main political entities: the South and the North. Until 1990, the country was divided into The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and The Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen). Those two countries were separate states with distinct political histories and were products of two different spatial and political formations. The modern southern state was a product of the British Empire, while the modern northern state was one of the main legacies of the Zaydī Shiite Imamate. As a result of the lack of planning and equal representation of the South in the aftermath of 1994 war, the unification of the two states has been suffering from structural failure. In 2007, The Southern Movement, (al-Ḥīrak al-Janūbī) also simply known as al-Ḥīrak emerged as a peaceful protesting movement. Since then, the movement has grown significantly and has resulted in large numbers of Southerners actively protesting against the rule of the Northern elite under former president 'Ali 'Abd Allah Salih (d.2017). The majority of al-Ḥīrak's members demand the disengagement of the South from the North and the restoration of an independent Southern state. The outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC 2013/2014) suggested federalism as a solution for this problem. However, the negotiations were initially spoiled by politicians who had different interests and eventually the suggested solutions were aborted by war in late 2014 and early 2015.

Religious Identities

The main traditional component groups of the Islamic landscape of Yemen are the Sunni Shāfi'īs, the Shiite Zaydīs and the Shiite Ismā'īlīs. While these three groups belong to the old traditional religious schools of thought in Yemen, the second half of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of new Sunni patterns of religiosity, namely the Muslim Brotherhood's school of thought (since the late 1930s) and the Salafī Ḥanbali doctrine (since the late 1970s). In addition, there is also the Tablīghī Jamā'at group who has religious centers in Hodeidah, Sana'a and al-Bayhdah.

In addition to the political and economic reasons, the conflict between the Huthis, a Zaydī group, and the government has its own religious dimension. The current internationally recognized government represents and symbolises for many Yemeni citizens in the North the republican system that dated back to 1962 when the Zaydī imamate was defeated by revolutionaries who belong to different Yemeni regions and sects. The Huthis are seen by the republicans as the revivalist of the Zaydī imamate. In the Zaydī school of thought, the Imam or the leader of the Muslim nation must be one of the Hashimite clan (descendants of the prophet) to which the Huthi family belongs. This Shiite's principle is abhorred by the republicans who believe that it is against democracy, equal citizenship and equal representation. The Huthis believe that the republican governments during the last four decades marginalised their Zaydī identity; a claim rejected by the republicans who believe that Hashimite families in the North were dealt on equal footing with other Yemenis.

Ethnic Identities

Ethnicity plays a significant role in Yemen. Yemen has geographical and hence historical and social relations with the Horn-of-Africa countries. The African Yemenis, who are called akhdām in Yemen, are

said to have been enslaved in the early medieval history of Yemen. Today they live in shantytowns outside the main cities or in marginalised neighbourhoods. UNICEF reported that they constitute 10 percent of the Yemeni population. This group of people is distinguished by their physical appearance and they suffer from marginalisation and hence economic hardships and miseries.

Recommendations

- There are three main collective identities in Yemen: The government and its followers, namely, the republicans in the North; the Zaydī Huthis; and the Southern Movement in the South. These three groups should be included in any negotiation that aims at a sustainable peace in Yemen. Peace requires justice and genuine representation.
- The story of the Yemeni conflict is older than the current war; it is also more than a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It rather has its local dynamics and motives since 1962 and 1994. An inclusive solution should take into account the local grievances, whether they are based on regional, religious or racial identification.
- Any lasting and just solution to the ongoing war in Yemen should also address the grievances of the minorities such as that of akhdām.

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