

# YEMEN REPORT: A PEOPLE SEEKING PEACE UNDER THE RUBBLE OF A WRECKED STATE

Riad Domazeti



**INSAMER**  
IHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER  
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

To cite this article: Domazeti, Riad. "Yemen Report: A People Seeking Peace under the Rubble of a Wrecked State",  
INSAMER, February 2020.

 Report

## Introduction

Located on strategic crossroads such as the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, Yemen borders Saudi Arabia at the north and Oman at the northeast. With a surface area of 555,000 square kilometers, Yemen is an important country with about 200 large and small islands, unlike the one-piece, unified stretch of land illustrated on the maps. All these islands are located around the Gulf of Aden, one of the most strategically important passages in the world.

There are various religious minority groups such as Jews, Christians and Hindus representing less than 1% of the population in Yemen, a country with a population of about 30 million where 99% of the people are Muslims (60% Sunni, 40% Zaydi). Yemen, one of the countries with the lowest per capita income socioeconomically,

is plagued by sectarian tensions while also trying to cope with severe poverty of its population.

The cogs of the Yemeni economy are turned by minor trade activities and monies sent by a substantial number of Yemenis working abroad to their families back home. Despite having natural resources such as gold, oil, lead, nickel, copper and marble - though limited - Yemen's economy has never generated adequate income to meet the needs of the population. The country's main sources of income are oil and agriculture. The largest employer lies in the agricultural sector. A scene to the worst forms of humanitarian crisis, the country is beset by serious social and economic troubles, from food shortages to lack of housing.

In Yemen, more than half of the population lives in rural areas. Zaydis, one of the two major groups in Yemeni society that usually



**INSAMER**  
IHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER  
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

live in more sequestered regions, still live by their conservative traditions. Zaydis dominate the northern regions of the country, while the Sunnis are concentrated in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

Yemen is one of the most culturally cosmopolitan countries. Dominated by tribes, Yemen is like a melting pot that brings together Islamic, Arabian, African and Indian cultures. Yemen, which occupied a central position in the Gulf region until the discovery of the oil fields, is culturally considered the home of the Arabs, and is an Arab country with the oldest historical and cultural heritage.

In Yemen, where family, kinship ties and tribal relations are strong, there is a serious conflict between traditional social structures and the modern state. In the rural areas of the country, state control has never been fully achieved. And therefore leaders who wish to govern Yemen would have to form alliances and agreements with regional and local tribal leaders.

After many civil wars in the last century, Yemen has been experiencing a major economic crisis since 2011, leaving behind a huge wreck. The first series of events that caused unrest began with calls for democracy in the Arab Spring chain of events, escalating after a while into internal conflicts to finally turn into, through the intervention of regional powers, a civil war between Zaydi Houthis and Sunnis. Bugged down in a debilitating social and economic quagmire over a period of seven years of civil war, Yemen saw its entire infrastructure collapse, along with social ties that kept it together.

This report aims to contribute to an understanding of the current political and humanitarian crisis in Yemen. While touching on the current situation in the country, the study also seeks to highlight the socio-political causes of the war. Accordingly, this study intends to examine all dimensions of the crisis in Yemen, from local dynamics to regional and global powers.

## Brief History

According to Islamic historians, the first inhabitants of Yemen were Prophet Noah's son Shem and his descendants, who are considered the ancestors of Arabs. In the pre-Islamic period, the region was dominated by different empires; it became a home for Christians with the Byzantine influence, and also for Jews with Jewish immigrants from Palestine. Later, Yemen became one of the early Islamic cities with the appointment of Muadh ibn Jabal as local governor by Prophet Muhammad. In the following centuries, the region lived under the reign of various dynasties like the Umayyads, Abbasids, Ayyubids, Yufirids, Qarmatians, Rassids, Sulayhids, Hamdanids, Mahdids, Rasulids, Tahirids and Mamluks.

Yemen, which gradually came under the Ottoman rule starting from 1517, remained an Ottoman province for four centuries. Despite frequent revolts and uprisings, the Ottoman state attached great importance to Yemen building religious, military, administrative and social facilities in the region. Although the Zaydis embraced a Sunni version of Islam, they believed the descendants of Imam Ali should rule the state, hence their revolts against the Ottoman state so many times.

The Ottoman strategy of Yemen was founded on two main pillars: The first of these was Yemen's role in international trade as a gateway to the oceans. The second was to halt the threat posed by the Portuguese navy that existed at that time in international waters. Because especially, starting from the 15th century onwards, the Portuguese navy had occupied a part of the East African coast, advanced as far as Jeddah that sat at the entrance of the Red Sea putting it within reach of Mecca and Medina. Due to all of these circumstances, the defense of Yemen was vital to preclude depredations from the south.

The Ottoman rule in Yemen did indeed end with the Armistice of Mudros, signed at the end of

the WWI, and Yemen was no longer an Ottoman land with the Treaty of Lausanne. The north-south division of Yemen, which survives to this day, is a product of those times. While north Yemen under the control of then Zaydi kings, declared its independence from the Ottomans, the southern region with the country's coasts was occupied by the British until 1967, as a consequence of which the country was divided into two parts.

On the other hand, north Yemen was also divided between Zaydis and Idrisids and part of the region was ceded to Saudi Arabia. Founded by Yahia, the 87th Imam of the Yemeni Zaydis, the Yemeni Zaydi Emirate was later renamed the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen. Imam Yahia held onto power in the period running from 1920 to 1948, thanks to the agreements he made with Great Britain, Italy and Saudi Arabia.

The rule of Zaydi Imams in north Yemen ended with the promulgation of the republican regime in 1962. The Arab nationalism that emerged from Egypt during this period had a profound impact on Yemeni politics. While the South Arabia League was founded in Yemen to wrest occupied regions from British forces, South Yemen gained independence in 1967.

Making confident strides towards full independence, Yemen was caught this time in the throes of ideological conflicts due to the divisive political climate of the Cold War. In the process, there were constant conflicts between the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), which was closer to the socialist bloc, and the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), which stood closer to the US.

By 1989, North Yemen proposed to merge with South Yemen, and South Yemen merged with North Yemen on May 22, 1990, with the support of the Soviet Union. The country was jointly administered by the two parties during the two and a half year transition period and was fully unified after the elections in late 1992. Under the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh from the North (1992-2012), who alone shaped Yemeni politics after winning the elections, the country experienced a turbulent process.

In the 1991 Gulf crisis, the Yemeni government's support for Saddam Hussein's Iraq caused neighboring Saudi Arabia to impose economic sanctions on the country. Saudi Arabia's deportation of more than one million Yemeni workers also deepened the economic crisis in Yemen. Since the early 2000s, Yemen has had to deal with groups led by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi encamped in regions bordering Saudi Arabia. The government of Riyadh, which tried to liquidate these groups on the grounds that they were supported by Iran, killed the leader of the Houthi militia by exerting pressure on Yemen. However, this event only served to further aggravate the situation leading to radicalization of the group. During the socio-economic crisis caused by the Arab Spring in 2011, the Houthis wanted to turn the crisis into an opportunity with the support of Iran and this kindled the tinder of civil war that still rips through the country to this day.

## **Geostrategic Importance of Yemen**

Yemen has always been a strategically important country, not only today, but throughout history. Yemen, which boasts the most important sea passage between Asia, Africa and the West, has always been in the sights of major powers seen as a key destination that needs to be dominated.

In the distant past, fabrics and spices from India and China were carried to Mecca and Damascus, which were pivotal trade centers, through Yemen, to Europe. During the Islamic period, Yemeni ports played an important role in the Islamization of Southeast Asia. For example, the Islamization of countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia was also due to traders travelling through Yemen.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased the importance of Yemeni ports even more. Moreover, Yemen is a country of extreme critical importance for world trade security and for the holy lands of Mecca and Medina; since Yemen is the first line of defense against possible threats to the Haramayn from the south. In fact, the same strategy was also used during the Ottoman era.

4.8% of the world's oil flows through the Gulf of Aden.<sup>1</sup> The Bab-el-Mandeb, which handles about 4.5 million barrels of oil daily and more than 21,000 cargo ships annually, is an important route for transporting oil from the Middle East to world markets via the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Yemen is one of the most important destinations in the One Generation One Road or the New Silk Road project that China has started to implement, spanning 68 countries. China plans to transfer trade goods to Europe via the Gulf of Aden, starting from the Gwadar Port it has built in Pakistan. Accordingly, it is expected that the economic importance of centers such as the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will

gradually decline. For this reason, the UAE is trying to control the strategic coastal points of Yemen. Besides Taiz, Hudaydah and the island of Socotra in Yemen, the UAE is also trying to control the coastal ports of Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

The construction of the New Silk Road is seen as a development that threatens the current trade order for the US. This situation raises the global, commercial and

economic dimensions of the struggle for Yemen. Also noteworthy is the participation of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both allies of the US, in the Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum in July 2018 at a low diplomatic level.<sup>2</sup>

Both for world powers such as the US and China as well as regional powers, Yemen's geostrategic position is crucial for the comprehensive transformation and reshaping of the region.

## Yemeni Society and Tribalism

Although Arabs make up the majority of the population, African and Asian minorities also live in Yemen. In Yemen, Muslims make up 99% of the population; of which about 60% are Sunnis and the remaining are Zaydis. Although the Zaydis approach religious matters almost in a similar way to the Hanafi sect, they differ from the followers of sunnah in their belief that Imam Ali has the highest rank among the four caliphates and the caliphate should therefore belong to Ali and his family. For this reason they rejected the Ottoman Empire and staged frequent revolts.

Yemen can be divided socially into two main regions. North Yemen, mainly made up of desert terrain, is home to Bedouin tribes in general who live in oases or small settlements due to the unfavorable climatic conditions. Geographical conditions and the country's social make-up have always been an obstacle to the creation of a central authority and political unity in the region. The majority of the tribes in the region belong to the Zaydi sect. The city of Saada is the historical center of the Zaydis. On the other hand, South Yemen, which is mainly made up of coastal areas, is mainly composed of urbanized Sunni tribes and famous for its relatively good living conditions.

Tribes have always been the most important element of society in Yemen. For this reason, tribes in Yemen maintained their influence and position against the central authority, not being able to be disbanded in the modernization process. Not being able to develop a balanced policy, Yemeni governments and politicians could not prevent the tribes from clashing with each other over this issue.<sup>3</sup> Since the tribes traditionally act according to certain rules and codes inherited from past ages - according to estimates - 80% of the Yemeni population solve their problems according to these tribal rules.<sup>4</sup>

The geographical spread of the tribes is also closely related to the modernization of the cities. The places where tribes dominate the social

*Yemen is a country of extreme critical importance for the security of world trade and for the holy lands of Mecca and Medina.*

order are rural areas. These are the northern and northwestern regions, including Saada, Amran, Al Jawf, Sana, Ma'rib and Dhamar. In coastal towns like Taiz, Hudaydah, Aden and Mukalla in the west and south of Yemen, tribal rules and norms have less influence on the social order.<sup>5</sup>

Since the traditional patriarchal structure prevails, tribal leaders in Yemen play a crucial role. As the country has not gone through a modernization process in a contemporary sense, political relations are conducted in accordance with local cultural norms rather than with modern methods. Another factor that aggravates this situation is the inability of the central government to overcome the economic and safety problems in the country. In such parlous and unstable times, people quite normally stick to their tribes for safety. These traditional powers, which have replaced governments, have become indispensable legitimate elements of Yemeni society.

The fact that the tribes in Yemen are armed does not mean that they readily resort to violence. Weapons are widespread among Yemeni tribes, but the rules and traditions governing the use of weapons are also very strict.<sup>6</sup> Although this does not always mean political stability, tribes and government agencies often remain in close contact and cooperate in areas such as protecting the highways and public buildings. In some cases, tribal leaders, members and women also serve in parliament, central government and local provincial centers.<sup>7</sup> In 2012, half of the parliamentarians and the army members were tribal sheikhs.<sup>8</sup>

With the Arab Spring, both Islamic groups and left and liberal groups became more visible, and tribal influences soared, let alone weakened. Iran as well as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are developing alliances with Yemeni military groups made up of tribes. The influence of modern political parties, ideological groups and religious structures in Yemen is limited due to the dominant tribal culture.

## Conflict Dynamics in Yemen

It should be noted that there are many ideological, strategic, economic and social factors that determine the tensions and conflicts in the Yemeni political scene. These chronic problems, which also have historical roots, largely determine the nature, timing and dynamics of the conflicts within the country that are too complicated to be pigeon-holed:

**Strategic position:** The unique geography of Yemen has made it a strategically key country. The fact that the country, which plays a central role in international trade and security, is located at the critical crossroads between Asia, the Middle East and Africa, has led many regional and international powers to make the country part of their political agenda. For this reason, foremost among the dynamics determining the conflicts in Yemen is the close interest of foreign powers in the region and their competition with one another, covertly or openly, to have control in the region. The conflicts between Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, the war policy of the US and the Western alliance under the pretext of al-Qaeda in the 1990s, the civil war unfolding today in the axis of Iran-Saudi Arabia-UAE, and finally the trade wars between the US and China and their efforts to make political and military gains have turned Yemen into a battlefield for these global powers.

**Sectarianism:** The second factor determining the nature and continuity of conflicts in Yemen is sectarian divisions. Although the Zaydi minority, which makes up about 40% of the country, and the Sunni majority, which makes up 60%, have been able to live together for a long time, a major problem of trust arose between the parties together with the political balances of the modern era. In this loss of trust, the failure to establish a fair political order, which satisfies all sectarian elements in the country played a major role in the post-Ottoman period.

**Poverty:** The third factor determining the conflicts in Yemen is the socio-economic

situation, which has a direct impact on the public. Although surrounded by oil-rich countries, Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the world, has major problems in many areas, from education and health to culture and social structure. These problems not only encouraged the emergence of radical groups in the country, but also led to strained social ties.

**Neighboring countries:** Another reason for the conflicts and tension in Yemen is the problems caused by its close and distant neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia. In the post-Ottoman period, since the founding of the two countries, the border disagreements between Saudi Arabia and Yemen have never ended. Both sides still remain at loggerheads over land disputes (such as the Asir region and some islands) and with regard to certain lands with oil reserves. This leads to the neighbors in question destabilizing the situation in Yemen through the agency of various groups.

**Feudal system:** Another important factor determining the nature of the conflicts in Yemen is that the society still defines itself through its tribal and ethnic affiliations. This situation hindered the establishment of a central Yemeni state authority and caused conflicts due to the individual coalitions and alliances of tribal leaders with other countries. Even today in many parts of the country, local tribes call the shots instead of state authorities. In the country where the state authority has always been flimsy and tenuous, weak governments have always had difficulties in providing stability.

**Regionalism:** Another important factor that stokes the flames of conflict in Yemen is regionalism. Such division along cultural, economic, sectarian and psychological lines particularly manifest in the divide between the North and South. Throughout history there has been a wealth gap between the southern provinces dotted with coasts, and the rural northern provinces. This created two separate social structures based on different socio-economic realities. The most important political legacy that deepens this divide is the fact that

Northerners dominated the entire country that fell under the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh from the North after 1991 and the unjust removal of so many Southerners from vital state and military offices and duties. This in turn fosters a feeling of regional discrimination and anger that still persists today.

## Arab Spring Process

Although it is difficult today to determine the origins of the current situation in Yemen, it may be argued that it all began with the 1991 Gulf War. Firstly, with tensions between the North and the South had already arisen at that time, means Yemen had been struggling for years to overcome the political and social problems caused by this division. The regional crisis, which began with Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait in 1990, heralded a period of uncertainty with the US embargo and operation against Iraq in 1991. During the war and the process that followed, Yemen avoided participating in an American-led international coalition, contrary to the expectations of Arab countries in the region. When Yemen did not side with Saudi Arabia on such an occasion with great consequences for its own security, severe economic punishments followed, signaling the start of a period of economic and political sanctions against Yemen.

In the 1990s, hot topics on the Yemen's agenda were the attacks by local al-Qaeda cells formed by foreign Yemeni returning from Afghanistan. The attacks carried out by the US under the pretext of counterterrorism during this period led to armed fighters in Yemen taking control of many regions. The central authority, which was already weak, was decimated even more by al-Qaeda, which also used its tribal connections, leading to the disappearance of state authority in many regions.

At the same time, the presence of the Houthis in the Zaydi population located in the regions near Yemen-Saudi Arabia border also caused great unease. While the Saudi Arabian government called on the Yemeni state to take more drastic

measures against the Houthis, the Houthis, whose position was weakened by the unification of the North and South Yemeni states, also initiated efforts to sharpen their political awareness. Reports that the Houthis were preparing to embrace a more rebellious attitude against the state following the Iranian revolution were met with concern in the region. Finally, in 2004, the Yemeni government launched an operation in which up to 1,000 people died, including Badreddin al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis, due to growing concerns. However, Badreddin al-Houthi's death led to even greater support lent to the movement by the Zaydi community, far from the expected break of the movement, and with the support of Iran, the Houthi forces got even stronger.

Although Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, who replaced Badreddin al-Houthi following his death, signed a ceasefire agreement with then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthis have been staging attacks since 2008 targeting military posts, police stations and foreign embassies. The Houthis expressed their demands for political and economic reform and also held street demonstrations in cities like Saada, where their presence were strong.

Under these circumstances, Yemen seemed to be caught unaware by the Arab Spring that began in 2011. After the student movements that began at Sana'a University on January 27, 2011 spread to the streets, the government crushed the demonstrations in a bloody manner. This event also kindled the flames of civil war, which still ravages the country today.

The rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been continuously ruling the country for the past 33 years, started to be shaken by public movements and demonstrations. Many officers and bureaucrats began to join the opposition ranks due to the rising number of casualties as a result of Saleh's heavy-handed measures and the accompanying international pressure. Commander of the First Army, General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar announced that he would use the armed forces under his command to

protect the civilian population. Many religious, tribal and military leaders also sided with the demonstrators.

Based on the sociological basis of the demonstrations, people from all groups, from Sunni Islamists to Houthis, nationalists and left-wing groups, took part in the demonstrations. As a result of the military and economic relations Saleh maintained during his long presidency, and the policy of balance he pursued with various tribes, armed clashes between supporters and opponents of the regime increasingly got out of control.

It was not expected that Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been seriously injured following a missile attack on the presidential palace in June 2011, would return to his homeland following his treatment in Saudi Arabia. In response to these developments, neighboring countries concerned about a regional conflict also began to act. The United Nations (UN), the Arab League, the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and finally the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) actively and persistently intervened. With intensive diplomacy and pressure, President Saleh resigned and transferred his powers to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The handover ceremony held in Riyadh was broadcast live on Saudi state television. An agreement made with the initiatives of the GCC gave Saleh and his relatives impunity and established a unity government composed of opposition leaders.

Even after Saleh resigned from his 33 years of presidency, international pressure forced him to keep fight for his cause and sided with the Houthis in the civil war until he met his tragic death.

Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who came to power in February 2012, was unable to put an end to the chaos engulfing the country. The search for stability in Yemen was derailed for reasons such as the failure to meet the demands of demonstrators and the increased the intervention of foreign powers in the country. In the same days, the al-Hirak movement, mainly composed

of southern secessionists, and the Houthis in the north called out for a boycott of the elections. Hadi, who was the only candidate in the election, received almost all the 6.5 million votes cast in the election, overshadowed by violent incidents and calls for boycotts.

The event that opened a second chapter in the Arab Spring process in Yemen were the attempts by the Houthis to forcefully take over the government by excluding all other groups. The coup led by the Houthis was the beginning of a series of events that led to the intervention of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and triggered a grave humanitarian crisis.

The Houthi Ansarullah movement, seizing on the climate of turmoil, usurped the government by taking over the capital Sana in September 2014 without encountering significant resistance, thanks to Iran's military and logistical support. The Houthis dissolved the parliament, and announced that they had established the Transitional National Council. Leftists and other opposition groups, mainly southern groups, and the majority of Yemeni society expressed their dissatisfaction with this development and raised their voices at what they saw as wrongful seizure of power. Although President Hadi and his cabinet had initially resigned and sought refuge in Saudi Arabia, Hadi later announced that he had withdrawn his resignation and was going back to his role as the President.

Conversely, the Houthis initiated a sweeping wave of arrests and detentions in the regions that they dominate, especially in the capital Sana. Meanwhile, clashes between the Houthis and security forces in various parts of the country and between other groups in the south escalated even more. While the Houthis called on their followers to celebrate, their leaders Abdul-Malik al-Houthi also called for a major national conference in the capital Sana. The putschist Houthis, however, never seemed to have the intention of creating a social order that could pander to all segments of the society. With diverse groups in the society growing mistrustful of each other, the crisis gradually worsened and conflicts intensified.

As things stood, it turned out that Saleh's dismissal had aggravated the crisis, let alone solved any issues. The emergence of groups such as al-Qaeda on the one hand, while the Houthis took control of the country on the other, led to the intensification of separatist and factionist ideas that had historically divided the North the South. With the incitement of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, disturbances in Yemen turned into a purely sectarian conflict. The United Nations, the US and the EU, and especially the Gulf states, refused to recognize the Houthi government.

Many tribes and groups, especially those in the south, who had been fighting each other, began to unite and fight against the Houthis. When it became apparent that the Houthis were setting their sights on Aden, the main center of the Southerners, Saudi Arabia saw no option but to intervene.

Conflicts in the vicinity of the Bayda province were where the attitudes of the tribes, who played an important role in the civil war in Yemen, became most visible. The province of Bayda is a strategic point for controlling the central parts of Yemen. It connects the seven provinces of the country while separating the south from the north. When the forces of Ali Abdullah Saleh set their course towards Bayda to regain control in the region, tribes supporting Saleh chose to support the Houthis. Together with the Houthis, Saleh's loyalist troops turned their attention to the north of the country and the strategically important points of Taiz and Aden.

The Houthis, who conquered the Bayda province after a while, gained a stronger position in the region than Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Houthis, who treated the tribes well and used their lands, began to eliminate the tribal leaders and local administrators who opposed them. One of the most remarkable events in this process occurred in August 2016. The Houthis' killing of four tribal leaders and house demolitions, confiscation of livestock and harvest, led to deteriorating relations with other tribes in the region.



## **Military Intervention of the Arab Coalition**

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states were the ones most concerned about the situation in Yemen and the growing influence of Iran. Due to Iran's increasing role in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, its neighbor Saudi Arabia, spurred by safety concerns, reacted with force to the wave of insurgency in its own borders, especially in the Qatif region, where mostly Shiites live. When Saudi security concerns coincided with the economic concerns of the UAE, it was decided to establish a force consisting of Arab states.

King Salman, who ascended the throne after the death of King Abdullah in Saudi Arabia, immediately made the decision for a military intervention in Yemen. The Arab Coalition, formed in 2015 under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, began military operations to end the rule of the Houthis. Although Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Sudan, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt were part of the military coalition, Riyadh led the coalition. Many countries supported the "Operation Decisive Storm", but these countries were not willing to send troops to Yemen.

Initially, the coalition forces who supported anti-Houthi groups and the State Army only in terms of logistics and with air strikes, gradually took active part in land operations with army units and various armed groups of tribes. On the other hand, the Houthis, who received military and logistical support from Iran, had no difficulty paying for their weaponry and fighters. The Houthis, who even possess many defensive weapons, including anti-aircraft batteries, became capable of launching missiles into Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia.

In terms of international legitimacy, Saudi Arabia's main argument was the fight against terrorism and ensuring the integrity of the country, and the US and UK have supported this coalition almost unconditionally. Nevertheless, although three years have passed since the

operations, Saudi Arabia has been exposed to serious security risks, let alone achieved de-escalation in the war in Yemen. The suicide attacks on the Saudi warships by the Houthis and the deaths of several Saudi crews, as well as missile attacks on Saudi Arabian territories show the extent of the risk posed to the Kingdom.

In mid-2018, fighting escalated in the capital Sana and in the city of Hudaydah with the coalition supported by Saudi Arabia and the Sunni tribes taking over the city of Aden.

The demonstrations in Yemen, which began in 2011 with completely humane and libertarian ideas, have now evolved beyond their original intentions with the country turning into a battleground for score-settling between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The grooming of Houthi leaders, supported by Saudi Arabia in the past, by Iran and Badreddin al-Houthi's theology training in Iran and Lebanon led to the politicization of the Houthis in Yemen who were turning away from a Zaydi interpretation of Islam. The fact that the Houthi leadership was clearly influenced by the idea of a revolution like in Iran and deepened relations with Iran were enough cause to rile the Saudis. At this stage, however, it is not possible to argue that all the Zaydis in Yemen acted together with the Houthis. During the last 10 years there has been a serious division of opinion between the Zaydis.

It should be noted that the war in Yemen presents serious challenges due to the geographical conditions. The terrain characterized by steep mountains and cliffs, leaves the warring sides almost no choice but to launch air strikes. Instead of a direct confrontation between regular armies, a war is waged in the form of bombings, guerrilla tactics and arson attacks. And this alone adds to casualties.

## **Current Political Situation in Yemen**

Yemen is in a state of chaos in every respect due to the ongoing conflicts ripping through the land. With Yemen divided politically and militarily into two main groups, the Iranian-backed Houthis dominate the northern provinces, while

Hadi government forces, supported by the Saudi-led Arab Coalition, dominate the southern provinces. In addition to these two main groups, tribes also have local spheres of influence, but their impact is not felt throughout the country. Though no longer as strong and influential as it used to be, there is also al-Qaeda which still controls certain sections of the country.

Within two great spheres of influence divided by north and south, there is also no perfect unity between the southern forces. There are currently frequent fights and clashes for domination between groups supported by the UAE, the state army loyal to the Hadi government, forces of Saleh, southern separatists and groups affiliated with al-Qaeda.

## The Southern Region

Southern Yemen is made up of six regions. Though small in size, the most strategically important city in these regions is Aden. Lahij, Abyan, Shabwah, Hadhramaut, Mahra and Socotra are other important settlements. Aden, a strategic coastal city, is the capital of South Yemen. Although, as a result of the fights, the city came under the control of the Hadi troops, who acted as official government troops, the majority of the city and its strategic points were taken over by the UAE and the forces supported by it with pressure from the UAE. The city of Aden, where the hostilities are at their most intense, remains the most strategic point for anti-Houthi forces. Being the center of anti-Houthi movements under today's political conditions, the city is scene to the birth of a new identity in which Arab nationalism and the Sunni ideology is intertwined. Since it is the largest port city in Yemen, Aden is the gateway to the country, not only for commercial goods, but also for food and weapons. Due to its strategic importance, the city has become a battleground for separatist groups, pro-Hadi army units and UAE-supported groups. Since January 2018 there have been fierce clashes in many parts of Aden, especially at the airport.

Lahij, Mahra, Shabwah, and other major cities in the south have been ruled from the outset by the UAE-backed armed groups, while the city of Abyan is under the control of pro-Hadi forces. The Hadhramaut region was dominated firstly by pro-al-Qaeda and then by the UAE-backed armed groups. The strategic Socotra Island is also controlled by the UAE-backed forces. Wadi Hadhramaut located bordering Saudi Arabia is dominated by Saudi soldiers and local armed groups. Recently, there have been reports that UAE-backed forces are trying to take over this region.

An important issue that plagues the southern regions is the presence of al-Qaeda cells. Members of the group mingling with tribes and armed groups pose a serious problem for coalition forces. This situation leads to cracks in the fight against the Houthis. Although there are various claims about the weakened dominance of al-Qaeda in Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have executed many operations with the United States under the pretext of fight against terrorism. Another important problem plaguing the southern regions are the checkpoints created by armed groups acting independently of each other, particularly those controlled by the Arab Coalition. These checkpoints appear in almost every two or three kilometers, making transportation and life for the citizens considerably more difficult.

## The Northern Region

Among the Houthi-dominated cities in the north, the capital Sana and the port city Hudaydah come to the fore. Moreover, places like Ibb, Amran, Raymah, Zemar and Mahwit are completely under the control of the Houthis. Although some parts of the capital Sana are divided, the Houthis keep the majority of the lands, especially Bayda, under their control. The Saada and Hajjah regions, which are also on the border with Saudi Arabia, are under the control of the Houthis, with the exception of some pieces of land.<sup>9</sup> Districts controlled by the Houthis are administered by committees formed by revolutionaries, and all of the roads and paths

are controlled by Houthi armed militants. These committees also control Houthi political leaders and their families, government buildings, ports, the presidential palace and airports. This system, similar to a temporary administration, is under constant threat from ongoing conflicts. In Houthi-controlled areas, there is almost no state-like hierarchy or bureaucracy that can restore order to social life, no sign of established institutions or agencies.

## **Hudaydah Port**

Hudaydah Port, a key spot on the Red Sea, is the largest port in Yemen where large ships can dock. 70% of the goods and fuel imported by Yemen enter the country through this port. According to the allegations of the anti-Houthi coalition, weaponry and other logistical supplies sent to the Houthis by Iran also pass through the Hudaydah port. It is known that ammunitions including long-range and ballistic missiles fired into the Red Sea and Saudi Arabia are also transported via this port. Therefore the Arab Coalition is desperately trying to take over this port in order to win the war in Yemen and wean the Houthis from Iranian influence.

For the Houthis, who have held Hudaydah since March 2015, it is crucial to protect this city and port to keep their ability to continue the fight. In addition to the humanitarian materials and weapons they receive from outside, the Houthis make around US\$14 million per month from trade activities on the port. In addition, people in the north and center of the country receive food and fuel from Hudaydah. If the Houthis lose Hudaydah, this will mean that they will mostly lose control over the northern regions of the country. Therefore, this situation will also strongly influence the outcome of the war. Under these circumstances, it is not difficult to predict that the Houthis will resist to the end to defend the city.<sup>10</sup>

Owing to its strategic value, the Arab Coalition Forces led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the Republican Guard of President Hadi, the National Resistance Forces of Tareq Saleh - the son of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Salafists in the south and Tihama Resistance Forces launched a major operation in May 2018

stretching from south to north to take over the Hudaydah port. Although the Coalition forces have made some progress in this operation, it is believed that an all-out war is needed for a major strategic change in the region. The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, who is trying to force the Arab Coalition to reach an agreement and enter into political negotiations with the Houthis, proposed a transfer of the port to the United Nations during his meetings with the Houthis. Although the leader of the Houthis, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, declared in a statement that they were prepared to hand over the port of Hudaydah to the United Nations, it would not be realistic to expect such a step to be taken in 2018 without a significant concession made to them.<sup>11</sup>

## **Political and Military Actors**

Numerous local, regional and global actors are involved in the ongoing crisis in Yemen. From a broader perspective, China, the US, the United Kingdom and Russia are directly or indirectly involved while Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran are the regional players. On a micro level, we can see that there are many groups and political parties in the country that are in conflict with each other. Therefore, the military and political crisis in Yemen is a multifaceted, multi-layered phenomenon, in short, a very complex form of conflict.

It appears difficult for both local actors and regional powers to overcome the crisis in Yemen with an absolute victory. It has become clear that over the last four years neither of the parties can overpower the other and the international powers have not shown the will and determination to solve the Yemeni crisis.

## **Political Formations and Parties**

### **The Southern Movement (al-Hirak)**

The Southern Movement originating from the strategic city of Aden consists of the former administrative cadres of the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen, which was an independent state before the unification in 1990. The movement, known as al-Hirak, is also called "separatists" because it was founded on

the idea of separating the South and the North. The Southern Movement, which is made up of dozens of tribes and various schools of thoughts in the southern regions of the country, feels excluded by the central government controlled by the Northerners. Yemen was unified in 1990 under an agreement between Ali Abdullah Saleh from the North and Ali Salem al-Beidh from the South. However, during the civil war in 1994 Saleh dismissed his government partner al-Beidh and many southern bureaucrats and soldiers. The anti-Saleh stance of al-Beidh, one of the most important leaders of the Southerners, also continued after the Arab Spring. Until the National Dialogue Congress between 2007 and 2013, al-Beidh rubbed shoulders with Iran at times and conducted some of his activities, especially media and political activities, in Beirut. Gaining a financial advantage, al-Beidh founded a TV channel in Lebanon. Thus it became the best-organized group among so many other groups within the Southern Movement. Iran's rapprochement with the Houthis over the course of time led to al-Beidh's estrangement from Iran.<sup>12</sup> The best-known political formation of the Southern Movement is the Yemeni Socialist Party, founded under the leadership of al-Beidh. Although the party assumed the role of the political representative of the Southern Movement, its effectiveness gradually diminished due to the presence of armed militias associated with tribes in the south. Even though Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi from the South was a candidate in the 2012 elections in the transitional period after Saleh, the Southern Movement called for a boycott. Many leaders from the south also boycotted the National Dialogue Congress in 2013.

### **The Southern Transitional Council**

The Southern Transitional Council, the primary umbrella organization of the southern regions, was founded in Aden. The Council is chaired by Aidarus al-Zubaidi. The main goal of the movement is to found a new state with the support of the UAE.<sup>13</sup> Hadi, the legitimate president of Yemen, did not recognize the council calling it

illegitimate. Judging by the incoherent voices from the movement, it is not really able to put up a united front. This is because there were differences between the demands, expectations and interests of the various tribes and groups that make up this movement. Some groups advocated the idea that the South should be completely independent, others called for more influence in the central government, while the rest demanded more autonomy. These differences are reflected in the alliances established today. Although the Southern Transitional Council acted jointly with the Arab Coalition, some groups were in a separate alliance with the United Arab Emirates, while others decided to cooperate with Saudi Arabia. Some groups, on the other hand, try to stay more independent by acting alone.

### **The Southern National Coalition**

The Southern National Coalition supports Hadi as the legitimate president of the country, apart from the separatist groups represented by the Southern Transitional Council who are active in the south. The founding purpose of the coalition is to keep Yemen together and united to counteract the southern separatists. There are many southern groups in the coalition. It is also possible to describe the Southern National Coalition as the sum of groups close to the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as 65 different tribes over which President Hadi has influence and influential figures.<sup>14</sup> Statements by coalition officials show that they mostly work closely with Saudi Arabia and are in conflict with the UAE, which supports the separatists.

### **The Houthi Movement**

The Houthi Movement is basically a religious community and a group derived from the Zaydi interpretation of Islam. The Houthis are a group of Yemeni tribes living mainly in the Saada region in the north of the country. The Houthis are not a religious sect. The Houthis, who were a Zaydi tribe, gained recognition in 1962 with their support for the last Zaydi Imam al-Badr. They later represented the opposition by working together with many northern tribes



that fell afoul of the central government for several times. The most important feature that distinguishes the Houthis from other Islamic sects and communities is their views about the caliphate. Taking a different approach than the Sunnis, the Zaydis believe that the caliphate is the prerogative of the Ahlul Bayt and Imam Ali. From their perspective, Imam Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn, Imam Zayn al-Abidin and Imam Zayd should have been the caliph following Prophet Mohammad. In this sense the Zaydis differ from the Shiite theological philosophy. The Houthis, who are mostly a cultural subgroup shaped by tribal ties and geographical conditions, follow Zaydism, which is the closest to Sunnism in its interpretation of Islam; separating them both from Twelvers and other Shiite sects. In Yemen, the Houthis were never treated as alien fractions in society, neither in terms of social ties nor daily procedures and transactions. However, the Houthis' tribal roots and their geographical surroundings coupled with their religious ideology all make it difficult to impose a modern state authority on them. The politicization of the Houthis, traditionally a politically and socially libertarian society, was connected with Iran's rapprochement with the Shiites in the Gulf after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and especially with the education of the Houthis in Iran and in other Shiite theological centers. It is observed that the Houthi movement has become a political formation closely affiliated with the Iranian administration, independent of the Sunni and Zaydi movements in Yemen.<sup>15</sup> Today, the Houthis are at odds with the rest of the Yemeni society because of their close relations with Iran. The Houthis believe that they have been politically discriminated by the central authority. They would revolt from time to time because they believed they were not represented fairly and equally. While it is difficult to say the Houthis' exact intentions in Yemen, some of the Houthi representatives demanded fair representation, while others called for some kind of autonomy.

Inspired by the teaching of the contemporary Zaydi scholar Bedreddin Amiruddin al-Houthi,

the Houthis established a religious école within the Zaydis. This movement began to spread and promote the ideas of Sheikh Bedreddin, by founding an educational institution called the Youth Union in Saada in 1986. It was a breaking point for the Houthi community when Badreddin al-Houthi came to power. With Yemen's transition to a more democratic environment in the 1990s, a group of Houthis, consisting of scholars, political activists and media representatives founded the al-Haq Party, which represents the political wing of this new formation. However, the party lost the parliamentary elections and was able to only have two MPs in the parliament. One of these two MPs, Badreddin al-Houthi, resigned from the party after the election results. Badreddin al-Houthi, who had joined the parliament as an independent member, tried to participate in various social formations when he realized that he could not show significant political presence on the Yemeni stage.<sup>16</sup>

Other Zaydi imams and scholars have rejected many Houthi practices and traditions, although the Houthi movements originate from the Zaydi school of thought. For this reason there were serious conflicts and clashes between them. Some of the Houthis that called themselves "Ansarullah" who closed ranks around Hussein al-Houthi have been fighting the central government since 2002. Their primary goal is to get rid of the last revolutionaries in the central government (e.g. Mansur Hadi, elected in 2012) in order to found an Islamic Republic.<sup>17</sup> In the 2000s, Hussein waged dozens of wars with the Yemeni army and other tribes in the provinces of Saada, Amran and Al Jawf.

The Houthis, who took advantage of the chaotic environment of the Arab Spring and staged a military coup in 2015, took 65% of Yemen under their control. Apart from places like Saada, where they were traditionally active, they conquered the capital Sana and then made a move to control Aden, the center of the southern, and the entire Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. This indicates that the Houthis want to rule the whole of Yemen.

The first step of the Houthis, who established close relations with Iran, was to put two charter daily flights between Sana and Tehran. It is stated aside of civilian passengers, thousands of young people were also brought by these planes to Iran for training. There are also suspicions that so many masqueraded as students are brought to this country for military training. The Houthis' relations with Iran, which began in 1979, were taken to an even higher level, especially culturally, after the Arab Spring. During this period the Houthis tried to change the demographic texture of the places they conquered. Together with the Houthis, who mainly adopted Iranian Shiitism, some of the Zaydis also converted to Iranian Shiitism. In addition, some Sunnis were put under pressure and exposed to Shiite propaganda. For example, it is reported that 10% of the population in the city of Taiz, which was for a time under the control of the Houthis, was exposed to such pressure. The current leader of the Houthis is Abdul-Malik al-Houthi was trained in Iran for a while.

“Houthi People’s Committees” is the most classic organization for the Houthis. Their structures are called with names such as “people’s committees”, “revolutionary committees” etc. The people’s committees formed by the Houthis before the Arab Spring participated particularly in the operations against al-Qaeda. The popular people’s committees, which were also used by President Hadi, are mostly comprised of the unemployed and people with criminal records. These state-sponsored committees have taken over some of the powers of the army and the police. The loyalty problem of the committees is another subject of discussion. For whenever the government promises to provide financial or other kind of support to a committee leader, these state-supported structures quickly turn against the state becoming an enemy of the army and a cause of armed chaos.<sup>18</sup>

## **Muslim Brotherhood and the Yemeni Congregation for Reform**

One of the most important social groups in the Middle East, the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan), has an influential base in Yemen in many areas such as politics, health and education. The group’s first religious activities in Yemen dates back to the 1940s. Aden, where modern movements first enter the country, is also the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The political experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen dates back to 1973. Then President al-Iryani, who was also a religious scholar, was quite sympathetic of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, when al-Iryani failed in his presidency, he had to resign from office. In the war between the South and the North in 1979, the Muslim Brotherhood supported Ali Abdullah Saleh from the North. To prevent anti-religious attitudes in South Yemen from spreading to North Yemen, the Muslim Brotherhood began to call people to Jihad, which put North Yemen in a stronger position.<sup>19</sup> Relations with the Saleh government, which were good initially, reached a breaking point over time. When the Muslim Brotherhood became an important alternative to the government, Saleh removed many figures with known affiliations to this group from their roles in the army and bureaucracy.

The most important political formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen is the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, which was established in 1990. The Islamic party was led by Hussein al-Ahmar for a long time. The Yemeni Congregation for Reform became the third largest party in Yemen by sending 63 MPs to the parliament in the 1993 elections.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the party, there are also influential families who form alliances or collaborate with the Muslim Brotherhood on a tribal basis. The family of the al-Ahmar tribe had long been one of the main opponents of Saleh. The Yemeni Congregation for Reform did not just represent the Muslim

Brotherhood. On the contrary, it is the umbrella organization of the Salafists and other Islamic groups. Therefore, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform acted more flexibly than other Islamic parties in the Middle East, both as an ideology and as a program. Furthermore, the party was also engaged in social works, especially in the areas of humanitarian aid, women's rights and media.

Besides the party, Hashid is one of the largest tribal associations in Yemen. Following the death of Husayn al-Ahmar in 2007 who had acted as the head of the group, Hamid al-Ahmar, one of the richest men in Yemen who originates from the same family, became the chairman of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform.

The Muslim Brotherhood as one of the main social dynamics of the Arab Spring also supported the demonstrations in Yemen. At first people waited for Saleh to resign, but when this did not happen, they took to the streets. The Reform Party of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was prepared for possible elections after 2013, was positioned as the favorite party to win the public elections in Yemen. However, both the reluctance of regional and global powers and the Houthi coup prevented a smooth transition to democracy in the country.

The Muslim Brotherhood, which initially supported the military intervention initiated under Saudi Arabian leadership, later came into conflict with the coalition. The Muslim Brotherhood, which supports the Hadi government for a unified Yemen, was at loggerheads with the Arab Coalition after the 2017 Qatar crisis. Following the unrest, UAE-backed armed groups stormed buildings of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform and arrested many of its members.

At a meeting with the coalition countries following Saleh's assassination, officials of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform announced that they had no more connection with the Muslim Brotherhood in the first quarter of 2017. This attitude also caused controversy among the members of the Reform movement. Nobel

Prize winner Tawakkol Karman, who also has close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, also criticized the Yemeni Congregation for Reform's rapprochement with the Arab Coalition.

The Arab Spring has neither strengthened Islamic structures during the crisis in Yemen nor brought about a social transformation in the sense of pluralism. On the contrary, the divisions between the sects gradually increased and dissident voices from within the same groups were silenced.

### Salafists

Salafism appeared in the 1980s in Yemen thanks to the charismatic leader Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i (year of death 2001). Sheikh Muqbil played an important role in the spread of Salafism in Yemen in founding an institute in the city of Dammaj called Daru'l-Hadith. This way, Salafism became an important social power among traditional structures such as the Zaydis on the one hand, a strong Sufi identity on the other, and the Muslim Brotherhood on the political Islamic front. There has been a significant increase in Salafist followers, particularly on the borders of Saudi Arabia and in regions where Sunnis live. The financial and intellectual support of Saudi Arabia played a decisive role in spreading and promoting Salafism in Yemen.<sup>21</sup>

The Salafists in Yemen, who stayed away from politics until the Arab Spring and avoided direct involvement in any social or political movement, began to adopt different attitudes towards politics. While there were some who were not involved in politics in any way and were only interested in religious education, there were also groups that were actively involved in political processes in the country. Sheikh Muqbil's students did not take part in the demonstrations in 2011 and preferred to stay close to the current regime, describing the Arab Spring process as sedition and a Masonic movement. On the other hand, the more politicized Salafist groups that emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood took a stance against the regime.<sup>22</sup>

As the Houthis advanced towards the capital Sana, the Salafist leader Yahya al-Hajuri applied for state protection by writing a letter to the Yemeni government officials (not to Saleh). In response, the Houthis carried out a major operation in which more than 100 people died, laying siege on the Dammaj and Daru'l-Hadith institutes, the centers of the Salafists. After this incident, the Salafists, who received military support from the Arab Coalition, began to fight against the Houthis.

Muhammad b. Musa al-Amri, who is now the leader of the Salafists in Yemen, is also one of the aides of President Hadi. Al-Amri, member of the Yemen Council of Scholars<sup>23</sup>, is one of the founders of the Al-Rashad Union founded in 2012 with Abd al Wahhab al Humayqani. The Al-Rashad Union is currently the representative of the Salafists in the political domain.

### **General People's Congress Party**

The General People's Congress Party is the party of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who continuously ruled the country for 33 years until 2017. Although the party's main base was in the north, it took over power throughout the country after the unification in 1990 and became the leading party by winning 122 seats in parliament in the 1993 elections. It is the most popular and largest party in the country. Although criticized from time to time, the party is considered to be one of the rare political formations able to overcome the established norms and conventions of sectarianism and local identity. Thanks to Saleh's flexible approach towards alliances, representatives from various social groups were able to participate in the party. Over time, the party came under the authoritarian rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh and his party made alliances with various groups and tribes at different times. The General People's Congress Party is still one of the most important actors of the civil war.

### **The Yemeni Socialist Party**

The Yemeni Socialist Party is a party formed by the union of the parties and groups that declared

independence of South Yemen in 1967. This party governed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen from 1967 until the unification in 1990. The party that championed the socialist ideology stayed close to the Soviet Union and China in the period before the unification, but its power waned after 1990.

### **Ba'ath Party**

The Ba'ath Party has limited influence on the conservative Yemeni society because it represents the intellectual-socialist way of modernization. Despite having only a few thousand members, its intellectual background makes it an important party in terms of social opposition. Taking the Iraqi and Syrian Baathist ideology as an example, the party is one of the important representatives of Arab nationalism. The party, led by Qassem Salam, tried to make its presence felt on the political scene during the Arab Spring demonstrations, though to little avail.

### **Republican Party**

The Republican Party, founded on the ideals of a liberal and contemporary political structure, advocates the principle of secularism. The party chaired by Muhammad Ali Abu Luhum is limited in its impact because its policies mostly do not overlap with the social realities of Yemen.

### **Nasserist Parties**

Among the political structures established on the basis of the Arab nationalist ideals of former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Democratic Nasserist Party led by Abduh Muhammad al-Jundi and the Nasserist Unionist People's Organisation led by Abdul Ghani Thabet are the most remarkable. Although the parties founded in South Yemen have a certain ideological basis, their influence on current Yemeni politics is very weak.

### **Military Forces**

#### **Yemen Armed Forces (State Army)**

Yemen was unified in 1990, but after the unification the Yemeni army was never



fully institutionalized. Even today, there are conflicting reports about the size of the Yemeni army.

Due to the tribal ties and sectarian divisions in the country, the army suffers from a lack of loyalty to the ideal of a national army, from the top brass down to the lowest ranking soldier. In Yemen, where tribalism is the most dominant form of social organization, Ali Abdullah Saleh took important steps to institutionalize the army. In this context, Saleh, who appointed his most-trusted family members as army commanders, reorganized the security bureaucracy in the 2000s and brought his sons to the top of the secret services and security administrations. During this period, institutions such as the Republican Guard, the Central Security Forces and the National Security Bureau were established. While the army was indeed divided into three parts, the forces under the command of Ali Abdullah Saleh's son Ahmad al-Saleh were the best-equipped and trained troops, followed by armored units. Regular army units were largely neglected.<sup>24</sup>

There have always been powerful commanders in the Yemeni army, and these figures have always sought to increase their economic and social influence. In addition, some commanders have sought political power by establishing close relations with various social groups. In the last civil war, the generals of the state army were largely gravitated towards groups to which they felt closer. While commanding units loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh and his family still act in unison with their sons and family, part of the army follows President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi; while certain army commanders serve various groups and tribes, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, there are armed groups in Yemen supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Military personnel staying in Houthi-controlled areas act in concert with the Houthis and get involved in armed conflicts in their ranks.<sup>25</sup>

## Republican Guard

The Republican Guard is a special unit of the Yemeni Armed Forces. Although its foundation dates back to 1964, it was restructured in the 2000s to strengthen President Ali Abdullah Saleh's personal power and position. His son Ahmad al-Saleh commands these forces. The Republican Guard acts together with the anti-Houthi Arab Coalition.

## Yemeni National Resistance Forces

Tareq Saleh, Ali Abdullah Saleh's nephew who was killed by the Houthis in late 2017, founded the National Resistance Forces with some members of the Republican Guard. This group exercises control over vital goods such as oil and food in Yemen. The National Resistance Forces, which have many military weapons and vehicles at their disposal, are acting together with the Saudi-led coalition. The group played an important role in the fights in the city of Hudaydah and in the operations to take the airport and port of Hudaydah.

## Al-Hizam Al-Amni Forces

It is one of the primary armed forces of the Aden-based southern separatists. Using the separatist flag of South Yemen, the group acts according to the principles of Arab nationalism and socialism. It was founded in March 2016 after the Houthis started threatening the city of Aden. These forces, consisting of young people and possessing unregistered amount of ammunition, are subordinate to the separatist Southern Transition Council.

The biggest supporter of the al-Hizam al-Amni forces is the UAE. The group, whose basic military needs such as training and ammunition are provided by the UAE, is largely made up of former soldiers and local militias. Despite disparate views as to its size, the estimates speak of units consisting of tens of thousands of fighters serving under different commanders.

The al-Hizam al-Amni forces are against the former President Saleh, as well as the Houthis and current President Hadi. The group, whose primary goal is the independence of the South, controls some parts of Abyan, Dhale, Lahij and Shabwah, all the way to Bab-el-Mandeb apart from Aden.

## Hadrami Elite Forces

The Hadrami Elite Forces (*Kuvvatu Nuhbetu'l Hadramiyye/HSG*) is a force of local armed groups operating in the Hadhramaut region, the largest province in Yemen. According to sources, this armed group consists of local gunmen and acts on the basis of regionalism. External armed groups and individuals may therefore not join the group. The HSG is intended to combat the Houthis, as well as al-Qaeda and ISIS who are active in the region. The HSG, whose needs for logistics, military training and ammunition are met by the UAE, is actually under the UAE's control, although according to a UN report in 2017 it appears to be officially under the control of the legitimate government. Henceforth, the group is called a "state within the state". The HSG, which involved the local army forces, police, armed militia and some coast guards as its members, consists of a total of 6,000 armed fighters. The most crucial problem with the HSG is the issue of "secret prisons", whose existence denied by the UAE. According to information based on a report by the Human Rights Watch, there are secret prisons in the Hadhramaut region where opponents are held by the HSG forces.

## Ansarullah

Ansarullah is the armed wing of the Houthis. The most classic way of military organization for the Houthis is through people's committees. The Ansarullah forces were founded in 2004 by Badreddin al-Houthi and his son Hussein. After their death, the other son of Badreddin al-Houthi, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, took over the reins. The group has gained great momentum in the fight against the state with the support it received from Iran. In the first years of its foundation Ansarullah also received partial

military aid from the US and the State of Yemen to fight al-Qaeda.

Ansarullah, which has dominance over northern Yemen, consists of many tribal militias, armed groups and former members of the state army. These committees, fighting under different commanders, get their military equipment largely from military warehouses in places they dominate. Iran's military assistance and training has led to the further strengthening of the Ansarullah forces. Iran supplies weapons to the Houthis in various ways. At the same time, Iranian officers and various pro-Iranian militias fighting in the Middle East give military training to the members of Ansarullah.

It is very difficult to verify information about the number of Houthi fighters. As mentioned earlier, former soldiers of the state army, armed militias of allied tribes, Houthi People's Committees, some commanders of the Republican Guard and the Hussein Brigades are active in these forces. It is alleged that these armed fighters were trained in Lebanon and Iran in 2011 and 2012 and then transferred to camps in the northern province of Saada.<sup>26</sup> It is estimated that there are about 10,000 fighters in Saada, the center of the Houthis, with the total number of fighters, together with other regions, approaching 50,000-70,000.

Apart from the weapons that Ansarullah bought from outside, it has alleged arms production sites in Saada and the capital Sana, as well as various modern weaponry, including long-range missiles.

Under the current circumstances, the Houthis and their military components retain control of the capital Sana and several other cities besides Saada. The group that took control of Aden in 2015 lost its dominance here with the intervention of the Arab Coalition.

## Influential Figures

### Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi

Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who served as a long-time assistant to Ali Abdullah Saleh and later

dismissed from presidency in 2012 with the efforts of the GCC, was born in Abyan, Yemen's southern province. After his military training in the UK in 1966, Hadi served as Yemen's Minister of Defense. Despite being a southerner, he fought with Ali Abdullah Saleh during the South-North Civil War in 1994 and won his confidence. Hadi defended the idea of a United Yemen and persuaded the southern soldiers to lay down arms. Assigned in 1994, he was for a long time the vice president of Saleh as he was a Sunni, a Southerner and a Saleh loyalist.

Following the GCC Yemen-initiated agreement that led to Saleh's withdrawal, Hadi became the deputy president of Yemen. Later, Hadi, who was the only candidate in the 2012 elections, was elected the new president of Yemen. However, things did not go as planned and the remnants of the old regime, the southern separatists and the Houthis never fully accepted his authority. Hadi failed to reform the army in order to free it from the influence Saleh's sons and nephews. Afterwards, Hadi decided to disband the Republican Guard Corps, which was still loyal to Saleh, and he was able to do so by collaborating with army commanders who were adversaries of Saleh. By 2014, the Houthis abolished the parliament with a military coup. In the process, Hadi initially resigned and later, on the initiative of Saudi Arabia, continued to be the legitimate president of Yemen.

Hadi, who has international legitimacy, is currently the official president of Yemen. Backed by the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia, Hadi continues his struggle with the military personnel that are loyal to him and certain people's armed committees who are sympathetic to his cause. Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi is considered weak and ineffective, as he exerts only limited influence on social groups due to the existing tribal relations and the feudal social structure in Yemen.

### **Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar**

Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, born in 1940, had been President Ali Abdullah Saleh's greatest assistant

since the 1970s before becoming his greatest opponent. Described as the second strongest man in the army after the president, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar belongs to the Ahmar family, one of the most important and richest families in Yemen. The Ahmar family, together with the families of Ali Abdullah Saleh and Badreddin al-Houthi, is one of the most influential actors in the Yemeni political and military scene.

Mohsen al-Ahmar, director of the Hashid Tribal Confederation, protected the Islamists in the army and cooperated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Ahmar's appointment of Ahmad, son of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, as heir played an important role in his support of Islamic parties and other figures in the army.

Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar acted as the Chief of General Staff and the commander of several army units in Yemen. President Saleh, who could not break Ahmar's power, set up the Republican Guard under the command of his son Ahmad. Mohsen al-Ahmar also led the operations against the Houthis in the 2000s. In the war between al-Ahmar, Commander of the 1st Armored Division and the Northwest Region, and the Houthis, President Saleh is said to have handed over weapons to both the Houthis and the army. It is argued that his main reason for doing so was to weaken the army and al-Ahmar in the war with the Houthis and to strengthen the units under his son's command.

With the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011, al-Ahmar was one of the first influential commanders to oppose Saleh. With him, one third of the army made a move to defend the demonstrators. Hadi, who became president after Saleh, also tried to weaken al-Ahmar's power. To do so, he abolished the army unit under his command and made Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar an advisor to the president. Despite Hadi's plans, al-Ahmar retained his influence on the armed forces in Yemen. Al-Ahmar also supported the operations of the Arab Coalition, led by Saudi Arabia.

## **Abdul-Malik al-Houthi**

Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, the youngest of eight sons of Badreddin al-Houthi, was born in 1979 in the Saada region in northern Yemen. His father, Badreddin, leader of the Houthis, led the anti-state revolts in the north. After his father and elder brother Hussein were killed, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi stood at the forefront as the leader of the Houthis since 2004 and led numerous uprisings against the government until 2007.

The training Abdul-Malik al-Houthi received in Iran and Lebanon played a role in his rising through the ranks to be hailed as a leader. It is assumed that it is owing to such training that he devised concepts of armed revolution inspired by the Iranians.

Abdul-Malik is not only the political, but also the spiritual and military leader of the Houthis. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi is trying to take over the leadership of all Zaydis by inciting opposition against the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Yet, so far, he does not appear to have achieved his ends.

Abdul-Malik al-Houthi preferred not to take to the streets in the first days of the Arab Spring adopting a wait-and-see policy. The Houthis also got their share of the revolution when it became certain that President Saleh would soon leave his post. Later the Houthis, who set their sights on the central government, conquered the capital Sana with a military coup.

Although Abdul-Malik al-Houthi has been repeatedly targeted in military operations organized by the Arab Coalition, he continues to appeal to his base via TV broadcasts as the leader of the Houthis. It is not known exactly where al-Houthi lives.

## **Aidarus al-Zubaidi**

Aidarus al-Zubaidi was born in the Zubaid district of Dhale province in the south of Yemen. Having received training at the military air force academy, al-Zubaidi served as an air force officer. He was one of the first commanders to join the ranks of the southern separatists after

the outbreak of civil war in Yemen in 1994. Later, al-Zubaidi, who had been forgiven by then President Ali Abdullah Saleh, entered politics by founding a new party. Dhale, the birthplace of al-Zubaidi became the center of the Southern Movement. This movement was founded in 2007 as one of the most important and remarkable leaders of the Southern groups.

One of the main objectives of al-Zubaidi was to make south Yemen as an independent state. Al-Zubaidi declared in the period following the Arab Spring, in June 2011, that he would pick up arms again for the liberation of the occupied southern regions. Al-Zubaidi has been President of the Southern Transitional Council since May 2017 representing all southern regions that were established by southern separatists but rejected by the Hadi government.

## **Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr**

Born in 1952 in Hadhramaut province, one of the southern regions of Yemen, Ahmed b. Daghr began his political career in the South Yemeni Socialist Party. After the unification of Yemen in 1990, Daghr remained supportive of the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh, although like Hadi he was a Southerner. Known as someone close to President Hadi, Daghr worked with him for a long time. Daghr and Hadi have much in common both ideologically and in terms of their vision for the future of Yemen.

Ahmed b. Daghr supported the military operation led by the Arab Coalition formed in 2015 under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and was elected Prime Minister of Yemen on April 4, 2016. The influence of bin Daghr on Yemeni politics and social groups is generally regarded as limited. Known as a historian, Daghr is the author of many books on the history of Yemen. Among them are *Hadhramaut and British Imperialism and Yemen under the Rule of Imam Ahmed*.<sup>27</sup>

## **Ahmed Ali Saleh**

He is the oldest son of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Like his father, he belongs to the Sanhan tribe. Ahmed Ali Saleh, who was born in

the capital Sana in 1972, received a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Management from the University of Washington and then a Master's degree in Military Science in Jordan. In 2006, at a late period, he graduated from the military academy.

Ahmed Saleh began to rise through the ranks in the army and bureaucracy in the 1990s when his father was the president. His rapid appointment by his father, Ali Abdullah Saleh, even led to a reaction from his allies. Ali Abdullah Saleh, who tried to get his family's members into important positions within the security bureaucracy, faced roadblocks from strong figures around him.

Ahmed Saleh, who became a member of parliament in 1997, commanded the Yemeni Special Forces between 1999 and 2002. To make the security bureaucracy more dependent on himself, Ali Abdullah Saleh founded the Republican Guard in 2004 and put his son Ahmed Saleh in command.

Saleh controlled certain portions of Yemen's divided army and remained a strong figure in Yemeni politics even after his father's dismissal. Thanks to his tribal affiliations and political ties that he had built up over many years, colonels loyal to him continued to follow his orders. Ahmed Saleh was appointed ambassador to the UAE by the Hadi government after his father's dismissal.

After the Houthi coup in 2014, the military forces loyal to Ahmed Saleh sided with the Houthis. Towards the end of 2017, the Saleh family sided with the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia, called for revenge after the murder of Ali Abdullah Saleh by the Houthis. Ahmed Ali Saleh is still fighting with the Arab Coalition against the Houthis and Iran.

## **Foreign Powers and their Activities in Yemen**

In the current political and economic crisis in Yemen, external actors were at least as effective as and sometimes more so than domestic actors. While both global and regional powers with

different motivations and objectives are involved in the conflict in Yemen, it is also surprising that so many weapons are easily available in a relatively poor country. While Yemen's strategic coastal regions represent an important source of motivation for the forces involved in the conflict, it is clear that the economic and security components in the inner regions also have a critical function that feeds the conflicts.

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia, Yemen's northern neighbor, is foremost among countries that have taken a close interest in Yemen on many issues since its post-Ottoman political restructuring process. Since the 1930s, border disagreements with Yemen in the Asir region and the question of ownership of oil resources have led to long-term conflicts between the two countries. The Riyadh government, which sided with the US during the Cold War, supported North Yemen against the socialist administration in the south of the country that was divided into two parts. Saudi Arabia supported the rebels in the south during the unification process, which began in 1991 with the weakening of socialist Yemen. After 1994, however, the unification became inevitable and the government agreed to the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Spurred by the positive environment, Ali Abdullah Saleh's government consented to the border agreement in favor of Saudi Arabia with the Taif Agreement in 2000. Despite the ups and downs between the two countries, Saudi Arabia, where hundreds of thousands of Yemenis work, has a serious economic advantage over Yemen.

After the demonstrations that began during Yemen's Arab Spring, Saudi-led GCC convinced Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand over his office to his deputy Hadi. However, Saleh sided with the Houthis, and the Houthis seized the capital Sana causing a Saudi military intervention in Yemen. The government of Riyadh, which halted the Houthis' progress towards the north by declaring them a terrorist organization, defends its military operations, which have lasted for more than three years. The reasons behind their operations

was to eliminate the security vulnerabilities caused by the Houthis in the region, minimize Iran's influence and prepare the environment for a legitimate government authority.

On the other hand, there are two other important issues in the context of Yemen that also concern the future of Saudi Arabia. First is the source of Saudi Arabian oil is Yemen, more precisely the province of Hadhramaut, and that Saudi Arabia's oil wealth will suffer if the Yemeni state decides to drill the oil. Second is the possibility of an oil pipeline establishment from Yemen to the south, where Saudi Arabian oil production is concentrated. To this end, Saudi Arabia carries out cultural activities and construction work, particularly in the eastern regions of Yemen. However, it is stated that Oman, which is against these projects by Saudi Arabia, supports the tribes on its borders.

It would not be wrong to argue Saudi Arabia's policy is geared towards self-aggrandizement rather than fostering a mutually supportive relationship that could also benefit Yemen. For today, Saudi Arabia supports both President Hadi and the many armed groups in Yemen. Many Saudi Arabian aid organizations that support the country with humanitarian aid operate in Yemen.

As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, in the long run it will most probably face a range of issues originating from Yemen. Foreign fighters fighting for ISIS in Yemen, especially armed Houthis trained by Iran, pose a serious security threat for Saudi Arabia. Long-range missiles fired by the Houthis and sabotages by drones on oil pipelines and refineries are among the security risks for Saudi Arabia. Given the current environment, it can be said that Saudi Arabia will continue to play an important role in Yemen in the coming period.

## Iran

Along with Saudi Arabia, Iran is one of the most important actors in the Yemeni issue. Since the 1980s, Iranian officials have established relations with left-wing revolutionary groups, particularly

the Houthi community, and important opinion leaders in Yemen. In today's war Iran is the biggest supporter of the Houthis. With regard to Iranian foreign policy, the Houthi fighters play a similar role to comparable armed groups in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria waging a proxy war for Iranian foreign policy. When the Houthis, who took over the capital Sana in 2015, resumed flights from Sana to Tehran after 25 years, the opportunity arose for Iran to intervene directly in Yemen. Today, 28 flights per week take place over this route being of strategic importance for the Tehran administration. Iran, which is the only door to the outside world for the Houthis, has created an appropriate environment for the implementation of its ideological and cultural policies in the northern regions of Yemen. Iran has not only supported the Houthis militarily and logistically, but also led to a social, sectarian and sociological transformation of the Houthis and the Zaydis in general. This brings with it the possibility of a change to the demographic structure of the Gulf in the long term. It seems impossible for Iran, which is fighting against the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United States, to give up its trump cards in Yemen. For this reason it will do its best to keep this front strong and united at all costs. Iran will continue to be an important player in the political negotiations in this country, even if the clashes in Yemen are halted in the future.

## United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates, which over the past five years has tried to take bolder initiatives on regional issues, generally acts in concert with Saudi Arabia on many issues. Although it cooperates with Saudi Arabia on policy matters concerning Yemen, it is economic rather than security concerns that shape the UAE's policies in Yemen, in contradistinction to Saudi Arabia. It is no secret that the UAE was not very happy with the calls for freedom and democratization in Yemen during the Arab Spring. In this context, the United Arab Emirates tried to stem the demands for democracy while making efforts to

stop new occupations by the Houthis in order to maintain the status quo.

The UAE, which played a primary role with Saudi Arabia during the military operations that began in 2015, seeks to have its own military presence on the trade routes in the Gulf of Aden. The UAE also stands out for its operations against the Yemeni al-Qaeda and ISIS cells. The UAE, which supported and armed local armed groups for this purpose, carried out operations against al-Qaeda in many cities. This situation is also an international source of legitimacy for the UAE's presence in Yemen.

There are undoubtedly commercial and geopolitical reasons behind UAE's interest in Yemen and its expansion in the Gulf of Aden. The UAE cities Dubai and Abu Dhabi are transfer centers for international trade and the financial world. If Yemen becomes more stable, the ports here could possibly replace those in the UAE. These new scenarios also appear to be closely linked to China's New Silk Road project that spans many Arab countries. If the Gulf of Aden becomes a transit center alongside a commercial transit route, it will destroy the allure of the United Arab Emirates. Within this framework, the UAE is currently seeking to take over Aden, Duba, Balhaf, Meha Port and Hudaydah Port, particularly the strategic island of Socotra and the island of Mayyun at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden.

It should be noted that the UAE's main purpose of its energy and security investments in the region is to expand its scope of activities through the establishment of military facilities in the coastal areas concerned, and goes beyond its so-called counter-terrorism efforts.

Acting together with the Arab Coalition, the southern separatists, armed groups in Hadhramaut province and, sometimes, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform against the Houthis, the UAE also cooperates with security companies such as *Blackwater* as well as various local militias and their own military units in

Yemen. Although the UAE is part of the anti-Houthi Arab Coalition, it has often acted alone and unilaterally taken over many strategic points and ports in Yemen.

## USA

The US policy for Yemen was designed in coordination with Saudi Arabia. This policy, which was previously at the forefront of the fight against al-Qaeda, has been conducted over the last 15 years as a war against the Houthis to prevent Iranian influence from spreading. Although the basic motives of the US are cited as "security" and "counterterrorism", it is obvious that the ultimate goal is geopolitical. Yemen's location, particularly its proximity to international maritime transport routes, provides a strategic sanctuary point for the US, which wants to move freely in international waters. For this reason, Yemeni ports are very important for US warships. In recent years, Iran's advantage over the security of these ports, and in particular the passage of ships, has disturbed the government of Washington. Yemen's importance for the US is mainly related to the geopolitical importance of the Bab-el-Mandeb and the control of the trade routes. Another factor that has increased US interest in the region is the Chinese New Silk Road project. It is possible to describe China and the US as the global actors of the crisis in Yemen, since the project in question represents a challenge to the absolute commercial hegemony of the US in the world. Moreover, the US, being a close ally of Saudi Arabia, is spared the trouble of having large land forces in Yemen. The US, which has been supporting Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen since 2015, has provided the Arab Coalition with logistical and intelligence support. With Trump, US support for the Arab Coalition has increased even more. If one considers China's New Silk Road project, it becomes clear why the US wishes to keep Yemen to itself.

It is also clear that the war in Yemen has very profitable consequences for the US arms industry, which sold billions of dollars worth of

weapons and ammunition for the war in Yemen through Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates alone.

### **United Kingdom**

The UK has been supporting the GCC and the UN initiatives in Yemen since 2011 and maintains a policy in line with the US stance. This unity of action became clearer when a commission consisting of the UK, the US, Saudi Arabia and the UAE was founded. The main reason why the UK became more visible in the Yemeni crisis is the weapons it sold to Saudi Arabia. The UK supports the Arab Coalition, formed under the leadership of Saudi Arabia in 2015, selling billions of dollars worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia, including missiles and fighter jets. In addition, the country sent 166 military staff to train the Saudi army, to demonstrate its support for Saudi Arabia and provide assurance. Arms sales profit is an important source of motivation for both the UK and the US.

### **Russia**

Unlike in other problem areas in the Middle East, Russia does not appear to be very active in Yemen. Russia, which is generally calling for a political solution and diplomacy, has not fully supported either the Houthis' coup or the Arab Coalition's military intervention led by Saudi Arabia. Russia prefers to continue its cooperation and communication with both the Houthis and the opposition groups. Russia, which has not closed down its embassy in Sana, accepts delegations from the Houthis while continuing to recognize the authority of President Hadi who is fighting against them. In contrast to the Syrian question, the Moscow government is not on the same page with Iran with regard to Yemen.

### **European Union**

The EU, which is trying to remain neutral on the Yemen question, has repeatedly criticized the military operation led by Saudi Arabia. Germany, which has asserted itself in the EU, has called on the parties to the conflict to comply with international law, in particular by

drawing attention to violations of rights, and even stopped the arms trade with Saudi Arabia. The EU, which appears to be in favor of political negotiations and a diplomatic solution, supports the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths. The EU has repeatedly called for an urgent ceasefire to prevent the current humanitarian situation in the country from deteriorating even further.

### **Sudan**

Sudan is a key player in the Yemeni crisis, though not of primary ones. Sudan, one of the most effective land powers of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition, is noted for its military presence in the region. The fighting of thousands of Sudanese soldiers in Yemen has serious consequences for both the international and the Sudanese public opinion. Despite its good relations with Iran in the past, the government of Khartoum started to support President Hadi by joining the Arab Coalition formed against Iran-backed Houthis in 2015.

### **Oman**

Oman is the only Gulf country that has not participated in the Arab Coalition's military operations. Oman's position in the Yemeni crisis is critical because it has good relations with Iran. From the outset, the Omani government has tried to act as a mediator between the parties, welcoming both Houthi and Saleh and trying to find a political solution to the disputes. Oman also provides critical support to the Houthis by not closing the airspace to aircraft departing from Sana while issuing transit visas to the Yemeni people on the other hand; acting as an important gateway to third countries. The lukewarm position of Oman is especially frowned upon by Saudi Arabia. Although the bombing of its embassy in Sana in 2015 caused a serious crisis, Oman continued to maintain good relations with Iran. Oman also has good and close relations with Yemeni tribes near its borders. Oman's priority in the Yemeni crisis is the halting of the threat posed by al-Qaeda.





## Turkey

Turkey, which has social and historical ties with Yemen, has supported the demands for freedom in Yemen, which began with the Arab Spring. But with the escalation of the crisis in Yemen, Turkey supported efforts for a solution initiated by the GCC. Recognizing the legitimacy of the Hadi government, Turkey opposed the coup staged by the Houthis in 2014. Turkey, not explicitly supporting the military operations of the Arab Coalition, is particularly focused on the growing humanitarian crisis in the country. Turkey donated two sets of 50-bed field hospitals to Yemen, one in Aden and another in Taiz. Politically, Turkey sides with the legitimate government in Yemen, but is careful not to be a party to the conflict. On the other hand, in the last quarter of 2018, a major campaign led by NGOs in Turkey was launched to draw attention to the humanitarian situation in Yemen. Thanks to the campaign, which received considerable support from the media and the public, more awareness was raised about the situation in Yemen and food, health and cleaning supplies were brought to the people who experienced great destruction and devastation.

## The Humanitarian Situation in Yemen

Following eight years of crisis in Yemen, the military operations that have been ongoing for the last four years under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the intervention of Iran have led to a serious humanitarian crisis in Yemen, leading to a grave devastation in every way. In Yemen, where about 22 million people are dependent on humanitarian aid - a large sum considering that the total population is 29 million - 75% of the people cannot even meet their basic needs such as food, health and cleaning. More than half of those in need, equating to 11.3 million people, are children. 16 million people in Yemen do not have access to clean water and sanitation.<sup>28</sup>

There is concern that the growing poverty and hunger in the country will turn into a

major humanitarian disaster in the near future. According to the United Nations, 2,200 people have now died of cholera in Yemen, and the number of those affected is said to be approaching half a million.

It is estimated that since 2014, when the crisis turned into a civil war, 14,718 people have died in Yemen as a result of armed conflicts. There are also reports that the number of people injured exceeded 88,000 while another 70,000 went missing. In the conflicts during the crisis, public buildings, infrastructure facilities, schools and health care buildings; in short, all strategic buildings were damaged.

With the health system mostly broken, 16.4 million people currently have no access to adequate health care. More than half of the health facilities are in a derelict state due to the fighting. Only 45% of health facilities provide services in the country, where 274 health facilities were damaged during the conflicts. Moreover, 2 million children in Yemen have no access to education due to the dilapidation of no less than 1,600 schools.

Another one of the main problems associated with the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is the difficulty for aid agencies to reach the people in need due to the ongoing fighting. Since the country is divided into different dominions held by diverse warring factions, these groups must first be persuaded to allow access to needy civilians.

In addition to the houses, 917 mosques, 147 university buildings, 271 tourist facilities, 112 sports facilities, 36 media buildings and 2,960 agricultural areas were damaged in the clashes. An estimated 4.5 million people in the country need urgent shelter.

Due to the ongoing war, about 3.4 million Yemenis were displaced from their homes and became refugees. In keeping with the increase of refugee numbers in Yemen, human trafficking and similar other problems have also arisen. The 97,000 refugees there are not only from Yemen,

but also from other countries, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia. These people are almost trapped here. Since Yemen is a passage to rich Gulf countries, there are many African refugees in the country.<sup>29</sup>

In Yemen, the primary human rights violation committed is related to child soldiers. It is reported that many children are deployed to the front line, especially in the ranks of the Houthi fighters. 43% of children younger than 14 are sent to the frontlines. It is reported that the unemployment rate among young people in the country is between 60% and 80%. In Yemen, it is known that children between the ages of 5 and 17 are employed in various daily occupations and that children with poor educational opportunities are not able to receive a good, high-quality education. Such data is actually an insight into the long-term position of Yemen. Raising a generation forced to fight and deprived of even rudimentary education presents a bleak sight for the future of Yemen.

It is not difficult to predict that the current situation in Yemen will seriously affect the economic, social and demographic structure of the country in the coming period.

## Conclusion

Yemen suffered from the political and social traumas experienced by all Middle Eastern societies after the Ottoman Empire as well as having been plagued by many civil wars in the last century. Yemen is surrounded by oil-rich countries yet it is one of the poorest Islamic countries. It is safe to say that Yemen has never had peace since its foundation.

The conflicting situation and humanitarian crisis in Yemen is actually the result and not the source of the problems in the country. Decades of instability can largely be linked to the lack of a strong central government. This is due to reasons such as the North-South conflict dating back to the years when the country was founded, the social network of rival tribes, sectarian disputes, historical prejudices, daily political conflicts, ignorance and fanaticism.

Yemen's strategic position, along with the risk of inner instability, is another important factor that feeds tensions in the country. In Yemen, which lies on international trade routes, the intervention of regional and international powers in the country's politics through various actors prevents internal peace. Many countries in particular Iran, Saudi Arabia, the US, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, have long been the primary instigators of the crisis in Yemen.

The Arab Spring has led to serious social disruption through the reigniting of historical conflicts and claims in Yemen. With the involvement of regional and international actors, the country was dragged into a civil war leading to the political chaos and humanitarian crisis that is felt until today.

Besides the mental division among its peoples, Yemen also faces the threat of territorial division. With no central authority in place, it is very likely things may go back to how they used to be prior to 1990. While the idea of unity loses popularity with both the Northern and Southern groups, dissident voices are becoming more amplified. Emergence of cantons or small states divided along sectarian or racial line will drive the country further into the ground.

In order to overcome its current political and social crisis, it is essential that the Yemeni people take the initiative to determine their own future and reach a social consensus to countermand the hegemony of international and regional powers. For Yemen's political decision-makers, it is important to establish a structure that encompasses all ethnicities and sects in order to transform the country's potential into prosperity rather than conflict. To do that, drafting of an inclusive constitution should be the first priority. However, as long as the fighting continues, no de-escalation will occur, and so a peace process that brings the warring sides to the table must be implemented quickly.

On the initiative of a third Islamic country that does not play a direct role in the conflicts in Yemen, the initiation of peace negotiations



under the umbrella of the OIC or through an independent mediator will be the first step towards achieving unity in the country. Thanks to its human potential and strategic location, Yemen can quickly repair the destruction it has suffered. However, a facilitating mechanism should be put in place for the initiation of dialogue and negotiations between the Yemeni

people. In short, the war can only be ended and social peace reinstated through dialogue. In the long run, it will be crucial for the country to prioritize development projects particularly in areas such as agriculture, energy and maritime in order to achieve economic and social recovery and stability.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://ordaf.org/ortadogunun-petrol-transit-gecis-noktalar/>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.omanobserver.om/xi-says-arab-countries-key-partners-in-belt-road-initiative/>
- <sup>3</sup> <http://ordaf.org/kurulus-asamasindan-cikamayan-yemende-savas/>
- <sup>4</sup> Najwa Adra, "Tribal Mediation in Yemen and Its Implications to Development", Austrian Academy of Sciences, *AAS Working Papers in Social Anthropology*, Vol. 19, Wien, 2011.
- <sup>5</sup> Nadwa al-Dawsari, "Foe Not Friend Yemeni Tribes and Al-Qaida in Arabian Peninsula", POMED, February, 2018, [https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Dawsari\\_FINAL\\_180201.pdf](https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Dawsari_FINAL_180201.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> al-Dawsari, "Foe Not Friend Yemeni...", p. 15.
- <sup>7</sup> al-Dawsari, "Foe Not Friend Yemeni..."
- <sup>8</sup> [http://sclr.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/attachments/article/523/Tribes%20and%20Tribalism%20in%20Yemen%20-%20workshop%20report\\_FCO%20and%20Stabilisation%20Unit\\_2012.pdf](http://sclr.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/attachments/article/523/Tribes%20and%20Tribalism%20in%20Yemen%20-%20workshop%20report_FCO%20and%20Stabilisation%20Unit_2012.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YyM-Y8HmVk>
- <sup>10</sup> [http://insamer.com/tr/yemende-olum-kalim-savasi-hudeyde-limani-mucadelesi-\\_1564.html](http://insamer.com/tr/yemende-olum-kalim-savasi-hudeyde-limani-mucadelesi-_1564.html)
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2018/6/20/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%85%D8%B-4%D9%84%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1>
- <sup>12</sup> <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/60627>
- <sup>13</sup> website of the Southern Transitional Council: <http://stcaden.com/>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.arabstoday.net/37/070244-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B4%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%AC-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9>
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/yemende-iran-suud-savasi>
- <sup>16</sup> <http://fikercenter.com/political-analysis/the-houthis-the-military-power-and-sources-of-support>
- <sup>17</sup> <http://ordaf.org/kurulus-asamasindan-cikamayan-yemende-savas/>
- <sup>18</sup> <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/59560>
- <sup>19</sup> [http://insamer.com/tr/yemende-mezhebi-degil-siyasi-bir-savas-var\\_508.html](http://insamer.com/tr/yemende-mezhebi-degil-siyasi-bir-savas-var_508.html)
- <sup>20</sup> [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemeni\\_congragation\\_reform.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemeni_congragation_reform.pdf)
- <sup>21</sup> Laurent Bonnefoy, "Selefism in Yemen", *Transnationalism and Religious Identity*, C. Hurst & Co, UK, 2011.
- <sup>22</sup> Bonnefoy, "Selefism in Yemen".
- <sup>23</sup> Charles Schmitz, Robert D. Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*, Rowman Littlfield, London.
- <sup>24</sup> [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief\\_9\\_Yemen.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_9_Yemen.pdf)
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.26sepnews.net/>
- <sup>26</sup> <http://fikercenter.com/political-analysis/the-houthis-the-military-power-and-sources-of-support>
- <sup>27</sup> Schmitz, Burrowes, 2018, p. 86.
- <sup>28</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/640802-after-1000-days-conflict-yemen-sliding-deepening-catastrophe-un-agencies-warn>
- <sup>29</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/yemen\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_hno\\_2018\\_20171204\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/yemen_humanitarian_needs_overview_hno_2018_20171204_0.pdf)