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**Saudi-Yemen Border Conflict**

***Introduction***

For over three years, Yemen has been crippled by a seemingly intractable civil war that commenced with the intent to restore political, economic, and social stability to the Member State.<sup>1</sup> However, the civil war has instead killed more than 57,000 people and has brought millions to the brink of starvation.<sup>2</sup> The conflict has its roots in the Arab Spring of 2011, when anti-government protests throughout the Middle East led to rebellions in attempt to overthrow their respective governments in response to years of oppressive regimes.<sup>3</sup> Many civilians hoped that this revolution would bring about political reform and social justice, but it brought an influx of violence, war, and a low standard of living<sup>4</sup> In Yemen, these protests forced long-time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over his power to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, thus creating two factions within the State: those supporting the new Hadi government, and the Houthi militia led by loyalists of ex-president Saleh.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, Hadi faced great difficulty devoting sufficient attention to the many facets of the pressing issues in the State including militant attacks, food insecurity, corruption, and divisions within the military, leaving Yemen in a state of complete vulnerability.<sup>6</sup> The international community has taken notice of the vast devastations and impending security issues concerning the situation in Yemen and thus, international and humanitarian organizations have realized the necessity of bringing international attention to the issue and express the need to provide alleviation to the people and to the region. Notwithstanding the foregoing, many actors have taken action to alleviate internal issues within Yemen, but have adversely perpetuated divides within the region and have subsequently added more fuel to the conflict.

***Background***

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia and eight additional Sunni-Arab States, backed by the Kingdom of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, with the intent to assist in the restoration of the Hadi government after the Arab Spring, began a military intervention consisting of a series of air strikes against the Houthi militia.<sup>7</sup> Further complicating matters, many Member States have an intrinsically large stake in this fight as Yemen is home to Sunni

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<sup>1</sup> "Yemen conflict explained in 400 words," BBC News, June 13, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44466574>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> "Yemen conflict explained in 400 words," BBC News, June 13, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44466574>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> "Arab Spring." History.com. January 10, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring>. (accessed February 05, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> "The Arab Spring': Five Years On," Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/01/arab-spring-five-years-on/>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Bayoumy, Yara. "Yemen President Quits, Throwing Country Deeper into Chaos." Reuters. January 22, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-houthis/yemen-president-quits-throwing-country-deeper-into-chaos-idUSKBN0KV0HT20150122>, (accessed February 05, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> "Missiles and Food: Yemen's Man-Made Food Security Crisis." December 1, 2017. Accessed February 4, 2019. [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/bn-missiles-food-security-yemen-041217-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bn-missiles-food-security-yemen-041217-en.pdf). (accessed February 05, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> "Yemen conflict explained in 400 words," BBC News, June 13, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44466574>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

Muslim extremist group, Al-Qaeda. Many Member States are also fearful of Shia expansionism and the rise of Iranian power in the Middle East.<sup>8</sup>

According to the report published by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) on August 28, 2018, officials of both the Government of Yemen and in the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have committed acts that amount to international war crimes.<sup>9</sup> The military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen has killed thousands of civilians by airstrikes, torture of detainees, rape of civilians, and recruitment of child soldiers as young as eight-years-old.<sup>10</sup> The report singled out Saudi and Emirati airstrikes for causing the most civilian casualties, identifying that they had struck residential areas, markets, funerals, weddings, jails, boats, and health care facilities, and that the coalition has shown little evidence of attempting to minimize civilian casualties.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Humanitarian Crisis***

This civil war-turned regional crisis has created a humanitarian dilemma in Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition has been scrutinized by the international community for killing civilians and destroying critical infrastructure with their air strikes.<sup>12</sup> Based upon an Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report dated January 11, 2019, the conflict has left 22.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and 2 million people internally displaced.<sup>13</sup> According to a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report published on December 7, 2018, a Food Security Analysis revealed that, without humanitarian food assistance, over 20 million people in Yemen or two-thirds of the population will face severe food insecurity.<sup>14</sup>

Yemen relies heavily on imports for its food supplies and grows only about five percent of the wheat its people consume, due to the scarcity of fresh water for crops.<sup>15</sup> The Saudi-led coalition has disrupted the imports of food and other humanitarian needs by imposing a naval blockade in the Houthi-controlled north, on ports which normally

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- <sup>8</sup> Jethro Mullen, "Why is Saudi Arabia bombing Yemen?," CNN World, March 26, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/03/26/middleeast/yemen-saudi-arabia-offensive-why-now/index.html>, (accessed January 14, 2019).
- <sup>9</sup> "Yemen: United Nations Experts point to possible war crimes by parties to the conflict," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, August 28, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23479&LangID=E>, (accessed January 14, 2019).
- <sup>10</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce, "War Crimes Report on Yemen Accuses Saudi Arabia and U.A.E.," New York Times, August 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/28/world/middleeast/un-yemen-war-crimes.html>, (accessed January 14, 2019).
- <sup>11</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce, "War Crimes Report on Yemen Accuses Saudi Arabia and U.A.E.," New York Times, August 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/28/world/middleeast/un-yemen-war-crimes.html>, (accessed January 14, 2019).
- <sup>12</sup> McKernan, Bethan, "Saudi-led Coalition Air Strikes 'hit Yemen School'." The Independent. January 22, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-coalition-air-strikes-hit-yemen-school-civilian-deaths-sana-drones-donald-trump-a7540316.html>. (Accessed February 05, 2019).
- <sup>13</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Operational Update: Yemen*, January 11, 2019, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Yemen%20Operational%20Update%20-%2011JAN19.pdf>, (accessed January 14, 2019).
- <sup>14</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Yemen Humanitarian Update*, December 13, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-update-covering-1-13-december-2018-issue-34>, (accessed January 14, 2019).
- <sup>15</sup> Glen Carey and Sarah Algethami, "How the Saudis Turned the Yemen War into a Humanitarian Crisis," The Washington Post, December 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-saudis-turned-the-yemen-war-into-a-humanitarian-crisis/2018/12/14/9a8b6fce-ffb6-11e8-a17e-162b712e8fc2\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.0378a5e0eb6e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-saudis-turned-the-yemen-war-into-a-humanitarian-crisis/2018/12/14/9a8b6fce-ffb6-11e8-a17e-162b712e8fc2_story.html?utm_term=.0378a5e0eb6e). (accessed January 14, 2019).

handle about 80 percent of imports.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the coalition has deliberately caused destruction to the already limited agricultural sector in Yemen.<sup>17</sup>

In late July of 2018, Saudi-led airstrikes damaged a sanitation facility and water station that supplied clean water to Hodeidah, a port city held by Houthi forces, thus completely cutting off access to clean water and proper sanitation, leading to increased susceptibility to disease outbreak and malnourishment.<sup>18</sup> In 2011 at the start of the Arab Spring, Yemen imported 5.23 million USD worth of water. In its latest report in 2016, the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) analyzes that Yemen typically imports 194 million USD worth of water, an exponentially increased amount.<sup>19</sup> Due to this and the disruption of the importation of clean water, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that Yemen's cholera outbreak has been accelerating, with roughly 10,000 suspected cases reported per week.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most susceptible to this disease are children, some 1.8 million of whom are malnourished.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Migration Crisis***

While the airstrikes account for many civilian casualties, these deaths represent only a fraction of the impact that the airstrikes have on Yemen overall.<sup>22</sup> Millions of Yemeni people have been left to suffer from the damage and destruction these attacks cause, which has led to the inaccessibility to clean water, food, shelter, and health care.<sup>23</sup> The conflict within the region has restricted humanitarian organizations from providing life-saving medicine and clean water to those suffering from preventable war-related conditions.<sup>24</sup> Because of these conditions, attempts to flee the region have dramatically increased. While many Yemeni people are seeking refuge internally or externally, the State has become a transit hub for thousands of migrants fleeing the deteriorating economic, political, and security situations in their place of origin throughout the region.<sup>25</sup> Taking advantage of Yemen's weakened governance, transnational smuggling and human trafficking networks are able to exploit and profit off of migrants seeking refuge as they travel from the Horn of Africa through Yemen to the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>26</sup> In 2017, Yemen

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<sup>16</sup> Glen Carey and Sarah Algethami, "How the Saudis Turned the Yemen War into a Humanitarian Crisis," The Washington Post, December 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-saudis-turned-the-yemen-war-into-a-humanitarian-crisis/2018/12/14/9a8b6fce-ffb6-11e8-a17e-162b712e8fc2\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.0378a5e0eb6e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-saudis-turned-the-yemen-war-into-a-humanitarian-crisis/2018/12/14/9a8b6fce-ffb6-11e8-a17e-162b712e8fc2_story.html?utm_term=.0378a5e0eb6e), (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Craig, Iona. "Bombed into Famine: How Saudi Air Campaign Targets Yemen's Food Supplies." The Guardian. December 12, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/12/bombed-into-famine-how-saudi-air-campaign-targets-yemens-food-supplies>. (accessed February 05, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> "Yemen cholera outbreak accelerates to 10,000? Cases per week: WHO," Reuters, October 2, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-cholera/yemen-cholera-outbreak-accelerates-to-10000-cases-per-week-who-idUSKCN1MC23J>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Simoes, Alexander. "Import Origins of Water to Yemen (2016)." OEC - Brazil (BRA) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners. [https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree\\_map/hs92/import/yem/show/2201/2016/](https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/import/yem/show/2201/2016/). (accessed February 05, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> "Yemen cholera outbreak accelerates to 10,000? Cases per week: WHO," Reuters, October 2, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-cholera/yemen-cholera-outbreak-accelerates-to-10000-cases-per-week-who-idUSKCN1MC23J>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> "Yemen cholera outbreak accelerates to 10,000? Cases per week: WHO," Reuters, October 2, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-cholera/yemen-cholera-outbreak-accelerates-to-10000-cases-per-week-who-idUSKCN1MC23J>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> "Why is Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis?," International Rescue Committee, October 15, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-yemen-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> "Why is Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis?," International Rescue Committee, October 15, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-yemen-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> "Why is Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis?," International Rescue Committee, October 15, 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-yemen-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> "Yemen 2018: Humanitarian Compendium," International Organization for Migration, <https://humanitariancompendium.iom.int/appeals/yemen>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> "Yemen 2018: Humanitarian Compendium," International Organization for Migration, <https://humanitariancompendium.iom.int/appeals/yemen>, (accessed January 14, 2019).

saw over 87,000 migrants enter the war-torn State, inevitably creating a higher security issue not only for those living within the State's borders, but those who are traversing to seek refuge elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

As it is situated, Yemen and its inhabitants have been excessively vulnerable to humanitarian and security issues alike. Innocent lives have been stripped away and far too many have been victims of the violence within Yemen's borders. Due to the significant lack of a successful international response, it is unlikely that the crisis in Yemen will be expeditiously resolved, in turn subjecting millions of Yemeni people and African migrants to violence, insecurity, impoverishment, starvation, and an overall violation of fundamental human rights. Given the delicate nature of the situation, the Security Council should be prepared to take action to ensure the safety of the Yemeni people and security within the region as a whole.

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<sup>27</sup> "Yemen 2018: Humanitarian Compendium," International Organization for Migration, <https://humanitariancompendium.iom.int/appeals/yemen>, (accessed January 14, 2019).