

The Proxy War in Yemen

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ملخص البحث

حرب الإنابة في اليمن

تحت تأثير ما يُسمى بالربيع العربي اندلعت احتجاجات جماهيرية كبيرة في اليمن ضد الحكم الشمولي للرئيس علي عبد الله صالح. ولعب حركة الحوثيين (انصار الله) دورا قياديا في تلك الاحتجاجات التي أجبرت الرئيس صالح على التنحي عن منصبه لصالح نائبة عبد ربه منصور في عام ٢٠١١. ولم يوفق الرئيس الجديد في وضع حدا للاضطرابات التي شهدتها البلاد فازدادت الأوضاع تدهورا ثم أدت الى قيام الحوثيين، عام ٢٠١٤، باجتياح عسكري للعاصمة صنعاء وإزاحة الرئيس هادي. ولم تصمت السعودية التي لجأ إليها الرئيس اليمني المخلوع بل قامت بتشكيل وقيادة تحالف عسكري يهدف الى إنهاء سيطرة الحوثيين على صنعاء وأجزاء أخرى كثيرة من اليمن وإعادة الرئيس هادي الى منصبه. وبذلك دخلت البلاد في حرب إنابة ما تزال نيرانها تستعر حتى اليوم. ويهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة وتحليل العوامل التي تقف وراء إشعال وتصعيد الحرب التي جذبت أطرافا إقليمية ودولية أخرى الى ساحتها. ويتخذ البحث من نظرية أموس فوكس حول حرب الإنابة أساسا للتحليل والاستنتاج. ويفترض أن هذه الحرب لا يمكن لها أن تؤدي الى حسم الصراع في اليمن، ويتمثل الحل الواقعي بقيام الأطراف الإقليمية بإرغام حلفائها المحليين على التخلي عن السلاح والجلوس الى مائدة المفاوضات. وقد تدفع الظروف الصعبة التي تمر بها تلك الأطراف الإقليمية، كتفشي وباء كورونا وانخفاض أسعار النفط، الى الجنوح الى السلم إلا انه لا شيء يلوح في الأفق حتى الآن ما يشير الى قرب انتهاء هذه الحرب التي أدت الى واحدة من اكبر المآسي البشرية في التاريخ الحديث.

Abstract

Inspiring by the so-called Arab Spring, Yemen has witnessed mass protests which resulted in the resignation of the president Ali Abdullah Saleh in February 2012. Saleh's vice president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi succeeded Saleh in office but he failed in putting an end to the conflict. The failure of Hadi led the country to a civil war between the new government and the opposition led by the Houthis, officially (Ansar Allah). In September 2014, the Houthis succeeded in removing the president Hadi from power and controlling the capital Snaa. Hadi fled to the Saudi Arabia where he requested help to restore his authority. Saudi Arabia formed and led a military coalition to fight the Houthis. Since then, a severe proxy war has been attaching to Yemen with an efficient involvement of several regional and global powers.

This research aims at analyzing this proxy war and explaining the role of the external powers in it. The analysis, which is mainly based on Amos Fox' model

of proxy war, assumes that this war will not bring any solution to the conflict. Furthermore, the war is likely to continue so long the regional powers, especially Iran and Saudi Arabia, are not pushing their Yemeni proxies towards peace.

The wide spread of the corona epidemic, especially in Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the dramatic fall of oil prices, would decrease the abilities of these two regional powers to continue confronting in Yemen and bring them to the negotiation table but still there is no sign for such a move.

Introduction

In ancient times, Yemen was known as Arabia Felix, which meant 'happy' or 'fortunate' land of Arabia. The source of Yemen's happiness was the rain attracted by its high mountains and making it more fertile than any other place in the Arab Peninsula. Unfortunately, today, Yemen is neither happy nor fortunate. Images of blood, diseases, and hunger are the first jumping to mind when one thinks of Yemen.

Like many countries in our globe, the Yemeni society is divided into many ethnic groups, and like many countries, these groups do not coexist in peace. The struggle among Yemen's ethnic groups has been exploited by regional and global powers to control this poor country in accordance with their interests. For many years, Britain has controlled Yemen and divided it into two parts: northern and southern. After the military coup in Northern Yemen in 1962, the Egyptian leader, Abdul Nasser, attempted to export his nationalist model to Yemen and this attempt turned the country into an arena of proxy war between Egypt and the Saudi Arabia which felt threatened by Nasser's nationalism.

The pro-socialist revolution of 1967 in the South resulted in the establishment of People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. This republic aligned with the Soviet Union and the revolutionary regimes in the region. Accordingly, a two-decade period of conflicts between the two Yemens started and provided the regional and global powers with good opportunities for interventions in the interior affairs of the divided Yemen. Finally, the two Yemens unified in 1990 but this unification did not bring peace to the country. Four years after the unification a civil war outbreaked between the North and South. The former president Ali Abdullah Saleh succeeded in putting control over whole Yemen, but this control did not last for a long time.

After the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, thousands of al-Qaeda members returned to Yemen and established a branch of al-Qaeda, called al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP). Due to many political, economic, and social factors, such as the absence of democracy, poverty, and tribal division, this group came to play an influential role in the political life of the country.

Inspired by the Iranian model of Islam, the Yemeni pro-Shia sect, Zaidis, which form around %35 of the population, organized themselves in a movement, Ansarullah, (Supporters of God) and raised claims for political rights. Many armed confrontations took place between this movement which came to be known as Houthis and the governmental forces. The so-called Arab Spring prompted the Houthis to lead mass protests and demonstrations against the corrupted government of the president Saleh. The protests resulted in the resignation of Saleh to the favor of his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour, but this move did not satisfy the revolting street.

In September 2014, the Houthis seized the capital Snaa and the president Hadi was forced to leave for Aden and a few weeks later to the Saudi Arabia where he

is still there. The Saudis viewed the Houthi coup as a serious threat to their royal regime as well as to all the regimes of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). A few months later, the Saudi Arabia formed and led a coalition of many states to resist what they called an Iranian expansion in the Arab Peninsula. In March 2015, the Saudi-led coalition started a military campaign called (Operation Decisive Storm) to topple al-Houthi government and restore the international-recognized government of Hadi.

However, after five years of intensive airstrikes and severe ground battles, there is no sign that the Saudis will succeed in achieving their goal in defeating the Houthis. Many evidences show that the balance of power between the two parties has been shifted to the favor of the Houthis who have gotten a significant support from Iran. Moreover, the deep and serious disputes between the Saudi Arabia and its closest ally in the coalition, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the wide-spreading coronavirus inside the kingdom, the worldwide protests against the civilian casualties caused by the airstrikes, and the dramatic fall of the oil prices may force the Saudis to give up and to seek a peaceful solution to this war.

Problem Formulation:

The many local, regional, and global actors which involved in the Yemeni conflict made it one of the most complicated conflicts in the recent history. Moreover, the humanitarian disaster caused by the war put Yemen in the center of attention all over the world.

What are the motivations behind the intervention of the regional and global powers in the Yemen's War?

How do these powers affect the dynamic of this war? And

How does the future of this war look like?

The aim of this research is to answer these questions.

Method

Two methods of research are famous within the field of social science as well as of other sciences. These methods are quantitative and qualitative. Briefly, qualitative research methods produce qualitative data in the form of text. Quantitative research methods produce quantitative data in the form of numbers (Grinnell, 76 :2005). Accordingly, the qualitative method is useful for exploratory and interpretive researches. It enables the researcher to be inside the subject and close to it. Moreover, unlike the quantitative research, the qualitative research depends on the skills and abilities of the researcher to choose and use different kinds of literature to achieve the goal of the research (Bryman, 94 :1992). On the basis of these definitions, this research is classified as a qualitative one so long it relies on many textual resources to answer the questions which have been arisen in the beginning.

Further, any qualitative research, to be a scientific one, it may take one of two possible forms: inductive or deductive. Some researches, however, may take both forms. The difference between these two forms is that the inductive research aims to build a theory on the basis of observed data. The deductive research aims to explain a phenomenon or a number of phenomena on the basis of an already built theory. That is why, the inductive research is sometimes called theory-building research while the deductive is called theory-testing research (Bhattacharjee, 3 :2012).

The aim of this research is to explain the factors responsible for the creation and complication of the current Yemeni conflict. This conflict started in 2011 as mass peaceful demonstrations and protests, then turned into violent confrontations between the protesting people and the governmental forces, then into a civil war, and finally into proxy war. To explain the reasons and consequences of this war, this research relies mainly on Amos Fox' theory of proxy war. Accordingly, the main form of the research will be deductive. This form, however, does not mean that inductive reasoning will be totally ignored. In some cases, the research takes an inductive form in the sense that it generalizes some conclusions, based on repeated observations, to other areas and populations.

To achieve a comprehensive and deep analysis, the research will range the factors and actors which contribute to the complication of the Yemeni conflict and creation a proxy environment on three main levels: local, regional, and global. Each of these levels will be examined in a separate part of the research.

The research, however, will deals in detail only with the actors which involved in the conflict as proxies (agents) or proxy's sponsors (principals). The Russian role, for instance, is not examined because Russia does not have a proxy inside Yemen despite the fact that it plays some role in the conflict. Finally, the research ends with a conclusion summing the entire analysis.

Theoretical Framework

War, like many other concepts within the field of social and political studies, is not easy to define. That is because war may take many forms, purposes, and intentions. War, according to Paul Williams is much more than a clash of armed actors. "It is an intense form of political relations that impacts upon virtually every dimension of human life" (Williams, 187 :2013). However, Carl von Clausewitz (1831 – 1780) defined war as "An act of force to compel our adversary to do our will" (Clausewitz, 3 :1950). Further, Clausewitz (16 :1950) argued that "War is a mere continuation of politics by other means".

Proxy war, like every war is an act of force and violence to compel the opponent to fulfil specific desires. It is also a mere continuation of politics by other means but, unlike other types of war, it is waged and escalated on behalf of other powers than of those which are directly involved in the battle. Or, as Oxford

English dictionary explains, “a war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved”.⁽¹⁾

It is, however, important to distinguish between mercenaries and proxies. While the mercenaries fight just for money without any consideration to the cause they fight for, the proxies are motivated by ideological, political, and societal factors. Moreover, while the mercenaries are ready to fight everywhere and every time, the proxies fight just where and when they feel threatened. Accordingly, the great global and regional powers can always find mercenaries but cannot find proxies wherever and whenever they want.

Proxy wars is an old phenomenon. It is as old as states and empires themselves. The Persian, Byzantine, Ottoman, and many other empires have always had small proxies to fight on their behalf. Similarly, the recent great powers use small armed proxies to impose their policies and agendas on states and regions considered as parts of their hegemony. The question which could be raised is: why do major powers make use of proxies to fight instead of them?

A number of reasons stand behind this behavior. First, the major powers do not like to bear huge human, economic and moral costs of direct military confrontations, especially in a case of using nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction. Or as Robert Powell put it: “proxy wars reduce the total cost of conflict and, therefore, can perpetuate its existence in the long run. At the same time, agents deviating from their equilibrium level of conflict involvement may lead one of the two principals to defeat and transition to a form of direct military confrontation”.⁽²⁾

Second, the geographic distance of the conflict makes it easier to intervene through proxies than direct involvement. Third, because of cultural and societal differences among nations, local proxy actors are more successful in managing conflicts than foreign armies.

Proxy war could be both intrastate (i.e. an armed conflict inside a single state) and interstate (i.e. an armed conflict between two states or more). In the first case, the proxy actors are armed groups and organizations fighting each other or against a central government. While in the second case, the proxy actors are sovereign states involving in a war on the behalf of other powers, or to protect interests of other states. In the intrastate conflicts, the involvement of the neighboring and regional powers is usually more effective than that of the global powers. In the interstate conflicts, the involvement of the global powers usually dominates that of the neighboring or regional powers. Thus, igniting a war between two states or more and making use of it requires huge capabilities whereas intervening in intrastate conflicts does not require such capabilities, especially when the central government is weak and cannot put full control over its own territory.

Amos Fox is one of the scholars who have made a huge effort to theorize

(1) Oxford English Dictionary, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/proxy_war

(2) Powell, R., 2012. Persistent Fighting and Shifting Power. American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July): 637-620.

proxy warfare. In his work “In Pursuit of a General Theory of Proxy Warfare”, Fox defines proxy warfare, or a proxy environment, as he call it, as “one marked by two or more actors working toward a common objective; however, the relationship between the two actors is hierarchical” (Fox, 3 :2019). Further, Fox categorizes the two actors as principal actor and agent or proxy. The principal actor employs the agent to achieve its objectives. That is, under a proxy war, the principal’s objectives become the agent’s objectives.

Fox also articulates two models of proxy warfare: exploitive and transactional. Each of these two models expresses the relationship between the principal and the agent. The exploitive model or relationship is characterized by a complete dominance of the principal and a complete compliant of the agent. The transactional model or relationship is characterized by more cooperation than dominance or one-sided dictation (Fox, 12-11 :2019). Accordingly, the transactional model is more vulnerable to external influence than the exploitive model. That is because the principal, in the exploitive model, enjoys a control through which it can keep the proxy rotate around its axis. In the transactional model, the proxy or agent is almost willing to change the principal when it feels that the change is more profitable.

Further, Fox (5 :2019) concludes that the relationship between the principal and the proxy agent could come to an end if one of the following conditions occurs:

1. The proxy becomes able to stand on its own.
2. The proxy can receive help from other powers than the principal.
3. The proxy achieves the objectives that brought it in line with the principal.

Finally, Fox (12-11 :2019) concludes that transactional proxy relationship is characterized by more cooperation than dominance or one-sided dictation. Accordingly, the transactional model is more vulnerable to external influence than the exploitive model. That is because the principal, in the exploitive model, enjoys a control through which it can keep the proxy rotate around its axis. In the transactional model, the proxy or agent is almost willing to change the principal when it feels that the change is more profitable.

Fox’ theory provides a good tool for analyzing the proxy wars in the Middle East. That is because the two models of proxy warfare suggested by the theory can be applied to all the Mideastern proxy wars. Moreover, the suggested dynamic of such a war is also familiar in the Middle East.

The theory, however, suffers from some faults. Fox’ assumptions about the end of the relationship between the principal and the proxy, for instance, lacks an important factor. This factor is the balance of power among proxies and the balance of power among the principals. Any essential shift in this balance could lead to a military dominance of an actor over the others and then to an end to the conflict. Additionally, the theory does not take into consideration the influence of the ideological factor on the proxy environment. This factor plays a significant role

in the duration of the relationship between the principal and the agent. The alliance between Iran and Hezbollah is an example for such a role. Moreover, the theory does not pay enough attention to the role of the ethnic (i.e. nationalist, religious, sectarian, tribal, and other) factors in the formation and duration of proxy environments. Nor does the theory deal with the influence of the structure of the international system on the behavior of both the principal and the agent. Thus, proxy war under the bipolar system, for example, could last longer than it could under a unipolar system. That is because the unipolar acts more aggressively and rapidly than other powers, and it does not take the reactions of the others into high consideration. Finally, Fox' theory makes no clear difference between the behavior of the global principals and the regional ones. While the global principals are almost motivated by economic interests, the regional principals are almost motivated by other factors, such as ethnicity and ideology, than economic interests. These shortages, however, do not reduce the ability of the theory to explain many important aspects of the current proxy wars in the Middle East, including the Yemeni War.

In order to have a comprehensive analysis of the proxy war in Yemen, this war will be examined at three levels: domestic, regional, and global.

The domestic level

Yemen is a desert country situated in the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait to the west, to the north by Saudi Arabia and to the north east by Oman. Yemen has maritime borders with Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia. Its territory is about 527,970 sq. km. and its population are about 28 million in 2018. All Yemen's citizens are Muslims. Around %35 of these Muslims are Zaydis, a sect of Shia Islam. The rest %65 are Shafiis; a branch of Sunni Islam.⁽³⁾ Yemen's natural resources are petroleum, fish, rock salt, marble; small deposits of coal, gold, lead, nickel, and copper; fertile soil in west.⁽⁴⁾

During the 16th century, Yemen has been absorbed by the Ottoman Empire. After the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, the north part of Yemen gained independence and turned into an imamate ruled by Imam Yahya. In 1948, Imam Yahya was assassinated and succeeded by his son Ahmad who ruled until his death in 1962. The army officers seized power after the death of Imam Ahmad and opened the door for a bloody struggle between royalist's supporters backed by Saudi Arabia and republican supporters backed by Egypt. In 1970 the republicans succeeded in turning the imamate into Arabic Republic of Yemen.

In South Yemen, the British withdrew in 1967 after years of pro-independence insurgencies and the withdrawal resulted in the establishment of the so-called People Republic of Yemen. Two years later, a pro-communist coup took place in Yemen and the republic became a Soviet ally in the region. In 1990, after the

(3) CIA Factbook, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

(4) Nation Master, available at: <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/profiles/Yemen/People>

collapse of the Soviet bloc, the two Yemens united under the leadership of the northern president Ali Abdallah Saleh. A decade later, in 2000, al-Qaeda network occurred in south Yemen as a powerful actor. Four years later, a Shia' movement called al-Houthis emerged in the northern province of Sa'dah.

Under the pressure of mass protests motivated by the so-called 'Arab Spring', the Yemeni president Saleh was forced to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, in 2011. Hadi could do nothing to pick up the country from its deep crises. Al-Houthis exploited the turmoil and seized power in Sana' in August 2014. In March 2015, president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi escaped to Saudi Arabia. A few months later, at the request of president Hadi, a Saudi-led coalition waged a military campaign called 'Operation Decisive Storm' against al-Houthis to restore peace and stability in Yemen. ⁽⁵⁾ The campaign is still far away from achieving its goals and things inside Yemen are getting worse and worse.

In this chapter, I will examine the domestic factors which made Yemen an attractive proxy environment for regional and global powers. These factors can be categorized into three categories: political, societal, and economic, and will be examined separately.

2.1 The political Situation

Yemen has witnessed many armed and blood conflicts through its long history, but the current conflict is one of the bloodiest. According to the American and European-funded organization, "Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)", more than 90,000 Yemenis have been killed since 2015. Around 30,000 of them in 2018 and 12,000 in 2019. ⁽⁶⁾ This conflict entered in a dangerous phase in August 2014 when al-Houthis, officially "Ansar Allah" (Supporters of God), put its military control over the capital Sana' and forced the President Hadi to leave the country. This move of the Houthis brought the country to a severe civil war among several local armed groups and opened a wide door for external interventions.

Today, four main armed groups are sharing control over Yemen. The following map shows the territory dominated by each of these groups.

As shown in the map, the Houthi movement is controlling the most important and populated area in the country, including the capital Sanaa. This movement belongs to the Zaydi branch of Islam and claims that it follows Zaid bin Ali, a grandchild of Imam Hussein, the third Imam of the Shiites. This affiliation has been considered by the movement as a political legitimacy to rule the state. The feeling of discrimination and marginalization caused by the government's policies inspired this group to adopt armed struggle as a main means to achieve its goal

(5) BBC News, Yemen Profile, November 2019 ,6, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east14704951->

(6) Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention", Congressional Research Service, September 2019. Available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov R43960>

of playing a political role equal to its numerical size as one of the largest ethnic group in the country. The mountain province of Saada, which is located in northern Yemen, is the main and strongest stronghold of al-Houthis. The location and terrain of Saada was an incentive factor behind the movement's turning to armed struggle against the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The first serious armed conflict between al-Houthis and the Yemeni central government took place in the summer of 2004, when Sa'dah-based charismatic leader Hussain al-Houthi was considered as a threat by the Government of Yemen after his followers chanted anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans in Sana. Husain al-Houthi was killed by the governmental army in September 2004 and was succeeded by his brother, Abd al-Malik (Salmoni, 1 :2010). The death of the Houthis' leader did not release the armed confrontations between the movement and the government. Between 2005 and 2010, the Houthis repeatedly rose against the central government but their uprisings were quelled by the Yemeni army.⁽⁷⁾ However, during this period, the military capabilities of the Houthis have been highly improved and the number of its fighters increased, especially when the movement succeeded in mobilizing many tribes behind its objectives.⁽⁸⁾

The so-called 'Arab Spring' which resulted, among other things, in the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, had a remarkably high influence on the political situation in Yemen. Many mass protests took place in Sanaa and other big cities demanding the resignation of the president Saleh. Because of their wide popularity, the Houthis played a leading role in organizing the protests against Saleh. The security forces of the former president showed cruelty in dealing with the protesters. On March 2011, 18, for example, more than fifty demonstrators were killed by snipers. This event triggered a bloody phase of the political conflict and attracted the support of some troops within the Yemeni army for the protesters.⁽⁹⁾ However, the domestic huge pressure of the mass protests and the external pressure of the region's states forced the president Saleh to step down in favor of his vice-president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. After his failure in meeting the demands of the protesting people, the protests turned into street fighting between the Houthis and the Yemeni army which followed the president Hadi. The Houthis won the battle and forced Hadi to leave to his hometown Aden in September 2014 and five months later to Saudi Arabia.⁽¹⁰⁾ Hadi's government, however, is still recognized by the international community as a legitimate authority.

Hadi's supporters, however, did not surrender. Two months after the escape

(7) Swietek Hubert "The Yemen War: A Proxy War, or a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?", | The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs, April 2017 ,1

(8) Michael Knights "The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2018, available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Knights-20180910CTCSentinel.pdf>

(9) Swietek Hubert, 2017

(10) Ibid.

of Hadi, the government forces succeeded in regaining control over Aden. They also succeeded in preventing the Houthis from expanding their control towards the east regions. The success of the government forces, however, owed the huge help of a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia.⁽¹¹⁾ Today, Hadi's forces control, in addition to parts of Aden, the port city of Hodeida which is considered as the most important port on the Red Sea.

Beside the Houthis and the forces of the internationally recognized government, al-Qaeda in Yemen is also an active armed group. By the end of the previous century, many branches of al-Qaeda network have been formed in several Muslim regions, such as the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, and North Africa. Yemen was an attractive country for al-Qaeda. Several factors attracted the leaders of the organizations to act in Yemen. The Yemeni terrain is a suitable environment for guerilla war which remarked al-Qaeda struggle against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The weak control of the Yemeni government over its territories, the corruption, the high rate of people living under the poverty line, the absence of necessary services, and the low level of education also provided fertile ground for growing and strengthening al-Qaeda in Yemen. Moreover, the former President Saleh welcomed, to some extent, the growth of al-Qaeda in the southern part of Yemen in order to restrict the activities of the Southern Marxist socialist party which was at odd with the government in Northern Yemen.⁽¹²⁾

In June 2014, the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a descendant fraction of al-Qaeda, occupied huge territories in northern Iraq and declared a state of Islamic caliphate. Five months later, in November 2014, ISIS announced that it accepted pledges of allegiance from jihadists in other Muslim countries such as Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. As a symbol of its alleged authority, ISIS also announced the establishment of wilayat (governorates) in these countries.⁽¹³⁾

Today, ISIS and al-Qaeda in Yemen put their control over more than %10 of the country's territory including important cities located on the Arab Sea. Accordingly, they play a role in the country's politics and stability. The two organizations are also involving, against one another, in a bloody struggle for territory, recruits, and influence. This struggle is dividing the Yemeni tribes and deepening instability in the Middle East's poorest country. Each of the two groups is attempting to defeat the other and to show its power on the ground. Clashes are occurring regularly in the central province of Beyda between Yemeni tribes aligned with these two terrorist groups. Sometimes, the two rivals put off fighting one another in order to focus their efforts on fighting the Shiite Houthi movement which is regarded by

(11) Ibid.

(12) Samuel Lindo, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Case Study no. 3, July 2011.

(13) Barak Mendelsohn, "Islamic State in Yemen: Why ISIS is seeking to expand", BBC World News, 21 March 2015

both groups as apostates.⁽¹⁴⁾

The sources of the organizations' support are not ambiguous yet. Even the American policymakers are divided regarding this issue. Some of them think that al-Qaeda in Yemen gets help from the Saudi royal regime. Others think it gets help from the Saudi people but not from the regime (Byman, 122 :2015). What is clear, however, is that these two groups are backed by the Sunni tribes which fear the Shiite Houthis. It is also not a surprise that the Saudis give hand to the two extremist organizations so long they are fighting the Houthis, the foe number one for the Saudi Arabia.

The behavior of the two organizations is ambiguous too. They are at odd with both the government and the opposition. While they reject the secularism and corruption of the internationally recognized government of Hadi, they view the Houthi movement as a deviant Islamic group. Both two view the Yemeni Socialist Party, which attempted to build a pro-Soviet regime, as an apostate party too. This view belonged to Bin Laden who has always been active in backing anti-communist efforts in Yemen, his ancestral home (Byman, 14 :2015). Accordingly, the relationship between al-Qaeda in Yemen and the Socialist Party in the South cannot be friendly.

The fourth important armed group in today's Yemen is the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC). This group is a separatist movement seeking independence for Southern Yemen. It comprises of 26 members, including five governors from Southern Yemen and two former ministers. The emergence of STC was a fast reaction to Hadi's decision of firing Aden governor Aidarus al-Zoubaidi in April 2017 after accusing him of prioritizing the independence of the South over a united Yemen.⁽¹⁵⁾ This group claims that after his victory in the civil war of 1994, the former president Saleh dismissed many southern civil servants and military officials, confiscated their properties and put hands on the wealth of the oil rich southern province of Hadramawt. Several protests against Saleh's retaliatory policy have been outbroken in the South under the name 'Southern Mobility Movement (SMM or hirak in Arabic) but the security forces of the regime repressed them brutally (Day, 155 :2012). The Yemeni revolution of 2011 brought to mind, among many other things, the demands of the southern people for autonomy. After years of severe opposition to both the president Saleh and his successor Hadi, Al Hirak al Janubi, turned into an active political actor. In April 2017, the dismissed governor of Aden, General Aidarus al Zubaidi, announced the formation of Southern Transitional Council (STC). Two years later, the armed forces which follow this council put their control on Aden and became an immensely powerful actor in the Yemeni conflict.⁽¹⁶⁾

(14) Sudarsan Raghavan, "With the ISIS caliphate defeated in Syria, an Islamist militant rivalry takes root in Yemen", The Washington Post, April 2019 ,14

(15) "Yemen war: Who is the Southern Transitional Council?", Middle East Eye, 30 August 2019.

(16) Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention", Congressional Research Service, September 2019 ,17

(STC) fights against the forces of the president Hadi for more than a reason. First, for a long period has Hadi served as a vice president but he failed in meeting the demands of the Yemeni people for reform and progress. Second, despite his high position in Saleh's regime, Hadi has not been useful for his people in southern Yemen where he was born. Third, the southern Yemenis blamed Hadi of playing significant role in defeating the southern forces in 1994 civil war.⁽¹⁷⁾ Finally, the (STC) has declared the restoration of statehood in the Southern Yemen as its goal. This move is strictly rejected by the government of Hadi.⁽¹⁸⁾

The armed struggle among such different groups with quite different goals complicate the Yemeni crisis and provides a very fertile ground for proxy environment. Each of these groups is seeking to shift the balance of military power in its favor, and to achieve this goal it is inevitable to rely on regional or global power. Accordingly, Yemen turned into a terrain for a proxy war where different armed actors fight in favor for different regional and global powers.

2.2 The Socio-economic Situation

Paul Collier (89 :2003) argued that a variety of economic motivations for conflict are born out of poverty, including economic grievances, greed and even opportunism. He also concludes that poverty and security feed one another at both individual and state level. Collier's argumentation and conclusion fits the case of Yemen. According to the Nation Master data of 2012, the Yemeni population below poverty line is estimated to %45.2, the unemployment rate %35, the inflation rate %9.9.⁽¹⁹⁾ The GDP (Gross Domestic Production) per capita 349 U.S. dollars in 2018.⁽²⁰⁾ Another data of the World Bank shows that poverty in Yemen reached 49 percent in 2014. Around 10.8 million Yemenis (equal to 41 percent of the total population) were undernourished, and much larger shares of the population suffered from nutrient deficiencies.⁽²¹⁾ According to the data of CIA World Factbook, the literacy rate in Yemen is %70.⁽²²⁾ These data show that Yemen is a poor country. It is the poorest one in the Arab Peninsula where all countries are rich and modern.

What got things worse, however, was that some provinces in the country

(17) "Historic Aden Declaration," al-Hirak, May 2017 ,4, available at: <http://www.southernhirak.org/06/2017/aden-historic-declaration.html>.

(18) Sergey Serebov, "Yemen Crisis: Causes, Threats and Resolution Scenarios", Russian International Affairs Council, Issue 14, October 2017

(19) Nation Master, available at: <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/profiles/Yemen/Economy>

(20) IMF database: <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/ngdpdpdc@weo/meq/mena/egy/sdn/yem/lby/tun/weoworld>

(21) Yemen Poverty Notes, World Bank Group: Poverty and Equity, June 2017, available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/147231509378508387/pdf/Yemen-Poverty-Notes-Revised0612-.pdf>

(22) IA World Factbook, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

suffered more than the others from poverty and economic underdevelopment. This fact produced feelings of injustice and even repression against specific social groups, such as the Houthis and southern Yemenis. The Houthis, for instance, rejected the -2014 federal plan of the 'National Dialogue Council'(NDC) led by president Hadi to divide Yemen into six regions, four in the north and two in the south. The plan suggested to incorporate the province of Saada province, the historic stronghold of the Houthis, in the desert and resource poor region of Azaal. This move was viewed by the Houthis as an intended attempt to damage their ability to develop economically, and to undermine their power (Parveen, 132 :2019).

Beside poverty and economic underdevelopment, tribalism is a profoundly serious factor in creating and escalating political conflicts in Yemen. As argued by Charles Schmitz, Yemen is famous for its tribes, and these tribes are powerful political actors and central to Yemeni culture and society.⁽²³⁾ This fact is also confirmed by the World Bank which estimates that %80 of the country's population consist of agriculturalists and fishermen. These people are tribesmen and traditionally bore arms.⁽²⁴⁾ Moreover, Shelagh Weir concludes that local tribes "can be regarded as sovereign polities like microstates with "political borders and internal administrative divisions (Shelagh, 211 :2007)".

In many areas of Yemen, especially in the north, the government does not have the capacity to impose security and deliver necessary goods and services to the tribesmen. That is why, the tribal system is effective and the tribes' leaders (sheikhs) enjoy significant power.⁽²⁵⁾ Accordingly, the loyalty of the Yemeni tribes is to their leaders but not to the government. And this loyalty enables these leaders to play a significant role in escalating and resolving the political conflicts in the country. One of the essential explanations for how the former president Saleh managed to rule the country for around three decades was his skill to gain the support of many powerful tribes. Saleh played with the tribal card even after he was removed from power. He, for instance, succeeded in mobilizing his clan behind the Houthis when he aligned with them in 2014 and that was one of the factors which made the collapse of the president Hadi fast and easy.

Some of the Yemeni northern tribes, especially 'Hashid' and 'Bakil' resisted the Saudi-Emirate military intervention in their country. These two big and powerful tribes also prevent al-Qaeda in Yemen and the Muslim Brotherhood from getting strong footing in the north part of the country.⁽²⁶⁾ In the southern part, however, the tribes do not play the same role as in the north. That is because the influence the

(23) Charles Schmitz, Understanding the Role of Tribes in Yemen, Combating Terrorism Center, October 2011, Vol. 4. Issue 10

(24) Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis, the World Bank, Report No.: -34008YE, January 2011 ,6

(25) "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis", The World Bank, Report No. -34008YE, January 2006 ,11

(26) Sergey Serebrov, 'Yemen Crisis: Causes, Threats and Resolution Scenarios', Russian International Affairs Council, No. 14, October 2017

Marxist ideology of the 'Yemeni Socialist Party' which ruled the Southern Yemen for around three decades.

Another serious problem from which Yemen is suffering now is sectarianism. As concluded by Reynal Querol, religious disputes can produce more violence than other social cleavages. Querol explained this phenomenon with two factors. First, one cannot have more than a religion. Second, the religious differences imply different ways of understanding politics and social relations.⁽²⁷⁾ The powerful occurrence of the Houthis and their success in seizing the capital Sanaa set a blaze of a bloody sectarian conflict in Yemen. The 'Islah Party' which is considered as a Muslim Brotherhood movement, al-Qaeda, and ISIS viewed the Shiite Houthis as a serious threat to the Sunni majority. Accordingly, the Houthi triumph of September 2014 deepened the rift between Yemen's two main sects and open the door for more external interventions.

It is to conclude that the failure of the Yemeni government in dealing with the political, economic and social problems, the armed struggle among the different parties and groups, the sectarian conflict and the separatist tendencies in the south part turned the Yemeni parties into proxies used by regional and global powers to achieve their goals in this poor country.

The Regional Level

Yemen is of a high significance for the region's countries, especially for the (Gulf Cooperation Council) GCC-states (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Arab United Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait). This significance is tied to more than a reason. First, Yemen is located on the entrance to Bab el Mandeb strait, which links the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea through the Gulf of Aden. This strait is one of the most active and strategic shipping lanes in the world.

The crude Gulf oil estimated to transit through the strait is 6.2 million barrels a day.⁽²⁸⁾ Moreover, nearly all of the trade between the European Union and China, Japan, India, and the rest of Asia passes through Bab al-Mandab strait.⁽²⁹⁾ Second, unlike all Gulf states which are ruled by royal or emirate regimes, Yemen is a republic ruled by presidential regime. Third, democracy and political freedoms are more stable in Yemen than in the region's countries. Fourth, any political crisis in Yemen could result in waves of immigration to Saudi Arabia and Oman. Accordingly, the Gulf states make huge efforts to keep Bab al-Mandeb safe and keep their societies far away from Yemen's political influences.

(27) Reynal Eynal-Querol, M. (2002) 'Ethnicity, Political Systems, and Civil Wars.' Journal of Conflict Resolution 54-29 : (1)46.

(28) "The Bab El-Mandeb Strait is a Strategic Route for Oil and Natural Gas Shipments", U.S. Energy Information Administration, EIA, Independent Statistics and Analysis. August 2019. Available at: www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=41073

(29) Tomi Oladipo, "Why are there so many military bases in Djibouti?", BBC World News, June 2015 ,16.

Other countries in the region, such as Turkey and Egypt are also affecting in and affected by the situation in Yemen. While Turkey supports the Islah party because its ideological proximity (Muslim Brotherhood) with Ankara, Egypt, which is at odd with the Muslim Brotherhood and a close ally for Saudi Arabia, supports the Saudi-led coalition which fights the Houthis in order to restore the government of Hadi. Thus, each of these countries deals with the Yemeni conflict according to its ideology, interests, and objectives. In the following pages, the role of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and UAE in the Yemen war will be discussed separately. That is because these three regional powers, unlike the others, play a very crucial role in the Yemeni conflict.

3.1 Saudi Arabia

For many times in the recent history, the Saudi Arabia has anticipated actively in Yemeni conflict. And every time, the kingdom relied on a domestic group within the boundaries of its southern neighbor to be its proxy. In return, every time, at least one Yemeni group found in the kingdom as a principal actor on which it could rely to win the proxy war. The most famous proxy war in Yemen's recent history took place in the beginning of the 1960s of the previous century. In September 1962, a group of military officers succeeded in toppling the Zaidi Imamate regime in Sanaa and declared a republic instead of it. This moved was very welcomed by the then charismatic leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser who viewed it as triumph for the revolutionary camp in the Arab World. In contrast, the Saudi Arabia viewed the military coup as a profoundly serious threat to its royal regime and values. Consequently, Yemen turned into an arena for severe proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Ferris, 2 :2013). A decade later (in 1972) an armed conflict erupted between the two Yemens. The Saudi Arabia chose to ally with the northern Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) while the former Soviet Union chose to ally with the southern Democratic People Republic of Yemen (PDRY) which was ruled by a pro-Soviet socialist party. This time the Saudi Arabia involved in a proxy war in Yemen against the Soviet Union. The Arab League, however, succeeded in containing the conflict and the two parts of Yemen coexisted peacefully until the civil war of 1994.⁽³⁰⁾

In the Yemeni conflicts of 1986 and 1994, the Saudi Arabia also made efforts to influence the outcome of the power struggle in the southern neighbor, but it did not succeed because those two conflicts did not last for a long time. In 1986, a struggle for power inside the leadership of the southern Yemeni Socialist Party lasted for a few days and resulted in the defeating of the then President Ali Nasser and his supporters. In 1994, a civil war erupted in the country between the army led by the president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the military forces of the former southern republic of Yemen. The declared reason of the war was that a number of southern officials

(30) Country Profile Yemen, Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, August 2008. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen-new.pdf>

accused the President Saleh of ruling the new unified Yemen with an iron fist and marginalizing his southern partners, especially the vice president Ali Salem al-Beid. The southern leaders declared the reestablishment of the former People Democratic Republic of Yemen. The Saudi Arabia supported the separatists, but the revolt was severely cracked down by Saleh's forces.⁽³¹⁾

Today, the situation is quite different. It is not a mere struggle for power inside the ruling elite as it was in 1986. Nor is it an armed conflict between a central government and a group of separatists as it was in 1994. It is a conflict in which many local armed parties are participating, and many regional and global powers are intervening. Like in the early 1960s, the Saudi Arabia is again threatened by a regional power, but the current threat is coming across the Persian Gulf instead of the Red Sea. And the local source of threat to the kingdom is not a nationalist movement backed by Egypt or another Arab country, but a Shiite group backed by Iran. This group is known as the Houthis or Ansar Allah and became a key-actor in the Yemeni politics in the last two decades.

As mentioned above, the Houthis influence on Yemen's politics got so effective at the start of the Arab spring. Inspiring by the mass protests in Tunisia and Egypt, the Houthis attempted to lead street protests against the government of the president Saleh. The Saudi regime felt that the collapse of the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes and the uprising of the Shiites of Bahrain could result in infecting their kingdom by the revolutionary disease. Accordingly, the kingdom had to make its best to prevent the Arab Spring from spreading inside the Arab Peninsula and to prevent Iran from employing the Shia' communities in the Arab World for its goal of exercising hegemony on the region.⁽³²⁾

Together with other Gulf states, especially UAE and Kuwait, the Saudi Arabia tried to find a peaceful solution to the Yemeni conflict. After marathon negotiations, the Saudis succeeded in persuading the former Yemeni president Saleh to hand over power to his vice president Hadi. The handover took place according to an agreement signed in the Saudi capital Riyadh in 2012 and was sponsored by representatives from all GCC states. In addition to the resignation of the president Saleh, it was agreed on gathering the Yemeni groups in a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) to draft a new constitution.⁽³³⁾ By this move, the Saudis attempted to marginalize the Houthis, al-Qaeda in Yemen, and the separatist movement in the south and to ensure that the coming government of Yemen would be friendly. The outcome of this agreement, however, did not meet the Saudis expectations. Thus, the disputes among the country's different armed

(31) Yemen Profile- Timeline, BBC World News, 6 November 2019

(32) Diansaei Behzad, "Iran and Saudi Arabia in the middle east: leadership and sectarianism (2017—2011)", RUDN University (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 2018 Vol. 18 No. 1 134—124, Moscow, Russia

(33) Rugh, W. A. "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign", Middle East Policy, Vol. 22, NO ,4 2015

groups were deep to the extent that no compromises could be made. As a result, the dialogue of weapons overcame the dialogue of ideas and the arenas of bloody fight left no room for the negotiation table. Finally, the struggle for power reached its highest point in September 2014 when the Houthi fighters invaded the capital Sanaa and toppled the government of the president Hadi. After spending several months in Aden attempting hopelessly to return to Sanaa, Hadi left the country and went to Saudi Arabia to form a wide and powerful regional alliance against the Houthis. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia formed a military coalition with other Arab and Islamic states and launched a military campaign in response to a specific request from President Hadi. The declared goal of this campaign was to protect Yemen from the Houthi aggression.⁽³⁴⁾

The Saudi intense reaction to the Houthis' capture of Sanaa is motivated by several factors. First, the kingdom viewed this move as a dangerous Iranian attempt to approach its southern border. Second, any Shiite regime in Yemen could inspire the Saudi Shiites to revolt against the royal family. Third, a hostile regime in Yemen could threaten the Saudi oil tankers passing through Bab al-Mandab strait. Fourth, the escalating armed conflict in Yemen could result in huge waves of immigrations to the Saudi territories and cost the Saudi government too much. Consequently, the Saudi Arabia adopted the role of principal while the Hadi's army and his supporters adopted the role of proxy or agent.

Bringing to mind Fox' model, one can easily conclude that the proxy relationship between the principal (Saudi Arabia) and its proxy or agent (Hadi's forces) is an exploitive one. That is because the Saudis enjoy full control over the proxy and the proxy shows a complete compliant. This control is because the fact that Hadi and his supporters are too weak in comparison to the Houthis, and the Saudi Arabia is the only regional country which possesses the military and financial capabilities to help. The long borders shared by the two neighbor countries also enable the Saudis to fight effectively inside the Yemeni territories.

Today, the urgent question is to what extent the Saudi-Hadi alliance and the five-year Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthis will continue since it failed in achieving any of its declared goals. In accordance with Fox' three assumptions (5 :2019) about the conclusion of a principal-agent relationship, Hadi has no option but to continue relying on the Saudis. Thus, Hadi's forces are still not able to stand on its own. Second, Hadi cannot receive help from another power than Saudi Arabia. Third, Hadi did not achieve any of its objectives yet.

The continuation of the Saudi-Hadi alliance, however, does not depend on Hadi but on the Saudis. Many reasons could force the Saudi Arabia to seek a peaceful solution for the Yemeni conflict. Most importantly is that the balance of power between the two Yemeni sides trends to shift in favor of the Houthis. During the last few months, the Houthis showed that they were stubborn and well-organized

(34) Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention", Congressional Research Service, April 2018 ,12. Available at: file:///C:/Users/Bruger/Pictures/Yemen20%Civil20%War.pdf

fighters despite far inferior equipment. They succeeded in launching many missile and drone strikes against Saudi targets inside the kingdom's territories.⁽³⁵⁾ Most effectively of these attacks was the attack on Aramco, the world's largest oil processing facility in Saudi Arabia, which is vital to global energy supplies. Some reports said that the attack resulted in shutting down about half of the Saudi oil output.⁽³⁶⁾ The disputes and lack of coordinating with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also contributed to complicating the Saudi role in the conflict. In addition to all of that, the dramatic fall in the oil prices and the spread of coronavirus in Saudi Arabia put the kingdom in an extremely hard tough situation. Today, after five years of military campaign, in fact, it is fair to say that the Saudis and their proxies are on the verge of defeat, as concluded by Middle East Monitor.⁽³⁷⁾ Consequently, the kingdom is likely to prefer peaceful solution to the conflict.

3.2 Iran

After its Islamic revolution, Iran has dramatically shifted its foreign policy at both regional and global levels. While the regime of Shah Pahlavi has, for decades, been a close ally to the United States and the pro-American regimes in the region, the new regime of Ayatullah Khomeini has always been at odd with the United States and its allies in the region, especially in the Gulf. From the very beginning, Iran's new leaders attempted to export the Islamic revolution to all the region's states, and to achieve this goal, they made serious efforts to have proxies in those states. Today, Iran has proxies in most of the region's countries, especially Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Through these proxies, Iran enjoys a significance influence on the politics of the whole region.

The intensive alliance between Iran and the Houthis is not so old. That is because the Houthis were a close ally of the former president Saleh and then had little need for the Iranian weapons or other equipment.⁽³⁸⁾ The removal of Saleh from power and the large-scale war which outbroke between the Houthis and the armed forces of the new president Hadi made the Iranian support inevitable for the movement which planned to seize the capital Snaa. Then a clear and strong alliance was formed between Iran and the Houthis. This alliance played an essential

(35) Tim Lister, "Yemen fighting brings Saudi-led coalition to brink of collapse", CNN, August ,31 2019. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/31/08/2019/middleeast/yemen-saudi-coalition-collapse-intl/index.html>

(36) "Major Saudi Arabia oil facilities hit by Houthi drone strikes", The Guardian, September 2019 ,14. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/14/major-saudi-arabia-oil-facilities-hit-by-drone-strikes>

(37) "After 5 years, Saudi Arabia is finally on the verge of defeat in Yemen", Middle East Monitor, March 2020 ,26. Available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/-20200326after-5-years-saudi-arabia-is-finally-on-the-verge-of-defeat-in-yemen/>

(38) Al-Muslimi, Farea, "Iran's Role in Yemen Exaggerated but Destructive", The Century Foundation, 19 May 37 .2017 Accessed 13 Feb 2018. <https://tcf.org/content/report/irans-role-yemen-exaggerated-destructive/>.

role in the success of the Houthis in seizing Sanaa and toppling the government of the president Hadi. After the Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthis, the Iranians started to provide their ally with military experts beside weapons. Today, Iranian and Hezbollah military advisors operate on the ground in Yemen.⁽³⁹⁾ This effort enabled the Houthis to fire advanced weapons from Yemen into the Saudi territories and toward U.S. ships in the Red Sea.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The Iranian unlimited support to the Houthis is motivated by more than a factor. Both sides affiliate with the same religious sect (Shia'), and the conflict in itself, as David Oualaalou argues, reflects a regional struggle between Sunnis, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Shiites, led by Iran (Oualaalou, 51 :2018). In addition to the ideological factor, Iran found in the Houthi movement a promising partner through which it could ensure a significant political and military presence in the Arab Peninsula. This presence would naturally shift the region's balance of power to the favor of Iran. Moreover, the Houthi domination over whole Yemen will put Bab al-Mandeb under an Iranian indirect control and then the two most important straits (Hormoz and Bab Al-Mandeb) , through which millions of barrels of oil a day are transformed to different distances worldwide, become under an Iranian control. Accordingly, Yemen will also be an important card Iran can play in its relationship with the Western countries.

The proxy relationship between Iran and the Houthis can also be classified as an exploitive one giving the Iranians full control over the Houthi strategies and tactics. For their part, the Houthis have no options but to follow Tehran and fulfill its desires. More than a factor determined such a relationship. First of all, Iran was the first country to recognize the internationally refused government of the Houthis. Second, Iran is the only provider of weapon, military experiences, and other equipment to them. Third, Shiism provides a profound tie between the two parties, especially in such a Mideastern circumstance marked by severe sectarian tensions. The ideological or sectarian factor makes the proxy relationship between Tehran and Sanaa more stabile than that between Saudi Arabia and the exiled government of the president Hadi. That is because the Saudi-Hadi alliance lacks the necessary ideological base and political harmony. Thus, there is not too much in common between the royal regime in Saudi Arabia which is supported by a strict Wahabi tenet and the secular president Hadi. This ideological and political inharmony turns the Saudi-Hadi alliance into an ad-hoc alliance whose duration is not predictable at all.

The urgent question now is which one of the two principals will stand by its proxy to the end? Two facts are very crucial in this case: the balance of military power

(39) Transfeld, Marieke, "Iran's Small Hand in Yemen," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14 Feb 38 .2017 Accessed 22 Feb 2018. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/67988>

(40) "Missiles fired from rebel-held Yemen land near U.S. Destroyer in Red Sea," The Associated Press, 10 Oct 41 .2016 Accessed 22 Feb 2018. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-yemen-missile-u-swarship-20161010-story.html>

inside Yemen, and the military and economic capabilities of the principals. With regard to the first fact, many evidences confirm that the Houthis get stronger and stronger while the Saudi-led coalition get weaker and weaker. In September 2019, the Houthis launched successful drone strikes against the major oil installations in Saudi Arabia (Aramco). The strikes caused serious damages to the company despite it locates several hundreds kilometers far from the Saudi-Yemeni border.⁽⁴¹⁾ Five months later, in February 2020, the Houthis shut down a Saudi Tornado fighter jet.⁽⁴²⁾ These attacks showed that the military balance of power between the two camps had been shifted in the favor of the Houthis. According to the 'Middle East Monitor': after five years of severe military campaign, it is fair to say that the Saudis and their mercenaries are on the verge of defeat. The Yemeni armed forces and 'popular committees' which include Houthi forces are continuing their advances with their sights set firmly on the stronghold of Marib and the pro-Hadi, Islah militia which makes up the coalition-backed force on the ground.⁽⁴³⁾ This shift was creditable to the Iranians who provided arms, including short-range ballistic missiles.⁽⁴⁴⁾

With regard to the economic capabilities of the two principals, both of them are severely suffering from deep economic crises caused by the spread of Coronavirus epidemic and the historic fall in the oil prices. The Iranian crises, however, are deeper than those of Saudi Arabia and that because the sanctions imposed by the United States on many of its economic activities, especially exporting of crude oil and oil products. In return, the Saudi financial expenditures are more than those of the Iranians and that because the kingdom is involving in a direct war against the Houthis. Accordingly, both countries show tendency to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict which is exhausting huge resources in a difficult time. However, the current facts on the Yemeni ground indicate that the Iranian proxy is in a better situation than that of the Saudi proxy. Consequently, the Iranians' position in any future negotiations will be better than that of the Saudis and then they will refuse any return to pre-Houthi seizing of Snaa on September 2014 ,21.

It is also worthy to know that Teheran considers Yemen as one front of an undeclared war against the United States and its allies in the Middle East. In any potential large-scale military confrontation between Iran and the United States or Israel, each of the Iranian proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestinian territories,

(41) The New York Times, September 2019 ,14

(42) BBC World News, February 2020 ,15

(43) Omar Ahmad, "After 5 years, Saudi Arabia is finally on the verge of defeat in Yemen", Middle East Monitor, March 2020 ,26. Available at:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/-/20200326after-5-years-saudi-arabia-is-finally-on-the-verge-of-defeat-in-yemen/>

(44) Daniel Byman, "How the U.S. Is Empowering Iran in Yemen", Foreign Affairs, July 2018 ,26. Available at:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/26-07-2018/how-us-empowering-iran-yemen>

and Yemen will do its best to help the Islamic republic. On the basis of these considerations, Iran will embrace its proxies so long the American or Israeli threat exists and that will decrease the opportunities of reaching a political solution to this long-standing conflict.

3.3 Arab United Emirates (UAE)

Since March 2015 and up to the present day, the Arab United Emirates (UAE) has been participating effectively in the Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthis. The main object for both Saudi Arabia and UAE was to prevent a total collapse of the government of President Hadi and at the same time to prevent the Houthis from extending their power throughout the whole country.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The role of both regional allies, however, differs from one another. While the Saudis play a leading role in the aerial campaign, the Emiratis play a more forceful role on the ground. UAE succeeded in creating and mobilizing several armed groups in the south behind their objectives. These groups included militias, Salafi fighters, and southern separatists who seceded from Hadi's government.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The most important and powerful one of these groups is the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC). This group is a proxy on which UAE mainly relies to achieve its goals in Yemen. The proxy relationship between the two parties is an exploitive one and that is due to the fact that (STC) completely depends on the Emirati military and financial help. This relationship enables the Emiratis to play a significant role in the Yemeni conflict.

The Emiratis were, of course, looking for achieving both local and regional objectives through their intensive intervention in the Yemeni conflict. Inside Yemen, the Emiratis attempted to achieve three goals. First, they sought to crush political Islam in any form. Second, to control the strategically valuable Red Sea coastline, especially Aden and its strategic port in order to ensure its commercial shipping lanes in the region, where it has already established military bases in Djibouti and Eritrea. And third, to strengthen their own special forces, which trained and oversaw local proxies like the (STC) and Security Belt troops.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Regionally, the Emiratis, like the Saudis, did not want to see the Iranians having foothold in the Arab Peninsula, especially in Yemen, where the Bab al-Mandeb strait, through which millions of barrels of oil are transformed a day. Moreover, the Emiratis sought to maximize their influence over political developments in Yemen and, indirectly, in

(45) The Yemen War Actors, Interests and the Prospects of Negotiations, Regional Programme Gulf States, Policy Report- October 2019. Available at: <https://www.kas.de/documents/0/286298/The+Yemen+War.pdf/8059274b-c1cd-ae8d1-aa28619-7e6fd8a3?version=1.0&t=1571042896980>

(46) Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, 'Yemen on the brink: how the UAE is profiting from the chaos of civil war', The Guardian, 21 Dec 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/21/yemen-uae-united-arab-emirates-profiting-from-chaos-of-civil-war>

(47) Ibid.

Saudi Arabia.⁽⁴⁸⁾ That is because the Emiratis look forward to being on an equal footing with the Saudis in the region.

Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia and UAE are fighting together against the Houthis, there are many disputes between the two allied countries regarding the conflict, especially the relations to the local groups. While the Saudis are committed to Hadi, the Emiratis have created and trained several southern groups whose loyalty is not to Hadi. According to UAE, supporting Hadi is a losing bet so long he is remaining in his Riyadh compound, and allying with the Islamist party 'Islah', which is not accepted by the Emiratis. These different points of views resulted in competition for influence inside Yemen. The competition has turned into armed struggle among the proxies supported by the two partners.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Aden has been, for several times, an arena of battle between the forces loyal to the president Hadi and those of the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Last time, the two sides engaged in a deadly fighting was in August 2019. Dozens of people have been killed and wounded.⁽⁵⁰⁾

The armed clashes between the proxies of the two allies, however, are not going to turn into a divorce between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. That is because each of the two allies has his own strategic goals in Yemen. According to Abdul Baqi Shamsan, a Yemeni academic and political analyst, there is an obvious understanding between the UAE and Saudi Arabia when it came to Yemen. He argued that a weak and shattered Yemen is an objective for both sides to achieve their strategic goals. The UAE wants Yemen to be weak and divided in order to enable the South to separate. And, in a divided Yemen, the Emiratis will be able to keep the strategic Socotra Island in the Arabian Sea under their control. As for the Saudis, Shamsan argues that the kingdom is eager to maintain control over other parts of Yemen closer to its southern borders, especially Hadramawt, Shabwah and Mahrah provinces.⁽⁵¹⁾

As an attempt to resolve the conflict between the Saudi and the Emirati proxies in Yemen, Riyadh hosted, on November 2019, negotiations between the Saudi-backed government of Hadi and the Emirati-backed (STC). In addition to the Saudi prince crown, Mohammed Bin Salman, the sheikh of UAE, Mohammed Bin Zayed, sponsored the negotiations. The most important decisions on which both sides agreed were to put an end to the armed confrontation between governmental forces and the forces of (STC), and to reorganize the military forces under the

(48) 'The UAE's War Aims in Yemen', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October, 24 2017. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/73524>

(49) Ibid.

(50) Tim Lister, 'Yemen fighting brings Saudi-led coalition to brink of collapse', CNN, 31 Aug 2019. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/31/08/2019/middleeast/yemen-saudi-coalition-collapse-intl/index.html>

(51) Ali Younes, 'The divergent Saudi-UAE strategies in Yemen', al-Jazeera, 31 Aug 2019. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/08/2019/analysis-divergent-saudi-uae-strategies-yemen190830121530210-.html>

command of the ministry of defense, and the security forces under the command of the Ministry of interior affairs. They also agreed on forming a government of national unity within 30 days of signature with 24 ministers, equally divided between north and south, and led by a prime minister appointed by the president Hadi. Another decision called all armed group to withdraw to their original positions before the outbreak of the last confrontation.⁽⁵²⁾

This agreement, however, failed in putting an end to the clashes in and around Aden. Once again, confrontations erupted between (STC) and the governmental forces on March 20, and April 2020 ,1. Saudi Arabia was accused of expanding its deployments of elite forces in Aden to guard against future hostilities instigated by the council. Resuming the clashes was a clear evidence that the Riyadh Agreement did not work well. According to Nadwa al-Dawsari, an expert at the Middle East Institute, the Riyadh Agreement will likely be failed because each side of the conflict insisted on its own interpretations of the agreement. While (STC) interpretation of the agreement includes the belief that it should lead to self-determination or independence of the Southerners, Hadi emphasized the unity of Yemen and stated his preference for a federal structure.⁽⁵³⁾

Taking into consideration the different objectives and strategies of the two allies, Saudi Arabia and UAE, and the complete dominance of these allies on their Yemeni proxies, one can conclude that this agreement will not resolve the Yemeni conflict. Nor will it be able to create a strong and unified front against the Houthis or their Iranian ally. Accordingly, the Emirati role in the Yemeni conflict, like that of the Saudis and Iranians, is a destructive one aiming at achieving UAE's interests at the expense of Yemen and Yemeni people.

The global Level

The strategic location of Yemen has always attracted global and great powers to control this country by one or another means. Locating of the southwestern corner of the Arab Peninsula enables Yemen to control Bab al-Mandab, the water strait which links the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and further to the Mediterranean through Aden Gulf. In an era of slow and uncertain communications, trade on such a global scale was impossible without the infrastructures that maritime cities such as Aden provided (Magariti, 2 :2007).

Today, Yemen's location is more significant to both regional and global powers. That is due to the facts that it shares a long border with oil-rich Saudi Arabia, serves

(52) 'The Riyadh Agreement on Yemen: Arrangements and Chances of Success', Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies', November 2019 ,7. Available at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Agreement-between-the-Government-of-Yemen-and-the-Southern-Transitional-Council.pdf>

(53) 'Riyadh Agreement at risk of collapse in southern Yemen', Al-Monitor, April 2020 ,6. Available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/04/2020/tensions-south-yemen-saudi-uae-forces-coronavirus.html>

as a bridge between Arabia and the Horn of Africa, and is well placed to spread or contain the threat of the revolutionary Islam (Gasiorowski, 197 :2014).

The strategic location of Yemen, however, is not the first reason for which the global powers show interest in being close to this country. The activities of the terrorist groups inside Yemen, especially al-Qaeda and ISIS, is regarded by the global powers as a serious threat to the international security. Thousands of the so-called Arab Afghans who fought the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan returned to Yemen with an evolving and dedicated commitment to global jihad.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Training camps for these mujahideen were founded and financed by Osama bin Laden in northern and southern provinces of Yemen (Lawrence, 154 :2006). Many terrorist attacks either conducted inside of or originating from Yemen have been carried out against American, British, and German diplomatic missions, Western oil workers, hotels inhabited by Westerners; an Anglican church, American military barracks in Saudi Arabia, U.S. Embassies in Khartoum and Jakarta, and the French oil tanker Limburg (Clark, 233 :2004).

Yemen's oil and gas are also going to attract global and regional powers. Between 1990 and 2000, oil production increased from 10,000 to 400,000 barrels a day, placing Yemen around twenty-fifth among all countries in global oil exports.⁽⁵⁵⁾ In the mid1990-s, Yemen also started to sign international agreements to develop and export its significant natural gas resources.⁽⁵⁶⁾

The following pages will discuss the motives behind the American indirect intervention in the Yemeni conflict, and the efforts made by some other Western countries to achieve peace in the country which has been torn by wars and conflicts.

4.1 The United States

Under the Cold-War, the foreign policy of the United States in the Middle East rotated around three pivots: containing the Soviet expansion, ensuring the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, and protecting Israel (Binnendijk, 123 :2016). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States replaced the fight against the communist bloc with a new fight against terrorism, especially the Islamic extremist movements. To achieve two of their three strategic objectives, the Americans should increase their influence in Yemen. With regard to fighting terrorism, Yemen provided a safe haven for anti-American Islamist armed groups, such as al-Qaeda in Arab Peninsula and ISIS. To drain the sources of terrorism, as the Americans claim, they should attack the terrorists in one of their main strongholds in the Yemeni territories. And to ensure the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, they should have some presence near to Bab al-Mandab where millions of barrels of oil

(54) Andrew Higgins and Allan Cullison, "Friend or Foe: The Story of a Traitor to al Qaeda," Wall Street Journal, December 2002 ,20, p. A1

(55) "Yemen's Oil Production Climbing, Potential Great," Oil & Gas Journal, March 2001 ,5, p. 82

(56) Department of Energy, Country Analysis Brief, Yemen, "Natural Gas," October 2005.

transferred every day.

However, the American desire to have a military presence in the region is not as strong as it has been before several years. The decline of this desire is due to the fact that the US oil production witnessed a striking increase during the last decade. This abundance of American oil reduced the strategic importance of the Gulf oil for the United States. Moreover, according to many politicians and analysts, the military presence in the Persian Gulf costs the United States more than the value of the Gulf oil. As argued by Charles Glaser and Rosemary Kelanic, the United States can cut its defense budget by %15 if it gives up the military presence in the region.⁽⁵⁷⁾

With regard to the strategic objective of fighting terrorism, the United States seems in need for allies in Yemen and the entire region. That is because the central government does not have the capacity to fight such powerful armed groups which are supported by more than 50,000 tribesmen (Robert, 31 :2005). Given the Yemeni central government is so weak while the Yemeni territory is harboring tens of thousands of terrorists, it was inevitable that American military and civilian personnel would be threatened in there (Zenko, 78 :2010).

Al-Qaeda has carried out many attacks against American targets in Yemen. The most painful one took place in 2000 when the naval destroyer U.S.S. Coll was targeted by a suicide attack with a sturdier speedboat that was laden with a six-hundred-pound shape-charged RDX explosive. This attack resulted in the killing of seventeen sailors and wounding thirty-nine others (Benjamin, 323 :2002).

After the terrorist attacks of September 2001 ,11, the Bush's administration adopted a new strategy of fighting transnational terrorism. On the basis of this strategy, the United States allowed itself to attack any country suspected of harboring terrorist groups. This came as a response to the fleeing of many al-Qaeda's members of Afghanistan, after the fall of Taliban, to other Muslim countries. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld made it clear that "there are, obviously, a number of countries that have active al Qaeda cells, and Yemen is one."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Yemen was one of the countries which viewed by the Americans as a safe haven for al-Qaeda fighters. Thus, Ramsfield's deputy, Wolfowitz, noted specifically: "There are incredibly significant back regions of Yemen. That's a case of an ungoverned piece of a country".⁽⁵⁹⁾

The United States, however, could not rely on the former president Saleh in fighting al-Qaeda inside Yemen. That was because the relationship between the Americans and Saleh has witnessed a period of tension starting from 1990 when

(57) F. Gregory Gause, III, 'Should We Stay, or Should We Go? The United States and the Middle East', International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), September 2019. Available at: <https://www.iiiss.org/publications/survival/2019/survival-global-politics-and-strategy-octobernovember-02-615/2019-gause/>

(58) Department of Defense, "Secretary Rumsfeld News Briefing in Brussels," December 2001 ,18.

(59) James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Sees Battles in Lawless Areas After Afghan War," New York Times, January 2002 ,8

Saleh supported Saddam Hussein during the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and continued till 1994 when Saleh crushed the southern opposition. Moreover, the United States has always sided with the Saudi Arabia, which had border disputes with Yemen under the rule of Saleh (Kostiner, 105-93 :1996). For his part, Saleh could not cooperate completely with Washington in the War on Terror, and that was due to the fact that, to some extent, the fundamentalist groups served Saleh in containing his secular foes, especially the southern socialists. In addition to that, al-Qaeda was supported by many Yemeni tribes with which Saleh did not like to have conflicts. As a result of such a complicated situation, the Americans had no options but to launch drone strikes against the active members of al-Qaeda in Yemen from other territories.

After the resignation of President Saleh in 2011, the United States showed remarkable support for his successor, Hadi, who was very welcomed by Saudi Arabia, the historic regional ally of Washington. This support continued after the collapse of Hadi's government in September 2014 and his fleeing to Aden and then to Saudi Arabia in 2015. When Riyadh formed anti-Houthi coalition and started a military campaign to restore the government of Hadi, the American administration showed an efficient backing for the Saudi-led military campaign (Decisive Storm). This backing included "providing training and intelligence support, and selling billions of dollars in weapons to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which has become Washington's largest weapons buyer".⁽⁶⁰⁾

A number of reasons are behind the American support for the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis. The most important is that the United States does not like Yemen to be an Iranian ally because such alliance would impose a serious threat to the American interests in the Persian Gulf as well as to the US allies in the region, especially the GCC states. Thus, the Iranian influence on Yemen could result in an Iranian dominance over the Bab al-Mandeb strait through which a significant part of Western demanded energy is transformed. Moreover, the Iranian-Yemeni alliance would ease the Teheran's objective of exporting its revolutionary model of Islam to the region's countries. Furthermore, this severe armed conflict would provide the United States with good opportunities for selling weapons and thereafter for rebuilding the country.

However, the Americans did not involve in the Yemeni conflict directly but through an efficient military and diplomatic support for the Saudi-led coalition. It was, and still is, impossible for the Americans to find a Yemeni proxy on which they could rely. They realized that no one of the anti-Houthi parties could bear the burden of restoring the government of Hadi. Nor could anyone mobilize enough people behind a strong alternative. Moreover, the American administration also realized that the hatred towards the Western powers in Yemen made the Americans

(60) Mohamad Bazzi, "America is likely complicit in war crimes in Yemen", The Guardian, 3 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/03/yemen-airstrikes-saudi-arabia-mbs-us>

unacceptable ally to any popular political group. Accordingly, Washington preferred distance support for the Saudi-led coalition with intention to eliminate the Iranian presence in Yemen. If it cannot be eliminated, then the Iranians should pay a heavy price for their activities there.⁽⁶¹⁾ Consequently, the Saudis are acting as an American regional proxy which recruits local proxies inside Yemen to achieve common objectives for all of the principal, regional, and local proxies. Accordingly, it is to conclude that the American role in the Yemeni conflict is a destructive one and can do nothing but to make any solution unachievable.

4.2 The European Powers

The roles of the European countries and their attitudes to Yemen War vary with the variation of their interests. Some of these countries exploit the armed conflict to sell as many weapons and munitions as they can. Other countries attempt to help the war's parties find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The UK, Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, and Spain are the biggest arm suppliers to Saudi Arabia and UAE. According to official export reports of 2017, European countries have exported weapons to Saudi Arabia for 17€bn. and to the UAE for 5€bn. Among these countries, the UK (1.572€bn), Germany (477€m), and Belgium (152€m). Gulf arms shipments earned Bulgaria 484€m and Spain 174€m in the same year. Saudi Arabia became Bulgaria's biggest customer for light arms and munitions.⁽⁶²⁾ These arm sales were justified by the war on terror in which the Saudi Arabia and UAE have been involved.

Other European countries, such as Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Finland imposed an arms embargo on countries and groups involved in the conflict. The governments of these countries argue that, according to many non-governmental organizations (NGO), the Saudi-led coalition shows little regard for civilian lives: "A funeral was bombed in October 2016, killing 140; a wedding was bombed in April 2018, killing 13 ,30 of them children; and a bus was hit in August 2018, killing 40 ,51 of them children".⁽⁶³⁾ That is why these countries do not like to take part in the humanitarian crisis caused by the Saudi-led military campaign against Yemen.

Unlike many European countries, Sweden has made great effort to put an end to the Yemeni conflict by bringing the warring sides to the negotiating table. In December 2019, the Swedish diplomacy succeeded in gathering in Stockholm representatives from the three main Yemeni struggling actors: the internationally

(61) "Crisis in Yemen: A Strategic Threat to U.S. Interests and Allies?", Hudson Institute, April 18th, 2019. Available at:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Hudson20%Transcript20%Crisis20%in20%Yemen.pdf>

(62) "Why Is Europe Still Fueling the War in Yemen?", The Nation, October 2019 ,4. Available at:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/yemen-europe-weapons/>

(63) Ibid.

recognized government of Hadi, the Houthis, and the UAE backed forces (STC). The negotiations concentrated on four key issues: a prisoner swap, the creation of a demilitarized zone around the country's vital Red Sea trade corridor, the formation of a committee to discuss the future of the contested city of Taiz, and a commitment for the Houthis and the government to reconvene.⁽⁶⁴⁾ An agreement on ending the fight in Hodeida was signed. At that point of time, this agreement was of high significance for all Yemeni people because Hodeida is the most important seaport in Yemen. Accordingly, demilitarizing this port would allow foreign necessary goods and aids to reach the country, and then to prevent or at least to ease a severe humanitarian crisis.

In spite of the fact that the Stockholm agreement did not resolve the struggle on Hodeida, nor did it pave the way for further negotiations and meetings, it proved that it was possible to bring the fighting parties to a negotiating table. The Swedish attempt was an individual initiative to resolve the armed conflict. This initiative was not made by a great power which enjoys significant influence on the conflict's parties. Certainly, it could have achieved success if it had been supported by other great European powers such as the UK, France, and Germany. History showed that such a deep and complicated conflict like Yemen War require an effective intervention of powers which are able to make the signing sides commit to the agreement they sign.

As already mentioned, the different interests and policies of the European countries in the Middle East hindered the Union from adopting a unifying attitude towards the Yemeni conflict. While some countries, like Sweden and Austria, view the conflict as a source of a severe humanitarian crisis, other countries, like the UK and France, view the conflict as source of profitable deals of arm sales. Accordingly, the former countries try to make peace while the later ones are indifferent so long they can make money through selling weapons to the warring sides.

4.3 The United Nations

Since the outbreak of the Yemeni uprising in 2011, the United Nations (UN) has been attempting to help the Yemenis to find a peaceful solution to their struggle for power. The world organization supported the negotiations between the former government of the President Saleh and the opposition. The negotiations resulted in the signing of an agreement on November 2011, 23 in Riyadh. According to the agreement, which was sponsored by the GCC, Saleh stepped down to his deputy Hadi⁽⁶⁵⁾

The United Nations' neutral attitude towards the Yemeni conflict, however,

(64) "What does the Stockholm agreement mean for Yemen?", The Washington Post, Dec. 2018, 21. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/12/2018/what-does-the-stockholm-agreement-mean-for-yemen/>

(65) Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations. Available at: <https://dppa.un.org/en>

has been changed after the Houthis seized the capital Sana'a and removed the government of Hadi from power. As a response to the Houthi coup, the UN Security Council issued the resolution 2015) 2216) on 14 April 2015 in which it emphasized the legitimacy of the president Hadi's government and welcomed the involvement of the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemeni conflict.⁽⁶⁶⁾ This attitude legalized the Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthis and made the world's organization as an unfair mediator.

The UN's support for Hadi, however, did not prevent the organization from condemning the targeting of civilian people from both sides. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for instance, issued a report in which it directed the attention that "as of November 6,872 ,2018 civilians had been killed and 10,768 wounded, the majority by Saudi Arabia-led coalition airstrikes. The actual civilian casualties were likely much higher. Thousands more have been displaced by the fighting and millions suffer from shortages of food and medical care"⁽⁶⁷⁾,

The United Nations secretary- general António Guterres and the UN envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths made huge efforts to reduce the consequences of such a deep humanitarian crisis. Griffiths has taken part in almost all the negotiations among the warring parties hosted by Kuwait and Stockholm but the UN structure and its lack of enforcement tools prevented it from playing the supra-national role which would enable it to solve problems in the interests of populations at large. Accordingly, it is not a matter of fact to expect that the UN can resolve the Yemeni conflict.

(66) Resolution 2015) 2216). Available at: [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2015\)2216](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2015)2216))

(67) Human Rights Watch, Yemen Events of 2018. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/yemen>

Conclusion

The present Yemeni conflict is one of the most complicated conflicts in the current history. What makes this conflict so complicated is the participation of many local, regional, and global actors in it. The strategic geographic location of Yemen, where millions of barrels of oil a day transferred, attracted external powers to involve in the conflict. Moreover, the ideological, political, and sectarian contradictions among the Yemeni parties and groups open the door for regional and global interventions in Yemen's interior affairs. As a result, the Yemeni civil war turned into a proxy war, where local armed groups fight one another on the behalf of external powers.

In September 2014, the Iranian-backed Houthi movement put its control over the capital Snaa and forced the President Hadi to leave for Aden and then to the Saudi Arabia. This move came as a turning point in the Yemeni conflict. The president Hadi requested help from Riyadh and other GCC states to restore his internationally recognized government. The Saudis did not hesitate to respond to Hadi's request and formed and led a military coalition to fight the Houthis. As a result, the civil war turned into a proxy war, where the Houthis fought on the behalf of Iran while Hadi's forces fought on the behalf of Saudi Arabia. UAE, the closest ally to the Saudi Arabia, allied with the Southern Transitional Council (STC), whose goal was to establish independent political authority in the south. This alliance complicated the conflict by adding another regional dimension.

Each of the three regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE) has its own interests in this conflict. The Iranians sought to have a toehold in Yemen in order to be able to export its revolutionary model of Islam. They also sought to have control over Bab El-Mandeb strait through which it could influence the politics of the entire region. The Saudis sought to restrain the Iranian expansion near its southern border, to prevent any Iranian dominance over Bab El-Mandeb, and to avoid large waves of immigration into its own territories. UAE sought to have control on the southern coast of Yemen in order to ensure commercial shipping lanes in the region, where they already established military bases in Djibouti and Eritrea. UAE is also interested in containing the Iranian influence in the Arab Peninsula. Moreover, the Emiratis are at odd with the Islamic fundamentalist party 'Islah' and wish to marginalize it.

Due to the fact that all the warring groups in Yemen cannot continue the severe struggle for power without being provided with weapons and money, they turned into proxies relying totally on the help of the regional powers which turned into principals dictating their will on their proxies. Thus, the relationships between the principals and the proxies are exploitive ones where the proxies have no option but to fulfil the orders of the principals. The complete reliance of the Yemeni fighting groups on the regional powers makes the peace unachievable so

long the regional powers themselves cannot find solutions to their problems.

At the global level, the United States has been playing the most important and effective role in the conflict since the very beginning. The American position has always been in the favor of Hadi's government and against the Houthis. This position is simply motivated by the hostility between Washington and Teheran. The United States views Iran as a regional evil power threatening the security of its allies and destabilizing actor in a region considered of a high significance for the United States as well as for the entire world.

The American involvement in the conflict, however, is not characterized by direct military invasion or airstrikes as it was in the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya but by a huge support for the Saudi-led coalition and the air campaign it started in March 2015. This support also includes effective diplomatic efforts to isolate the Houthis and the Iranians at the regional and global levels. Accordingly, the American role in the conflict could be regarded as a destructive one.

The European position towards the Yemeni conflict differs from country to country. This difference reflects different interests and policies. Some countries, like the UK, France, and Bulgaria are interested in selling as many weapons as they can, and then peace is not on their favorite list. Other countries, like Sweden, Denmark, and Austria, prefer peace to trade and then try to push the conflict's parties towards peace. Sweden has made the most serious effort to bring the warring groups to negotiation table in 2018. An agreement was signed but did not last for a long time.

The United Nations has also been involving in the conflict since the very beginning but its supportive position to the military campaign of the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis made the later consider the world's organization as an unfair mediator. This position, however, did not prevent the United Nations from condemning the targeting of civil people by the coalition's airstrikes. The organization also made serious efforts to prevent or ease humanitarian crises in Yemen.

The worldwide crises caused by coronavirus and the dramatic fall of the oil prices could force both Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE to make more concessions towards a peaceful solution to the conflict but still there is no sign for such moves.