

Understanding the Downfall of “Arabia Felix”: Tribes and Economic Turmoil in Yemen

Esra PAKİN ALBAYRAKOĞLU*

Abstract

Portraying the recent civil war in Yemen simply as a sectarian clash between Zaidi Houthis and the Sunni central government or a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran is overly simplistic. This explanation leaves out many other domestic and foreign actors as well as micro scale conflicts. Once regarded as “Arabia Felix” (Happy Arabia), Yemen gradually became infamous for its repeated insurgencies, coups and civil wars. Although it has never been easy to interpret the complex dynamics of Yemen’s problems, it can be argued that today’s multidimensional issues in Yemen mostly stem from various tribal aspirations and long-standing economic grievances. Economy is also a significant determinant behind foreign states’ participation or non-participation in the Yemeni crisis. In the end, it is terrorism, which feeds upon the disintegration of tribal system and economic plight, which are major concerns for both Sunnis and Shias alike.

Keywords: Yemeni Civil War (2015), Saudi Arabia, Houthis, Tribe, Economy

“Mutlu Arabistan”ın Çöküşünü Anlamak: Yemen’de Aşiretler ve Ekonomik Kargaşa

Özet

Yemen’deki son iç savaşı Zeydi Husiler ve Sünni merkezi hükümet arasındaki bir mezhepsel çatışma veya Suudi Arabistan ve İran arasında bir vekâlet savaşı olarak tanımlamak, olayları fazlasıyla basite indirgemekle eşdeğerdir. Bu tür açıklamalar, ülke içindeki ve dışındaki birçok aktörü ve mikro düzey meseleleri devre dışı bırakmaktadır. Geçmişte “Arabia Felix”, yani “Mutlu Arabistan” olarak anılan Yemen, zaman içinde isyanlar, darbeler ve iç savaşlarla kötü şöhret kazanmış bir ülke haline gelmiştir. Yemen’in karşı karşıya olduğu sorunların arkasındaki karmaşık dinamikleri tercüme etmek hiçbir zaman kolay olmadıysa da, ülkenin bugün yaşadığı çok boyutlu sorunların temelinde aşiretlerin farklı talepleri ve süregiden ekonomik sıkıntıların yer aldığından söz edilebilir. Ekonomik kaygılar, aynı zamanda, yabancı devletlerin Yemen Krizi’ne müdahil olma veya olmama politikalarını yönlendiren önemli bir faktördür. Ancak nihayetinde, mezhep ayırımı olmaksızın tüm Yemenlileri olumsuz etkileyen aşiret sisteminin çökmesi ve ekonomik darboğaz, en çok terörizmin çıkarına hizmet etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yemen İç Savaşı (2015), Suudi Arabistan, Husiler, Aşiret, Ekonomi

There is a plethora of domestic as well as foreign state/non-state actors with conflicting interests in the latest civil war in Yemen. On the surface, the conflict is served to the world as a sectarian conflict instigated by a resurgent Iran. However, one must look beyond the clichés in order to have a full grasp of the situation in this potential failed state. This article offers an alternative account of the conflict, based on the research question “What are the structural reasons behind the latest Yemeni crisis?” It traces the history of state-sponsored manipulation of tribes for political gains, which hinders their effective functioning as providers of stability and economic support for their constituents in times of wars and poverty. Rather than the victim of a Houthi-Iranian collaboration, Yemen is more

* Assistant Professor, Istanbul Esenyurt University, Faculty of Management and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science and International Relations, E-mail: esraalbayrakoglu@esenyurt.edu.tr.

the creator of the necessary conditions for an insurgency in the light of recurring corruption associated with a weak government and decades-long economic and political marginalization of the Zaidi Houthis, whose aim is only to initiate full-scale reform in Yemen. Blaming Iran and its sectarian brothers in Yemen is a quick way to divert attention from state inefficiency; thus sectarianism becomes a trump card to guarantee the survival of the regime. While foreign powers and various terrorist organizations seek to take advantage of the situation, it becomes harder for Yemen, with each passing day, to edge back from the brink of collapse.

Actors in the Yemeni Conflict

In beleaguered Yemen, there is allegedly as many arms as the country's population today. Tribal ties are stronger than allegiance to this politically and economically ailing state, although these ties are increasingly severed owing to generational gap or conflict of interests among tribes catalyzed by state and foreign interference. Given that terrorist organizations also compete with one another to make the most of this chaos, it becomes even harder to delineate who is fighting whom in Yemen.

Main domestic actors involved in this conflict are the incumbent President, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, who had to resign in January 2015 only to rescind his resignation a month later, and keeps fighting in Aden; Hadi's predecessor Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ruled Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) between 1978–1990 and the unified Yemen between 1990–2012; pioneers of the Yemeni Arab Spring in 2011 called the Houthis, who adhere to a branch of Shia Islam known as Zaidism, making up one-third of the population; Yemen's security forces, which have split loyalties between Hadi and the Houthis; the separatist umbrella organization named Southern Movement (Al Hirak) launched in 1994; Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its insurgent wing Ansar al Sharia, seeking to take advantage of the situation in Yemen; pro-Hadi tribal militia known as Popular Resistance Committees, which joined forces against AQAP and Ansar al Sharia; and finally, pro- and anti-AQAP tribes.¹

There are also several foreign actors with direct or indirect stakes in the latest civil war in Yemen. Main state actors are Saudi Arabia, which believes that Iran is the main culprit to the ongoing turbulence in Yemen and has the backing of a regional coalition of states including Jordan, Egypt and Sudan; Iran, which provides political support and indirect military aid to Houthis, albeit incomparable to its visible presence and activities in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon; and the United States, which, in the context of rapprochement with Iran, provides intelligence and drone aid in order to avoid the wrath of Saudi Arabia. Contrary to Riyadh, Washington prioritizes fighting against the AQAP and Islamic State (IS) rather than the Houthis. As for the IS itself, this terrorist organization seeks to infiltrate the country and eclipse AQAP to further its own interests.²

¹ Transfeld, Mareike, *Political Bargaining and Violent Conflict: Shifting Elite Alliances as the Decisive Factor in Yemen's Transformation*, *Mediterranean Politics*, 2015, s. 1-17, s. 1-3; Eleftheriadou, Marina, *Elements of 'Armed Non-state Actors' Power: The Case of al-Qaeda in Yemen*, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2014, s. 404-427, s. 410-412; *Who are the Houthis of Yemen*, *The New York Times* 20.01.2015; *Yemen Crisis: Who is Fighting Whom?* BBC, 26.03.2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>, (10.04.2015).

² Terrill, W. Andrew, *Iranian Involvement in Yemen*, *Orbis*, 2014, s. 429-440, s. 430, 433-436; Khoury, Nabeel, A., *Yemen: In Search of a Coherent U.S. Policy*, *Middle East Policy*, 2014, s. 100-110, s. 100-102; *Saudi Arabia and Iran Compete in Yemen*, *Stratfor Analysis*, 25.03.2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/saudi-arabia-and-iran-compete-yemen>, (10.04.2015).

The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), who are considered as the main responsible of the latest crisis in Yemen, ruled North Yemen under a system known as the imamate for almost 1,000 years. In 1962, they witnessed the transformation of their country from a monarchy to republic through a coup supported by Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. This triggered a long and bloody civil war to last until 1970. After that time, they continuously revolted against the government for autonomy and for protection of Zaidi religious and cultural traditions against encroachment by the Sunni majority. During the Yemeni Arab Spring of 2011, the Houthis joined the protests against then-President Saleh not for political or sectarian, but for economic reasons. In time, they gradually expanded their sphere of influence and control beyond Saada, eventually toppling the successor to Saleh, President Hadi, for his inaptitude to reinstate order and stability in Yemen.³

The Houthis' priority is to put an end to their decades-long economic and political marginalization and to initiate full-scale reform in Yemen.⁴ Ironically, their major supporter is the General People's Congress (GPC) led by Hadi's predecessor, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was forced to resign from office in 2011. Although Saleh, himself a Zaidi Shi'ite, had fought against the Houthis when he was president, he is now on their side in an attempt to return to politics.⁵

“The Tribes are Yemen, Yemen are the Tribes”

This famous proverb defines very well the background of recent developments in Yemen. Tribal system was existent long before the advent of Islam and creation of Yemen's formal state system. In short, a tribe in Yemen is a social contract among the tribe's members, deriving its legitimacy from a set of traditional rules, which organizes intra- and inter-tribal relations. Contrary to common knowledge, tribesmen are not “foot soldiers of an ethnic army” led by the local tribal leader or sheikh. The tribal social structure is based on the collective responsibility and accountability of sheikhs to their respective communities. Even though sheikhs enjoy remarkable power, influence and wealth, they are not endowed with unquestionable authority over their followers. In fact, there is no absolute chief, but rather prominent sheikhs, who compete to earn this status. Furthermore, the status of a sheikh is not hereditary. A person is acknowledged as a tribal leader over time, by consistently attending to the interests as well as internal and external problems of their communities.⁶

Tribes in Yemen perform some common functions like promoting the welfare of their members and acting as conflict management mechanisms. Throughout years of political instability in the country, tribes have functioned as states, providing stability and economic support for their constituents. This informal system pulled a heavy load from the

³ Day, Stephen, Updating Yemeni National Unity: Could Lingering Regional Divisions Bring down the Regime? *Middle East Journal*, 2008, s. 417-436, s. 420-426; *Yemen Crisis: Who is Fighting Whom?*, Ibid.

⁴Reardon, Martin, The Houthi Challenge, *Al Jazeera*, 10.02.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/02/houthi-challenge-yemen-iran-saudi-150210060324805.html>, (12.05.2015).

⁵Reardon, Martin, Yemen over the Edge, *Al Jazeera*, 24.03.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/yemen-edge-150324052332887.html>, (12.05.2015).

⁶ Dresch, Paul, “Imams and Tribes: The Writing and Acting of History in Upper Yemen”, Khoury, Philip S.; Kostiner, Joseph (der.) *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1990, s. 252-282; Schmitz, Charles, *Understanding the Role of Tribes in Yemen*, CTC Sentinel, 2011, s. 17-21; Al-Dawsari, Nadwa, *Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen*, The Carnegie Papers, 2012, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribal_governance.pdf, (10.04.2015).

state’s shoulders and prevented Yemen from descending into chaos. According to research, around 90 per cent of problems based on issues related with services and natural resources, competition among political parties, conflicts between the government and tribes, as well as sectarian clashes are resolved, upon consent of state authorities, by the Customary Law system. However, although the tribe system has made great achievements as regards containing violence among conflicting actors, it has not found yet a sustainable solution to handle issues of revenge killing. Unfortunately, the tradition of revenge killing endures and causes further complications, even in cases where the original dispute that caused the initial conflict is resolved.⁷

Years of political and socioeconomic change have introduced various challenges to the tribal system that have eroded its effectiveness to arbitrate conflicts. This is especially evident in southern Yemen; this part of the country was an independent communist state (People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen–PDRY) in the period between 1967 and 1990, and its government strictly discouraged tribal affiliations.⁸ Generation gap is another major challenge towards the tribal system. Yemeni population increases exponentially, and the poorly-educated youth complain about limited life opportunities. Thus, younger generations have less understanding of and commitment to tribal traditions.⁹

Another factor diminishing the power of the tribal system is associated with the government’s manipulation of the tribal structure for political gains. Throughout history, the Yemeni regime sought to consolidate its power through incorporating sheikhs into its patronage network and empowering them to undermine those refusing to partake in political corruption. Those sheikhs who are “bought”, live in relative wealth and often relocate in the capital. Thus, many tribesmen became estranged from their leaders. Furthermore, tribes feel ignored and marginalized by the government. They are deprived of benefits from the oil and gas that has been extracted from their areas, and are desperately in need of basic services, such as electricity and water.¹⁰

Economy and Terrorism as Non-Sectarian Issues

As disappointment about the ailing state makes young people prone to violence and conflict, some do not hesitate to act contrary to the wishes of their tribal leaders, and join instead the ranks of reformists, separatists or even terrorists. Likewise, some sheikhs, who refuse to or cannot receive benefits from the government, turn to AQAP as the second best option, in order to meet the demands of their tribesmen. In short, Yemeni tribesmen pledge allegiance to whomever offering the most benefits in terms of money, jobs, and land. This has always been the case throughout the country’s history.

An exemplary case is Tariq al Fadhli, leader of the al Fadhli tribe in the southern Abyan governorate, who announced in June 2014 that he officially joined Ansar al Sharia and turned against the Yemeni government. Having fought with Osama bin Laden against the Soviets in Afghanistan, Tariq al Fadhli alienated some of his fellow tribesmen, who accused him of threatening the stability of the south through alliance with AQAP. The secessionist Southern Movement (Al Hirak), which argues that southern Yemen has been

⁷ Al-Dawsari, *Ibid*.

⁸ Swagman, Charles F., *Tribe and Politics: An Example from Highland Yemen*, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1988, s. 251-261, s. 252-255; Gordon, Sasha, *Abyani Tribes and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen*, *American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats Report*, 2012, http://www.criticalthreats.org/files/Abyani_Tribes_in_Yemen.pdf, (11.04.2015).

⁹ Swagman, *Ibid*, s. 252-254; Al-Dawsari, *Ibid*.

¹⁰ Al-Dawsari, *Ibid*; Gordon, *Ibid*.

neglected during the Saleh and Hadi administrations, also criticizes al Fadhli. In a similar vein, the Awlaki tribe is also fractured into pro- and anti-AQAP camps. On the other hand, some pro-Hadi tribal militia in the South were organized into Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) in 2011 to fight AQAP and Ansar al Sharia. These tribes were initially supported by the Yemeni army's 111th Infantry Brigade. Nevertheless, given the political and economic turmoil in the country, they began to receive lesser support from the government to counter AQAP offensives.¹¹

Corruption of the tribal system is a welcome opportunity for AQAP and Ansar al Sharia, whose numbers have skyrocketed in the past three years. Established in 2009 with the merging of the Yemeni and Saudi branches of Al Qaeda, the Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is perceived by the U.S. as "the most dangerous branch of Al Qaeda."¹² In March 2015, AQAP attacked and took brief control of the town of Al Houta, situated only 30 kilometers from Al Anad Air Base, where U.S. special operations forces were training Yemeni counterterrorism units. The attack on Al Houta led the United States to pull its forces out of the country.¹³ Likewise, AQAP militants in Yemen stormed the center of the Al Mukalla city the following month, and set free nearly 300 inmates.¹⁴

As if this drama was not enough, suicide bombings during noon prayers at the al Hashoosh and Badr Mosques in Sanaa, attended mainly by the Houthis, killed 137 people and wounded 350 others. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the bombings whereas AQAP vehemently denied involving in it.¹⁵ However, the way in which the attacks were carried out bear resemblance to the tactics of AQAP than IS in terms of pre-attack planning and organization. This raises the question whether some hardline factions within AQAP may have switched allegiance to IS, which has recently become a common trend.¹⁶

Even though some Sunni tribes try to curry favor with the AQAP, opposition to Houthis unites them under a common denominator. Nevertheless, the Southern Movement or Al Hirak; an umbrella group for various southern anti-government factions that trace back to the 1994 civil war between northern and southern Yemen, have recently approached the Houthis. The secessionist group also complains about economic marginalization in the south, which generates most of Yemen's oil revenues; illegal acquisition of southern land by northerners following the war; forced retirements from civil and military positions; troop enforcement in the south, and press censoring. Some of their socioeconomic concerns are shared by the Houthi rebels themselves. Nevertheless, Al Hirak's intention is to work with the Houthis within the framework of UN-backed dialogue to create a stable federal Yemen. The Houthis, however, are strictly against any project of federalization.¹⁷

¹¹ Gordon, Ibid.

¹² Gray, David H. ve Titus, Michael, Suppressing the Growth of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: An Examination of the Resurgence of AQAP in Yemen and Policies the United States can Employ to Mitigate the Threat, *Global Security Studies*, 2015, s. 19-28, s. 19-22; *Yemen Crisis: Who is Fighting Whom?*, Ibid.

¹³ *Yemen Crisis: U.S. Troops Withdraw from Air Base*, BBC, 22.03.2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32000970>, (13.04.2015).

¹⁴ Al-Haj, Ahmed, *Al Qaeda Militants Storm Yemeni Jail, Free About 300 Inmates*, *Huffington Post* 04.02.2015.

¹⁵ Al-Mujahed, Ali ve Naylor, Hugh, *Bombers Strike Rebel-linked Mosques during Friday Prayers in Yemen*, *The Washington Post* 20.03.2015.

¹⁶ Reardon, *Yemen over the Edge*, Ibid.

¹⁷ Zimmerman, Katherine, *Yemen's Southern Challenge: Background on the Rising Threat of Secessionism*, *American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats Project Report*, 05.11.2015,

Explaining International Intervention

Economy is also a significant determinant behind foreign states’ participation or non-participation in the Yemeni crisis. A major argument of states interested in Yemen is that this country is strategically important on account of the Bab al Mandab Strait, linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. It stands out as one of the world’s busiest shipping routes, with much of the Middle East’s oil exports passing through this waterway. Ongoing instability in Yemen brings to mind the fearful prospect of disruption in world energy balances. The possibility of a Houthi takeover of the Strait, supported by their sectarian brother Iran, terrifies Egypt and Saudi Arabia in particular.¹⁸

Although Saudi Arabia successfully intervened in Bahrain to crush what it considered as an Iranian-backed Arab Spring in 2011, the situation in Yemen is more complicated. Geographically speaking, Yemen is almost seven times as large as Bahrain. Furthermore, Bahrain has mostly enjoyed administrative stability throughout its history, in contrast to Yemen. In addition, Yemen’s mountainous border regions and rugged terrain stand as natural obstacles to any offensive.¹⁹ Military forces of the anti-Houthi Arab coalition composed of around ten states led by Saudi Arabia, increasingly finds it hard to sustain a prolonged military operation in Yemeni territory despite logistical and intelligence support by Western powers. This is already a great stretch for the West, especially at a time, when defeating terrorism especially the IS in Syria and Iraq is the main goal.²⁰

On the other hand, Yemen cannot be isolated from the Gulf. Many Gulf nationals trace their lineage to Yemen, and the yearly movement of Yemenis north into the Hijaz has existed long before the Saudis took control of this province in 1925 from the Hashemite dynasty. Things get more complicated, given the fact that perhaps half of the Saudi army is of Yemeni tribal origin. Riyadh had already experienced an epic fail in an offensive to support Saleh’s government against the Houthis in 2009. The new Saudi king, Salman bin Abdulaziz, who assumed the post in January 2015, regards the Yemeni crisis as an opportunity to buttress his legitimacy. The crisis is a litmus test not only for him but also for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose functionality is long under question.²¹

For many, Iran is allegedly the main catalyst of the intervention. Saudi Arabia and Iran have long engaged in a series of hot and cold proxy wars throughout the Middle East to undermine each other. Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, the Shia government in Iraq, Shiites living in Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, and now Houthis in Yemen are simply considered by Riyadh as Iranian pawns. It should be underscored that Iranian support to Yemen cannot be compared to its visible presence and meddling in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Having gone through hard times in the face of

http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/yemens-southern-challenge-background-rising-threat-secessionism#_edn13, (10.11.2015).

¹⁸Hadi Loyalists Claim Capture of Key Yemen Strait, Al Jazeera, 01.10.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/hadi-loyalists-claim-capture-key-yemen-strait-151001131134976.html>, (10.11.2015).

¹⁹Stephens, Michael, Yemen is a Defining Moment for King Salman, Al Jazeera, 27.03.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/yemen-defining-moment-king-salman-150327065530744.html>, (12.11.2015).

²⁰ Ottaway, David B., Saudi Arabia Forms a Pan-Arab Sunni Alliance Against the Houthis, Wilson Center Middle East Program, Viewpoints No. 74, 2015, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Saudi_arabia_forms_pan-arab_sunni_alliance_against_houthis_0.pdf, (01.12.2015).

²¹Stephens, Michael, A Big Rethink: Security in the GCC, Al Jazeera, 02.03.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/time-rethink-security-gcc-150302050430990.html>, (01.12.2015).

multiple embargoes, Tehran now enjoys its gains from the recently concluded nuclear agreement in Lausanne. Despite its political support and indirect military help to Houthis, Iran does not seek to lead this group through strict orders.²² As for the United States, which provides logistical and intelligence support to the Saudi-led operation, it is not in a position to engage deeply with Yemen. Washington not only prioritizes the deal with Tehran, but also cooperates with Riyadh's arch-enemy for stability in Syria.²³

However, between 1963 and 1970, Saudi Arabia and Iran had displayed a rare example of cooperation by siding with the monarchists against the republicans supported by the President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Later to be called "Nasser's Vietnam", this war is also associated with Egypt's failure to score a victory against the Israeli forces in the War of 1967. In fact, Cairo is on the verge of overstretching, given its ongoing fight against IS jihadists in Libya and the Sinai Peninsula without much success. Yet Egypt is worried about Houthis threatening maritime traffic in Suez Canal and Bab al Mandab. President Abdul Fattah al Sisi's decision to participate in the coalition can also be interpreted as an attempt to fulfil his promise to protect allies in the Gulf, who have been supporting him since July 2013 overthrow of elected President Mohamed Morsi.²⁴

Oman singles out as the only member of the GCC not participating in the Saudi-led bombing campaign. Omani authorities have argued that Sultan Qaboos spent many months abroad for health reasons and that the Sultanate was tightening its economical belt due to falling oil prices. In return, Muscat offered mediation and humanitarian support. Accordingly, many injured Yemeni receive medical care at hospitals in Oman.²⁵ Having substantially less resources and wealth than its neighbors, Oman refrains from confronting Iran. Oman and Iran share ownership of the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of global crude oil passes. This dialogue also owes a lot to the fact that the majority of Omanis practice Ibadi Islam, a strain of faith distinct from both the Sunni and Shia sects, which Riyadh associates with "heresy".²⁶ Pakistan pursues a similar path. Although Riyadh was a generous benefactor for Pakistan, Islamabad had to announce its neutrality in the Yemeni crisis owing to its ongoing large-scale operation against its own jihadists. However, Islamabad maintains that it is willing to act as mediator between the actors involved in the conflict.²⁷

²² Ghitis, Frida, Houthi Rise in Yemen Puts Saudi Arabia, Iran on Crash Course, *World Politics Review*, 13.11.2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/14429/houthi-rise-in-yemen-puts-saudi-arabia-iran-on-crash-course> (03.04.2015); Reardon, Martin, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the 'Great Game' in Yemen, *Al Jazeera*, 26.03.2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/09/saudi-arabia-iran-great-game-yemen-201492984846324440.html>, (03.04.2015).

²³ U.S. Authorizes Logistical, Intelligence Support to Saudi Operation in Yemen", *Reuters*, 25.03.2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/yemen-security-white-house-idUSL2N0WS04U20150326#4srle8HKz7duMMhA.97>, (04.04.2015).

²⁴ Trager, Eric, Egypt's Yemen Campaign, *The Washington Institute Policy Analysis*, 27.03.2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypts-yemen-campaign>, (04.04.2015).

²⁵ 91 Injured Yemenis Arrive in Oman for Treatment, *Times of Oman* 21.09.2015.

²⁶ Cafiero, Giorgio, Oman's Uncertain Future, *Al Monitor*, 21.10.2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2014/10/oman-sultan-qaboos-future-health-iran-saudi-gcc.html#>, (01.12.2015).

²⁷ Internal Security Concerns Keep Pakistan out of Yemen Coalition, *World Politics Review*, 27.04.2015, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/15628/internal-security-concerns-keep-pakistan-out-of-yemen-coalition>, (03.04.2015).

Conclusion

Although the turbulence in Yemen primarily rests upon tribal and economic issues rather than sectarian, it assumed another dimension with the strengthening of AQAP and the involvement of IS. Terrorism feeds upon disintegration of tribal system and economic plight, which are major concerns for both Sunnis and Shias alike. Nonetheless, whereas AQAP still pays heed to its tribal allies and acts with relative restraint, flourishing of Islamic State inside Yemen may fuel the conflict and increase casualties.²⁸

International efforts so far have served to destabilize Yemen further, since one can talk about multipronged involvement rather than genuine cooperation in Yemen, with each actor seeking to re-design this country according to its own interests. One exception is Oman. Belligerents in Yemen have given a green light to Muscat’s mediation. As a neutral actor, Oman’s efforts to seal a ceasefire and peace agreement among the warring parties is coordinate with those of the United Nations. Muscat has been involved in various hostage releases in Yemen. For instance, in September, Oman brokered the release of three Saudi Arabian citizens, two U.S. citizens, and a British citizen held by Houthi rebels in Sanaa.²⁹

Despite outside involvement for reconciliation, the tide will not turn unless the country’s socio-economic grievances are urgently dealt with through long-needed constitutional reforms. Although Houthis maintain that their utmost concern is to put an end to corruption rather than rule the country, their distribution of favors to tribes and organizing attacks against some tribal leaders do not bode well for the country’s future.³⁰ In principle, tribal sheikhs adhere to peaceful resolution of conflicts. Nevertheless, this approach has some limits, since even sheikhs fall short of offering a panacea for revenge killing. In any way, despite the fractured nature of the tribal culture, working with Yemeni tribes will be the key to any long-term solution to the prolonged havoc in the country.

Eventually, no one seems to be winning in Yemen. Saudi Arabia and its allies’ performance in Yemen is abysmal. Riyadh, in particular, suffers from economic hardship as well. Apart from the Yemen debacle, which has been draining its resources, Riyadh has refused to cut oil production despite more than 50 per cent fall in the price of oil since last summer. Likewise, Saudi Arabia ardently opposes Iran’s efforts to persuade OPEC to cut output. Riyadh anticipated that it could tolerate depressed oil prices for around eight years owing to its financial strength. Low prices would squeeze weaker competitors out of the market and strengthen Saudi Arabia’s political position against countries like Russia and Iran. However, Riyadh, which expected quick and profitable returns from this policy, has reaped what it sowed.³¹ On the other hand, civilian toll rises with each passing day either through Saudi-led air strikes or indiscriminate shelling by Houthis and allies. The Houthis, thanks to smuggling networks, have access to food and fuel to continue fighting. Nevertheless, the country in general is transforming into a failed state with essential public services like water and electricity are in short supply.³²

²⁸ Mendelsohn, Barak, Islamic State in Yemen: Why IS is Seeking to Expand, BBC, 21.03.2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31998682>, (03.04.2015).

²⁹ Vela, Justin, Praise for Oman’s Role as Region’s Mediator, The National (UAE) 21.09.2015.

³⁰ Houthis Abduct Tribal Elder in Yemeni Capital, 28.12.2014, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/haberler/151762/houthis-abduct-tribal-elder-in-yemeni-capital-updated>, (03.04.2015).

³¹ Farrell, Sean, Saudi Arabia can Last Eight Years on Low Oil Prices, Says Former Adviser, The Guardian, 19.01.2015.

³² Salisbury, Peter, As Civilian Toll Rises in Yemen, Houthis and Saudis Just Dig In, World Politics Review, 16.10.2015, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/16967/as-civilian-toll-rises-in-yemen-houthis-and-saudis-just-dig-in>, (02.12.2015).

In sum, belligerents' intransigence is self-defeating in the long run, which only serves to provide new recruits to terrorist organizations. Winning the peace is as vital as winning the war. Unfortunately, no actor is inclined to deliberate on what would happen once the war was over and there was virtually no Yemen, let alone "Arabia Felix", to govern.

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