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Yemen, Factor 14: Conflict Resolution

Yemen: Pursuing Peace To Establish Prosperity

Situated in the southwestern portion of the Middle East lies the country of Yemen. Nestled between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf of Aden, Yemen faces a dire situation when it comes to the nation's food supply. Once depending on petroleum to provide income for the country, oil has become scarce, leading to poverty and instability in the country. A constant shortage of food in the nation has been worsened by the intensifying conflict in Yemen as a result of an ongoing civil war and foreign military presences. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) ranks Yemen as the poorest country in the Middle East, with the conflict further crumbling the infrastructure needed to provide the food required to feed a nation. In order to enhance the food security in a struggling divided country, the warring factions in Yemen must come to terms while the UN passes must pass a resolution to keep foreign military forces out of Yemen. A chance for Yemen to stabilize will make great strides to the enhancement of the nation's ability to feed itself.

“Over both the short and the long term, populations, households, and individuals of countries in conflict suffer disruptions in livelihoods, assets, nutrition, and health.” (Messer, Cohen, and Marchione). Yemen is no exception to this. With a population of 26.7 million people, 1 in 3 of citizens are malnourished (World Food Programme). Since conflict has broken out, those stricken by hunger has been consistently increasing. For children, 35.5% are underweight and malnourished, which places Yemen third in the world for childhood hunger (The World Factbook). The population birth rate is very high in Yemen, with the average family having four to five children. There is a larger focus on males to attend to school, with 75% of males attending primary school and 64.2% of females attending school (UNICEF). Many needs in terms of food and health care are provided through the private sector in Yemen but with the conflict in recent years, the private sector has collapsed, resulting in a significant drop in staple foods--such as flatbreads, lentils, dates, eggplant, roasted sheep and lamb--while also experiencing healthcare services being halved (UNOCHA).

Most of the farms in Yemen are small and family owned. Crops ideally grown by Yemenis farmers are grain, fruits, vegetables, pulses, qat, coffee, and cotton. Also significant to the food supply of Yemen is the cattle, sheep, and goats raised by farmers. Of the two, the livestock raised is far more significant in terms of food produced domestically rather than crops. Over 75% of crops need must be imported into Yemen (New Agriculturist). Farming provides employment to over three-fourths of Yemen's Yemeni labor force, though 54% of the workforce is in poverty (The World Factbook). With unemployment at 27% and the Gross Domestic Production per Capita at \$3,800, establishes Yemen as the poorest country in the Middle East. (The World Factbook).

Yemen faces both food security issues and economic setbacks due to the difficulties of agriculture. Only about 2.2% of land is arable, which results in drastic domestic shortfalls in crop production, requiring the importation from other countries such as Saudi Arabia (The World Factbook). Given that most of the land is desert, water for the irrigation of crops is critical, but in the last year alone, the availability of water has dropped nearly 49% (Global Food Security Index). These issues have only been compounded by the ongoing conflicts. Fighting among warring faction has ruined arable land, killed farmers, and has divided

the nation so that trade with other countries is no possible. Foreign air strikes have decimated infrastructure for the storage, processing, and transportation of agricultural goods.

The country of Yemen can not be viewed as one nation, but rather three parts controlled by three fractions: the legitimate government, Houthi rebels, and Al Qaeda. For the Yemeni government, oil makes up 90% of revenue for the state (The World Factbook). A portion of this revenue goes towards subsidizing farming operation and obtaining food imports. Pipelines and other critical infrastructure of the oil industry have served as prime targets for opposition attacks, crippling oil production by the government and devastating revenue (Global Security). With the government facing decreasing funds, less and less is available to invest in food security, and with greater percentage of spending being placed on fighting a civil war. The war's resulting instability has decimated the private sector, leaving people without jobs and in the urban setting unable to purchase food. The situation is dire, with 43.7% of the population malnourished (UNICEF). The destruction of farmland and the inability for all parts of Yemen to import claims most of this responsibility. Women are feeling the brunt of this situation, having groups exploit them as a source of revenue by selling them into slavery.

This situation continues to grow increasingly dire, for the conflict in the country continues to escalate. As if the decade long civil war was not enough, within the last year foreign militaries have been conducting extensive operations in the nation. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United States all conduct airstrikes on the respective fractions they oppose. Those airstrikes have decimated infrastructure, within the last year alone agriculture infrastructure being decreased by 23.8% (Global Food Security Index). City markets are being destroyed, leaving so those in urban settings without a source of food, and in the rural setting farm houses and building have been struck. An exceptional problem exists in the region of Yemen controlled by Houthi rebels: Saudi Arabia is enemies with the Houthis, and is denying any trade into the rebel controlled areas (Global Security). Recently all foreign aid groups except for the UN have ceased to provide aid in Yemen due to how unstable the situation is, denying the people of Yemen needed food aid. (UNOCHA).

A political resolution to the conflict would prove boundlessly beneficial for the food security of Yemen. An end to foreign coalition airstrikes would immediately cease the indiscriminate mass destruction of infrastructure, in particular agricultural, and allow for it to be repaired. Restrictions and embargoes on trade would be lifted, allowing for the needed food to be imported. Most importantly is ending the civil war itself. The decades of fighting have long kept Yemen from stabilizing. An end to the fighting would mean preservation of farmland and the lives of farm workers. The government could dedicate full resources, instead of conflict, to resolving food security, dedicating new funding to farmers, advancing farming techniques to better promote productivity of the land, and drilling new wells to establish a source of fresh water for livestock and irrigation. Aid from more relief groups, as safety is no longer as great a concern, would continue relief work in the country.

“Armed conflicts are enemies of food security” (World Food Summit). Now comes time for the United Nations (UN) to take immediate action. They hold the ability to pass an international referendum to declare Yemen a military no-zone. The assembly should establish a military no-fly zone over the country, enforced with the threat of sanctions for violating. Even further, declare Yemen a demilitarized zone, off-limits to any foreign military force except for a UN peacekeeper force to promote security and enforce the demilitarization. Negotiations among the fractions need to occur. have the Houthi rebels and the government sit down together and settle their difference with diplomacy. In the past, talks experienced great cooperation and has nearly worked, Houthi ceased talks in the end as Saudi Arabia provoked them

with airstrikes (Global Security). This time around there would be no interference from outside players, other than the UN to motivate and a continual progression with talks.

Ultimately it is the Yemeni people that must decide for themselves their fate. Will they cease to support rebellions and terrorist cells? The people at all levels of social class and influence play a major impact on Yemen as a whole. If these people truly unify, truly work together, they will progress as a people. With unification and progress, the looming issue of food security will be address, bringing an end to the crisis. It naturally will not occur overnight, for much lost ground must be covered, by with time the country can rise above its poverty. Reinvest money into fixing and modernizing technology and infrastructure. Research practices that makes the limited arable in Yemen useable once again and find way to enhance non-arable land for crops. Subsidize farmers, don't let them go under. With the correct political resolve this will be achieved.

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