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Yemen, Human Rights

Yemen: Implementing a Unique Response Plan to the World's Worst Humanitarian Crisis

Yemen, a poor Arab nation, has undergone a terrible civil war that has set the already underdeveloped country over the edge into a complete humanitarian crisis. Before the Yemeni civil war, Yemen was improving its social programs to become less underdeveloped. Due to these improvements enrollment in schools rose to nearly 93%, the number of forced marriages with children was going down, and women's rights were improving (Swartz). The country was still underdeveloped, but conditions were improving. Things changed drastically when the civil war began. Once the Yemeni civil war began violence against women rose 63%, and enrollment in schools declined by around 33%. Yemen now has nearly no clean water, not enough food to support its population, an ineffective health care system, an ineffective government, and has many families who cannot afford food for themselves. Jihadists took advantage of Yemen's weak government and took control of much of the country. Al-Qaeda launched a massive campaign to take over Yemen's central government and it nearly worked. By the end of 2016, Al-Qaeda claimed 36% of Yemen and had begun a new branch of Al-Qaeda called AQAP, or Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. ISIS had worked with Al-Qaeda to do this which meant ISIS also held a strong presence in the country. ISIS has become notorious in Yemen for bombing embassies and ports to slow humanitarian aid ("World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Yemen.").

Background information:

The demographics of Yemen are crucial to understanding how Yemen became this way. The country of Yemen is placed between the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, as many other countries in this area Yemen is mostly desert, with an extremely harsh and arid climate in the east and a more tropical and mountainous climate in the west. The vast majority of the Yemeni population lives in the Asir Mountains in the northwest area of the country, this region has a more sustainable and comfortable climate. The Asir Mountains have the most fertile ground in Yemen, meaning agriculture is vital to this region. In fact, most Yemenis work on farms, earning around \$2,300 dollars a year. Most farms produce Qat, a tobacco-like plant, and other farms produce coffee. In more arid areas of Yemen workers herd instead of plant. Moreover, Forty-two percent of the land in Yemen is used for herding purposes. Men make up the majority of Yemen's workforce, as Yemen is a patriarchal country, meaning nearly all families are run by the father ("The World Factbook: YEMEN."). The average family size in Yemen is seven people with two parents and five children (*Yemen 2013 National Health and Demographic Survey Key ...*). This means women in Yemen oftentimes do not work outside of their home. The population of Yemen is 28 million, with 36% of the population living in urban areas and 64% of the population living in rural areas. Virtually all Yemenis are Muslims with 65% being Sunni Muslims, and 35% are Shia, most Yemeni Shias follow Zaydism, a form of Shia Islam closest to Sunni Islam ("The World Factbook: YEMEN."). Bread is a major staple food for families in Yemen. This is a problem because wheat cannot be grown in Yemen easily, as most of the country does not have enough water to grow it. This means that most of the bread in Yemen is imported. Ever since the war began bread prices have hiked up 60%, meaning many families cannot afford bread anymore. This price increase is caused because many ports are currently warring zones, meaning that less food gets imported and the price of food increases. Most food in Yemen is like this, in fact, 90% of all food consumed in Yemen is imported (Tinka).

The first ideas of a civil war in Yemen began in 2010 during the Arab Spring, which was a series of protests around the Arabian peninsula and North Africa for more democratic governments. The then president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was widely thought to be using his rule over the country to increase his personal wealth, also being accused of rigging elections to maintain his power, as he had

remained president since the unification of Yemen. With Yemen being one of the least developed countries in the world these findings caused mass outrage among Yemenis. Protests took place across Yemen, causing President Saleh to resign from office to prevent a coup. Saleh's Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was then appointed as President of Yemen and the protests began to die down. Yemen then remained relatively peaceful until 2014. In 2014 a separatist organization called the Houthis, a group based in the Yemeni state of Saada, began a campaign for reinstating support to Yemen's oil production. The Yemeni government had decided to remove a subsidy for the production of Yemeni fuel, which would have left communities involved in the Houthi movement without a source of income. The Houthis also wanted Zaydi-Shias to be equally represented in the Yemeni government, as Zaydis considered themselves suppressed by the Sunni-led government. The Houthis then protested in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, to bring attention to these problems. This protest began in late 2014 and lasted several months. The protest turned violent quickly. When the protest turned violent the Houthis had begun planning on taking over Sana'a and other nations began making plans in case if the protest turned into a civil war. On March 2015, the Houthis took control over the capital and accordingly placed the President of Yemen and the Prime Minister of Yemen under house arrest. The President of Yemen fled the capital with the Prime Minister to Aden, a large city in Yemen, before traveling to Saudi Arabia to avoid their capture. Once the President was safe he stated that Houthis have not taken control of the government and declared war against the Houthis. The former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, had chosen to support the Houthi rebels, causing confusion on who was fighting whom in this war. In the beginning of the war, most Yemenis supported the Houthi movement as they were seen as a noncorrupt and purer government, which was supported by a famous political figure, but that support dwindled quickly due to the Houthi movements harsh governing beliefs (Winsor). The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States have sided with the Yemeni government while Iran, China, and Russia have supported the Houthis. This civil war has also turned itself into a part of the ongoing cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, making the civil war even more complicated in addition to creating more human rights violations, as both Saudi Arabia and Iran desperately want their side to win the war to have control in that area the two countries are using brutal military tactics to win the war (Riedel).

Societal Needs and Human Rights:

Basic societal needs have become unmet since the war began, with needs like education, health care, and access to clean water declining rapidly to the point of a total breakdown. A good example of the diminishing of societal needs in Yemen is women's rights. Many young girls have been taken as a victim of forced child marriage, this number has only gone up since the start of the war. There is often a dowry in place, this means an exchange of goods for the marriage of the child. Both girls and boys in Yemen often cannot attend school because the schools near them have either been destroyed or taken over by soldiers, these reasons have caused over 1,600 schools to shut down. These factors have caused more than one-third of children attending school to drop out (Moheydeen). In addition, Yemen has an extremely poor health care system. Yemen imports 100% of prescription drugs meaning medications are now becoming scarce due to the war. The healthcare system in Yemen has now been reduced to essential, life-saving services, only. Hospitals have become major targets for air strikes in the civil war causing nearly 23% of hospitals to be destroyed. Non-Government Organizations like the World Health Organization and the International Red Cross are providing assistance but these organizations' workers are often targeted and killed. They are seen as foreigners and enemies to the soldiers' cause ("Health System in Yemen Close to Collapse.").

Access to clean water is an extreme struggle in Yemen, causing dehydration and nonpotable water-related illnesses throughout the country. An estimated 19.3 million Yemeni people have no access to clean water. The main source of potable water in Yemen is from desalination plants. Many of those plants have been targeted and destroyed due to the war. Most notably the desalination plant providing water to Taiz, one of

Yemen's largest cities, has been destroyed, causing most in Taiz to have no more drinking water. Another reason for the lack of access to clean water is the irresponsible water use when growing Qat, a narcotic plant similar in effects to chewing tobacco. Qat needs a lot of water to grow, causing farmers to use fresh, potable water to grow the plant. Too many Yemenis have become addicted to Qat, putting the need of watering a thirsty plant above saving people from dehydration ("Yemen."). The lack of clean water in Yemen and the state of Yemen's health care system has created what is widely considered the worst cholera outbreak in modern history. Nearly one million Yemenis have been infected with cholera and approximately two thousand Yemenis have died (Winsor).

Human rights in Yemen are often overlooked, but understanding the human rights violations in Yemen is a key part of understanding the entirety of the struggles Yemen is facing. Most presumably, human rights violations are by far the largest factor in why Yemen has not recovered from their ongoing humanitarian crisis. Saudi Arabia is the largest offender of violating human rights in this war. Saudi Arabia has placed landmines on roads leading to needy parts of Yemen so that humanitarian agencies cannot help safely. Saudi Arabia has also taken over Yemeni ports and restricted supplies in and out of the country, including food and medicine, causing a decline in the economy and near famine across the country. Sadly, these are not the only human rights violations committed by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has been responsible for more than 100 human rights violations just in one month's time. This includes airstrikes against civilians, airstrikes against Houthi controlled water treatment plants, hospitals, and schools ("Yemen Is Suffering at the Hands of Saudi Arabia - and the UK Is Profiting."). Although Saudi Arabia is the main cause of human rights violations, most parties involved in the civil war have been accused of violating human rights. Both sides of the war have been found attacking humanitarian aid centers, regardless of whether they are in a war zone or not, the United States has used drones to exterminate Al-Qaeda and killed civilians in the process, Pro-government forces and Houthi forces alike have recruited at least 1,702 children to fight in the war, and deny journalists from entering into the country to reduce the knowledge of human rights violations in the international community. In total, there have been 13,520 reported civilian casualties in the war due to human rights violations. Aside from combat, the war has also caused human rights violations in Yemen's legal system, with over 1,000 wrongful or arbitrary arrests. Yemenis now do not get a fair trial when accused of a crime, are put in damaged prisons, and are targeted for their religion or anything else that makes them different from the majority of Yemenis. Finally, the Yemeni people are often denied basic social rights such as having shelter, buying food, obtaining affordable, quality health care, and getting an education. Both sides of the war have tried to remove these rights from Yemenis, causing mass outbreaks of homelessness, disease, and starvation. All of these violations discussed have pushed Yemen into the dangerous state they are in today (Shamdasani).

Human Rights Violations Solution:

The biggest challenge in the Yemeni crisis will be getting both sides of the war to stop violating human rights. A summit exclusively between the rebels and the government will improve human rights conditions caused by the war. This would work because both sides of the war have expressed concern over human rights violations, but have been pressured by other nations to not work against these violations, both sides have also expressed interest in meeting each other to reduce the tragedies ongoing in their country. In addition, summits between the Houthis and the Yemeni government have brought results bettering the quality of life of Yemenis, but have eventually failed due to random, external factors such as a change of policy in a country providing support in the war and catastrophic natural disasters. This means that a summit would work, as long as there is support from the international community to support the summit and help fix things if something happens that could threaten relations between the two parties. Along with international support of this summit the international community must also help rebuild Yemen. The international community so far has helped very little at improving Yemen, mostly due to the attacks on humanitarian aid throughout Yemen. Since the summit would eliminate the riskiness of supplying humanitarian aid to the country, much more funding would be given to improving Yemen.

Although just giving Yemenis money may be the easiest approach to providing aid, it is not the best way. The Yemeni people need aid in several forms, including teaching Yemeni farmers sustainable agricultural processes, rebuilding destroyed health care centers and schools, sending water to Yemeni families, and rebuilding Yemen's economy so Yemeni civilians can be independent again. Many international organizations have developed plans to do these things, but these are nearly impossible to carry out, for acts against humanitarian agencies discussed earlier. At the summit, much work must be done to begin to repair Yemen. The most important thing in this summit would be to allow humanitarian aid throughout the country, providing hope to the Yemeni public that they can return to their lives before the war. Secondly, the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels must allow an unbiased human rights watchdog to monitor the human rights situation in Yemen and persecute human rights violators with the full effect of the law. Lastly, the summit must focus to reduce conflict in the war, this would decrease tensions between the warring parties and reduce the chance of human rights violations recurring. To keep talks focused and nonviolent the UN should facilitate the summit, the UN has done this in the past in Yemen with good results, additionally, the UN has been working with both sides of the war to better Yemeni society and prevent unnecessary civilian casualties. An equally important dilemma in the war is that more needs to be done about other countries meddling in the war, specifically Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia and Iran are currently in a state of cold war, meaning they are competing for power in the Middle East. Recently, Iran fired a missile at Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. The missile was fired from Houthi controlled territory in Yemen. This has only made tensions between Houthis and Saudi Arabia worse. For Yemen to succeed as a nation, it needs to break free from other countries' conflict. This can be accomplished by the Yemeni government not allowing any more Saudi Arabian interference in the war. This would solve human rights violations caused by Saudi Arabia and could make tensions between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels lessen (Riedel).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, The Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels have caused the worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen's history. The civil war has made itself into a political statement for several countries involved, this statement being they will not allow an Iranian-backed rebel group to take control over a country. This has prolonged the war and made it even harder for humanitarian assistance to reach Yemenis civilians. Besides the war, Yemen is one of the least developed nations in the world. Yemen has high rates of gender inequality, political corruption, and human rights violations ("Humanitarian Response Plan: Yemen."). To begin to mend these problems there first needs to be an allowance of humanitarian aid throughout the country. This could be accomplished very easily, as both the president of the Yemeni government and the president of the Houthi rebellion have acknowledged that regulation of human rights are abysmal and more needs to be done to fix it. Without humanitarian aid, this problem will only worsen, with 80% of Yemen's population needing aid to survive Yemenis cannot stand to wait for an end to the war to acquire aid. Yemen needs significant improvements in its food production, water sanitation, healthcare, and education systems as soon as possible. For Yemen to improve those programs Yemen first needs to fix the many human rights violations currently ongoing due to the war. This includes violations discussed earlier, such as air strikes on civilians, unauthorized attacks on hospitals, schools, and desalination plants, and the detention and murder of journalists within Yemen.

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