

Ashley Tibbs
 Waukee High School
 Waukee, Iowa
 Yemen, Conflict
Yemen: A Crisis Forgotten

“War is what happens when language fails.”¹ An eloquent summary of war, Atwood’s words ring true for the countless lives destroyed by the confrontation in Yemen. Conflict within this nation has been brewing for quite some time, tracing back to the 1990 unification of the Yemeni Arab Republic and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, or north and south.² Former president Ali Abdullah Saleh had been in power before the unification as the president of northern Yemen and took control of the entire state. Several factions within Yemen’s south have since protested Saleh’s rule for different reasons. During his leadership, Yemen’s economy declined to the point that in 2011, Yemen’s economy was one of the worst in the world. The lack of stability inspired the uprising that overthrew Saleh and created the new conflict taking place within the nation. The change led to his then-vice president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, becoming president of Yemen. This deal left many in southern Yemen disillusioned with the regime and gave way to the Houthi movement gaining popularity. Though they at first supported reinstating Saleh, the former president broke ties with the Houthis shortly before his death, most likely due to money that was given by the United Arab Emirates. In March of 2015, a civil war broke out and has continued to the present day.

Though there are many powers within the conflict, the war divides into two main groups: pro-government forces and anti-government rebels. The pro-government forces are staunch supporters of the current President and receive support from an international coalition, headed by Saudi Arabia.³ This coalition includes the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, and more. Anti-government forces involve the Houthis, rebel forces from Yemen’s north, and who are backed by the former President, Saleh. President Hadi’s government is the internationally-recognized official government of Yemen and supported, though unofficially, by the United States of America. There have been more than thirteen thousand estimated casualties, many of them civilians targeted by the Saudi-led coalition. Though the West all but forgets this conflict, it has proven to be devastating to Yemen and its citizens.

The country of Yemen remains a developing nation. According to the World Bank, over eighty percent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. With a current population of 28.92 million,⁴ that means over 23 million people in need of help. In 2016, Yemen’s rural community reached almost sixty-five percent of its total population.⁵ Much of this rural population consists of different tribes. Life in rural Yemen consists of poverty and conflict. Most of the country population depends on purchased food, which means food insecurity anytime their access to this food becomes threatened. According to the U.N, Yemen has “been ninety percent dependent on imported food, medicines, and fuel.”⁶ Rural villages become caught between both sides of the war, and they suffer the most. Young men, educated but jobless, turn to the army when they have no other options. Rural women and children from villages targeted are displaced and find their way to camps, like al-Dashin.⁷ Southwest of a city called Taiz, this is a small camp that houses about 120 families displaced by the fighting in southern Yemen. This camp, like many

¹Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*.

²Zachary Laub, *Yemen in Crisis*, Council on Foreign Relations, foreignaffairs.com.

³Ibid.

⁴ *The World Bank in Yemen*, worldbank.org.

⁵World Bank Staff, *Percent of Total Population*, worldbank.org.

⁶UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs, *Ensuring Yemen’s Lifeline*, reliefweb.int.

⁷Al Wazia’a, *Yemen’s silent disaster: a snapshot of life and death in rural Yemen*, IRIN, iriinnews.org/.

others within the poorest parts of Yemen, has no access to desperately needed food and medical supplies. Another such camp, al-Jaharahi, is in similar condition. IRIN wrote a report detailing life in camps like these, stating that there was “no support from aid agencies, no food, no water... [and] no shelter.”⁸ This particular camp is home to more than 120 families, all who fled their homes in rural villages to escape the war. Seventy percent of people in this camp alone are children. One man from al-Dashin camp summarized the precarious situation in two sentences: “We need food. We all need food.”⁹

Life in Yemen, especially rural Yemen, is not comfortable--even for those not directly impacted by the conflict. Yemen’s literacy rate is a low seventy percent of the population. Compared to other Arab nations, like Kuwait--who boasts a literacy rate of ninety-five percent--Yemen lags far behind.¹⁰ The most substantial causes of death in Yemen are Ischemic heart disease, diarrheal infections, and conflict.¹¹ Currently, Yemen is facing one of the world’s worst cholera outbreaks. A diarrheal disease, cholera is usually the result of contaminated drinking water. The World Health Organization states that the epidemic is being driven by “conflict, the collapse of basic public services, and malnutrition.”¹² Nearly one million Yemenis have contracted cholera. Both sides of the conflict have been contributing to the deplorable conditions many Yemenis find themselves facing. There have been reports from the United Nations of Houthi rebels recruiting child soldiers, up to three thousand verified cases.¹³ Saudi Arabia has deliberately targeted citizens during airstrikes and destroyed humanitarian-aided hospitals. The UN’s Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen calls these airstrikes “proof of the complete disregard for human life that all parties... continue to show in this absurd war.”¹⁴

Those most impacted have been displaced or blockaded to the point of starvation. The U.N. reports almost 2.4 million Yemenis have fled their homes, whether to somewhere else in Yemen or seeking asylum in other nations.¹⁵ Though the people have a higher risk of death, the growth is some of the highest in the world-- at 2.9%, meaning the population will likely double in twenty-five years.¹⁶ With much of the nation at an already low standard of living, finding ways to sustain an increased population in a time of intense conflict will become a significant problem. Various organizations, such as the World Health Organization, United Nations Children’s Fund, and OXFAM International are donating time, money, supplies, and more to the struggling people of Yemen: however, resistance from both sides are making it hard to get people the help they need. The UN has stated that if “[they] cannot gain greater access, and the violence does not subside, the cost in lives will be incalculable.”¹⁷

Given all of this information, we must ask ourselves the question: what can be done to help the people of Yemen? Humanitarian aid alone is no longer enough; organizations like WHO and UNICEF are facing incredible resistance from both sides. The Saudi-led blockade decreased the number of supplies coming into Yemen, and constant airstrikes have destroyed schools, hospitals, and even entire cities. The World Health Organization said this of the rapidly declining situation in Yemen: “Without peace, there will be no end to the suffering of the people.”¹⁸ The only way to ultimately end the growing famine in Yemen is to bring peace to the nation.

8Ibid.

9Ibid.

10*Yemen Literacy--Demographics*, IndexMundi, indexmundi.com.

11*Yemen*, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, healthdata.org.

12*What to Know About the Massive Cholera Outbreak in Yemen*, Time Magazine, time.com.

13Sarah Sirgany, *Firing guns, finding bodies: Life for Yemen’s child soldiers*, CNN.

14Ibid.

15Leo Dobbs, *Yemen Conflict...*, United Nations Refugee Agency, unhcr.org.

16*Yemen*, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, healthdata.org.

17*Yemen Sliding into ‘Deepening Catastrophe,’* UN News, United Nations, news.un.org.

18Ibid, 2.

Peace, of course, will not be easy to achieve. In addition to the various forces at play outside of the country, Yemen's rural population is still unofficially governed by a tribal system. Within this system, a myriad of tribes are always in conflict with each other, making humanitarian assistance challenging to administer; peace between tribes, rebel groups, and Saudi Arabia's international coalition seems out of reach. In the short term, thousands of people, civilians, are being killed every day. The most important focus right now is getting both sides to lessen resistance to humanitarian aid to keep these people alive for more time. A famine is growing from rural to urban areas rapidly, and it is entirely human-made. Villages and camps for displaced persons rely solely on humanitarian aid, including food, clothing, and medicine. Anything that may block them from receiving this aid will eventually kill them. The Saudi-imposed blockade has prevented the supplies so desperately needed.

First, we need to negotiate with Saudi Arabia and the rebel groups within Yemen to get them to lessen the restrictions on aid and supplies. These negotiations do not necessarily need to include long-term peace talks, as the most critical thing right now is helping the civilians of Yemen. Second, there need to be more efforts to get more supplies into the country. Few people know of the war taking place, and it needs to be publicized; the more people know, the more they may want to help. The U.N. has reported that to save close to thirteen million lives, they need at least 2.3 billion U.S. dollars.¹⁹ This money can find its way to Yemen, but not if the world turns its back on the people of Yemen.

The long-term fight for peace will be much more difficult and severe. The U.N, under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, is permitted to "take actions by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace."²⁰ Per the charter, "such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations."²¹ Realistically, creating another armed conflict with both sides of the war in Yemen would be disastrous. My proposal for the long term is to begin with sanctions imposed on Saudi Arabia, its coalition, and the rebel forces for violation of human rights. The recorded incidents of recruiting child soldiers, raping women in rural areas, and deliberately targeting civilian areas through airstrikes truly leaves few options. It is inherently wrong for an entire civilian population to suffer in a war they did create. Thus, sanctions often imposed by the United Nations, such as "arms embargoes, financial penalties, restrictions, travel bans, the severance of diplomatic relations, a blockade, or even collective military action."²²

Of course, using every single one of these is not a solution to the Yemen question. Collective military action, as stated before, would be far more devastating to the civilian population than what is already happening. Adding a third party army is only increasing the risk of death to non-combatants. A travel ban on people leaving Yemen that are part of certain groups does virtually nothing, as the country is so fractured and torn apart that very little would be done to stop it or change it. The only thing a travel ban would do would be to hurt those trying to flee the country as displaced persons, or refugees. Most likely these people are trying to escape the conflict, or were forced into the army of any such group and are trying to break free.

One of the biggest threats to any sort of lasting peace in Yemen comes north, from Saudi Arabia. The driving force behind Saudi Arabia's role in the conflict is the country's Crown Prince and Defense Minister, Mohammed Bin Salman. He continues to instigate conflict in Yemen as a part of his anti-Iran policy within the area.²³ The U.S. government has repeatedly expressed support for both the Prince and

¹⁹*Yemen*, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, unocha.org.

²⁰Chapter VII, *Charter of the United Nations*, United Nations, un.org.

²¹What We Do, *Maintain International Peace and Security*, United Nations, un.org.

²²What We Do, *Protect Human Rights*, United Nations, un.org

²³Alex Ward, *America is Fueling the War in Yemen*, Vox Media, vox.com.

his policy, including the current POTUS, Donald Trump.²⁴ This support of a conflict that places countless civilian lives at risk is dangerous and frankly, inhumane. The U.S. must step up and “sever diplomatic relations” with Saudi Arabia, limiting their weapons supply and confidence in the entire conflict. Possibly, limiting the spread of the destruction could be caused by widespread agreement from the international community to end support of either side, notably Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's lack of concern for the destruction caused by their airstrikes is disturbing, and they have only fractured Yemen worse than before.

The U.N. will often send “special envoys” and “political missions” to countries in need of negotiation for order and security.²⁵ The most critical factor for long-term peace is not necessarily a compromise that keeps both sides disillusioned, like what happened back in 2015. Peace negotiations must begin with Saudi Arabia and other nations that continue to interfere in Yemen. Until these nations withdraw troops and stop providing support, Yemen cannot begin to heal its fractured government system. After ending outside involvement, the U.N. can send political missions to help Yemen build a reformed system of government, and keep the civilian population safe and secure; improving food security and preventing yet another human-made famine.

Though peace may seem out of reach for the people of Yemen, it is entirely achievable. Each individual actions can create a huge impact in this devastating war. First, we can donate time, money, and resources to the humanitarian groups struggling to provide aid to the rural population. Anything we can donate is helpful. Secondly, we can take a more political viewpoint, and urge U.S. leaders to put an end to the United States support of the Saudi regime. The money and weapons donated by the U.S. have a devastating impact on the war, and we must show the world that we no longer support the complete waste of human life. Though the Houthi rebel groups are also causing widespread conflict and destruction, outside interference with no hope for peace does nothing to improve internal conditions. The only way to rebuild Yemen and stop the widespread famine is to create lasting peace. Leaders all over the world, spurred on by their citizens, must urge Saudi leaders and Houthi rebels to end the senseless fighting that has Yemeni citizens trapped in the crossfire. By creating awareness of the war, we as individuals can create a lasting impact. Because the war is often ignored in Western media, groups who favor peace in Yemen are lacking the support needed to create actual change. By becoming informed and outspoken, people all over the world can raise awareness of the fighting and urge their leaders to help end the fighting.

Dr. Norman Borlaug was ahead of his time when he stated that “food is the moral right of all who are born into this world.”²⁶ His words apply to every person alive, including those civilians in Yemen, whose involvement in the conflict is not necessarily a choice. As a result of this war, the essential rights Dr. Borlaug recognized have been threatened and taken away without a thought. The Saudi-led blockade, the resistance of rebel groups, and the war itself is deplorable and is destroying the men, women, and children of Yemen. Every single problem has been entirely human-made in this country. Until something is done, thousands more people will die due to the indifference from those who can, but refuse to, take action.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid, 3.

²⁶*Rotunda*, World Food Prize, worldfoodprize.org.

Works Cited

- “After 1,000 Days of Conflict, Yemen Sliding into 'Deepening Catastrophe,' UN Agencies Warn | UN News.” *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/640802-after-1000-days-conflict-yemen-sliding-deepening-catastrophe-un-agencies-warn.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Yemen Uprising of 2011–12.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 23 Nov. 2016, www.britannica.com/event/Yemen-Uprising-of-2011-2012.
- “Daily Life, a Struggle for Survival in Yemen.” *Daily Life, a Struggle for Survival in Yemen* | *Oxfam International*, www.oxfam.org/en/crisis-yemen/daily-life-struggle-survival-yemen.
- Deutsche Welle. “Yemen's War Explained in 4 Key Points | Middle East| News and Analysis of Events in the Arab World | DW | 11.08.2017.” *DW.COM*, www.dw.com/en/yemens-war-explained-in-4-key-points/a-40056866.
- “‘If the War Doesn't Kill Us, the Food Prices Will.’” *IRIN*, 2 Mar. 2018, www.irinnews.org/feature/2018/01/10/Yemen-if-war-doesn-t-kill-us-food-prices-will.
- Jazeera, Al. “Yemen: Who Was Ali Abdullah Saleh?” *Saudi Arabia News* | *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 5 Dec. 2017, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/yemen/2011/02/201122812118938648.html.
- LLC - Ames. “Rotunda.” *The World Food Prize Foundation*, www.worldfoodprize.org/en/hall_of_laureates/explore/rotunda/.
- “Maintain International Peace and Security.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/maintain-international-peace-and-security/.
- “Overview.” *World Bank*, www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview.
- Sifferlin, Alexandra. “Cholera in Yemen: What to Know About the Outbreak.” *Time*, Time, 26 July 2017, time.com/4874345/yemen-cholera-outbreak/.
- Sirgany, Sarah El. “Firing Guns, Finding Bodies: Life for Yemen's Child Soldiers.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 3 Feb. 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/02/02/middleeast/yemen-child-soldiers-

[intl/index.html](#).

United Nations. “Yemen Conflict Leaves 2.4 Million Forcibly Displaced.” *UNHCR*,
www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/3/56ded9399/yemen-conflict-leaves-24-million-forcibly-displaced.html.

Ward, Alex. “America Is Fueling the War in Yemen. Congress Is Finally Pushing Back.” *Vox*, *Vox*,
 14 Nov. 2017, www.vox.com/world/2017/11/14/16648848/yemen-congress-trump-saudi-salman.

“Yemen: ‘Humanitarians Face Unacceptable Obstacles from All Sides in Carrying out Relief Efforts’ - *OCHA Director of Operations* | *OCHA*, www.unocha.org/country/top-stories/all-stories/yemen-humanitarians-face-unacceptable-obstacles-all-sides-carrying-out-relief.

“Yemen in Crisis.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations,
www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis.

“Yemen.” *Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation*, www.healthdata.org/yemen.

“Yemen Literacy.” *Yemen Literacy - Demographics*, www.indexmundi.com/yemen/literacy.html.

“Yemen.” *Yemen* | *OCHA*, www.unocha.org/yemen.

“Yemen's Silent Disaster: A Snapshot of Life and Death in Rural Taiz.” *IRIN*, 6 Mar. 2017,
www.irinnews.org/feature/2017/03/01/yemen%E2%80%99s-silent-disaster-snapshot-life-and-death-rural-taiz.