

Lillian Hughes

Northwest High School

Omaha, NE

Yemen, Conflict

Yemen: Silent Starvation

Yemen is a middle eastern country bordered by both Oman and Saudi Arabia with a population of approximately 28.25 million people. Although it has widely been considered the most impoverished nation in the Arabian Peninsula, it is said to have some of the most fertile land in the region due to a wide range of arable climactic zones. It also has access to both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. These both provide abundant resources for its oil, fishing, and agriculture industries that are so essential to its economy. In fact, the agriculture industry makes up 64% of the workforce and is nearly enough to meet domestic demand. It has all the trappings of a country that could compete globally under the right circumstances. And yet it suffers the most extreme humanitarian crisis in recent history and perhaps one of the most devastating in all history to date. In fact, an estimated fourteen million people are at risk for starvation in the battle against widespread famine. Families and entire communities are being torn apart due to a severe shortage of food and are completely helpless to stop it. In order to end such a horrific crisis, one must know its cause. One of the chief causes of the famine in Yemen is the Civil War.

Beginning officially in 2015, the Yemeni Civil War is the result of political unrest following the removal of power from Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011. Yemen had already faced problems ranging from food insecurity, to mismanagement of natural resources, to crumbling infrastructure. Saleh did very little in the people's eyes to mitigate these issues, and amassed large sums of money that he hid away. During his presidency, a group known as the Houthi movement formed, who heavily criticized his alliance with the United States of America and charged him with financial corruption. They advocated for his removal. The ultimate loss of his power, however, did not solve the problem. The new president, Abdrabbuh Monsour Hadi, struggled immensely to deal with those same issues, and the Houthi movement attacked upon seeing his weakness. This led to them controlling the Saada province and surrounding areas while the president controlled the rest of the country. With the growing threat from this movement, Hadi soon fled, and surrounding countries were forced to step in. Various militant groups took advantage of the weakened state of the government and began attacking as well; thus, began a war.

Since its beginning, the war has had a devastating effect on the Yemeni people. The numbers paint a grave picture: 22.2 million in need of assistance, approximately 17,000 civilian casualties since March of 2015, and two million displaced people. These are all people that have nowhere to go, with no government to protect them and no home to return to. The cost of the war? \$14 billion. Bridges, hospitals, schools, and homes have been hit by airstrikes. The healthcare system

in Taiz, the third largest city in the country, has collapsed. Over 1,500 schools are damaged or being used as shelters for the most vulnerable victims of this conflict. A cholera outbreak beginning in 2016 is the worst in history, with 10,000+ new cases occurring every single week. Total outbreaks go into the 200,000's. Yemen does not have the economy to help its own people, especially considering the complete breakdown of its infrastructure. War and sickness essentially threaten the entire country and could destroy it. It is easy to see why the forecast for Yemen is so foreboding. These issues combined can be a death sentence for a nation. However, there is a much larger problem that has arisen from these tragedies: the famine.

The famine has been going on since the Civil war. The UN stated that it could become one of the worst in living memory. This is due to the destruction caused by the war. Because of the bombings and constant attacks, many people are unable to travel into the remaining cities to access food. They are often homeless, have no money, and cannot even make it to stores that have food available. Much of the industry has been impacted severely by the displacement of people. Another issue is that, due to destruction of ports and roads leading into Yemen, much of the aid other countries try to provide do not make it into the country. This aid ends up being wasted despite the best efforts of the countries that provide it. Essentially, food is inaccessible, and the millions that are dependent on aid cannot receive it. Women and children are suffering the most, with 3.3 million suffering malnutrition. In the worst of cases, a mother is unable to breastfeed her child because her body does not even have the nutrients to produce breastmilk. This is the reality in Yemen every day. Yemen is "no longer a functional state," being unable to provide for its own citizens any longer, even with the little aid it receives. The war is directly responsible for the famine, because it has tanked the economy, destroyed ports and major roads, and displaced large numbers of innocent people.

Such a complex issue requires an equally complex solution. It goes without saying that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach here. It is important to start at the bottom and work up. The following solution is a possible series of steps to take in order to mitigate the issues created by Yemen's civil war. The very first step is to begin managing the widespread sickness and short-term food shortage. Doctors Without Borders, an independent organization working in over 70 countries, provides life-saving medical care as well as research and advocacy for the communities it serves. It has made a huge impact on Yemen through its involvement in the war. It functions primarily through donations, meaning that if more money is put into its services, it can expand and provide more relief. It should work closely with governments to receive grants, public awareness, and resources necessary to expand. Short-term food shortage can be solved by reopening and expanding ports. Existing ports such as the Salef and Hudaydah ports should be carefully monitored and kept open. This means increased security, preventative measures, and communication regarding the ports. If a port becomes compromised, measures should be taken as quickly as possible to restore or replace it. Other ports should be opened as well, perhaps in the airports, schools, and hospitals throughout the country, in the case that the main ports do become compromised. The added benefit of opening new ports around the country is that transport of food and basic necessities is much quicker. These necessities do not have to travel as far or face as many risks during transportation.

Aid from other countries in the form of diplomatic and financial support is also important. These elements are essential to ending the war and restoring Yemen to a functioning nation. First, the United Nations has power and resources that Yemen does not, especially in its weakened state. This means that the UN has the ability to negotiate and help solve the problem. It should work with both the Houthi movement and the Hadi government to reach an agreement about how to end the war and restore peace to the people, placing emphasis on a government that is favored by the majority. Facilitating this conversation can help both sides reach an agreement much more quickly. Both sides need to compromise and agree to end the fighting of their own accord. Other threats, such as the militants and attackers from other countries, need to be dealt with promptly to prevent another war. Strengthening the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Yemen is also a good idea, as the country borders it and can easily provide support in case of another threat like the war. It can also provide financial support that Yemen desperately needs to return to a functioning state.

From the financial perspective, Yemen is in a very difficult spot. Even before the war, poverty was a widespread issue, primarily due to the lack of action by its leaders and its inability to compete with the global market. However, it has escalated far beyond what the country has ever seen. Because of the war, most of its people cannot even afford the food when it is available to them, and the damage to the infrastructure and economy is great. Thousands of hospitals, houses, schools, and public facilities have been utterly destroyed by the attacks. This means that even after the war, the country will need a lot of help to regain its step, so-to-speak. All the infrastructure will have to be replaced and improved, and services from outside the country may have to be implemented. The United Nations needs to put money into Yemen's economy, education and healthcare systems, and general restoration. This can be done in many ways. For example, providing grants to farmers and people working in the agricultural industry to assist them in rebuilding their farms, sending volunteers in to help rebuild the hospitals and schools, or even simply giving a sum of money to the Yemeni government to be put into these things. The focus should be on Yemen becoming stable once again.

Another long-term solution is to provide programs that allow Yemen to become independent and thrive in the global economy. Yemen is surrounded by some of the richest oceans in the world and has such a high potential for further agricultural development. Because Yemen has so many resources that are valuable, it just needs a push to become a major player in the world. Providing education to farmers and fisherman about the best practices to increase their yield will help tremendously. It is also important to provide incentives for these farmers and fisherman. Finally, trade should be opened up at the borders once again so Yemen can begin exporting more products and generating revenue that can be put back into its economy. All these steps will allow the country to not only stabilize after the war has ended but become stronger and more sustainable than it ever has been. These steps will also make it less likely that the country will experience a famine of the caliber it is now. Of course, getting its leaders on board with these massive changes will be a key part of their success.

Yemen is a promising country with vast resources and the potential to grow into a powerful, capable nation if it wanted. However, it is suffering greatly due to the civil war that is costing, or will cost, millions of innocent lives. For years this issue has been largely ignored by countries such as the United States and even the media, even though the United Nations has acknowledged the severity of the situation. Average Americans likely know next-to-nothing of the events that have transpired, or how they have come to be. The famine that exists in the country is a direct result of the war. People are starving, dying of preventable diseases, and losing their homes and families. However, there is still time to stop the war before it destroys the country altogether. The strategy involves working very closely with Yemen's government and seeking a quick end to the war itself, before moving to restore its economy and the wellbeing of the people. It is no easy task, but it is the responsibility of every country on this planet. And the United Nations has the resources available to make it happen. Yemen's population is 28.25 million people. How can the United Nations stand by and watch as those people suffer and die? Mothers, fathers, children, teachers, doctors, people. These are all people that deserve help. It is time they receive it.

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