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# Yemen Crisis: Causes, Threats and Resolution Scenarios

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## Yemen Crisis: Causes, Threats and Resolution Scenarios

*The events in Yemen has long remained in the shadow of the numerous crises in other Middle Eastern countries. Nevertheless, the Yemen crisis carries threats that have already started to affect its neighbours in the Arabian Peninsula and which might affect the interests of global actors in the future. The situation in Yemen has already been identified as one of the world's largest humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century, causing concerns for the United Nations and the international community. If urgent measures are not taken to resolve the political crisis in the country, the situation could present greater challenges. Russia has been consistent in calling on global and regional forces to work together in trying to resolve the region's problems. The current environment requires new approaches to the crisis in Yemen.*

### Current State of the Crisis and Its Development

Even before the Arab Spring in 2011, the Republic of Yemen and its 28 million people had experienced several military cataclysms that had undermined the country's political system. Two civil wars were of particular significance: the 1994 war between the north and the south, and the 2004–2010 conflict between the government and the Houthis (known as the Ansar Allah movement since 2013). The war facilitated the transformation of an intrinsically culturally driven local movement within the country's Zaidi community, led by the prominent religious leader Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, into a military-political force that received the support of this Shiite community. The war in the south of the country gave rise to a powerful separatist movement among the local population, and the Houthi war paved the way for a religion-fed conflict of identities between the traditional communities and the proselytising radical salafist groups led by the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter forms the religious core of the country's second most influential political party, the Islamic congregation al-Islah.

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*The catalyst for the 2011 revolution in Yemen was the discord within the country's ruling elites that had been simmering from 2007 to 2010 due to the competition for power.*

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That split caused the tandem of the country's two largest political forces, al-Islah and the General People's Congress (GPC), to fall apart. Al-Islah's tribal wing, led by the clan of the al-Ahmar sheikhs, became fierce opponents to the clan of the country's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Against the background of these problems, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), a Yemeni-based terrorist organization, had gained so much strength by 2010 as to be declared the most serious security threat to the United States and Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup>

The expanding anti-terrorist partnership between Yemen and the United States was perceived as a challenge by neighbouring Saudi Arabia which shares a land border measuring over 1500 kilometres with Yemen. Yemen's prospects of becoming a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were effectively suspended, and

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<sup>1</sup> Shaughnessy Larry. U.S. Official: Al Qaeda in Yemen Bigger Threat than in Pakistan // CNN, December 18, 2010. URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/US/12/17/al.qaeda.yemen/index.html>

the 2009–10 political crisis in Yemen was accompanied by the handover of the country's dossier to Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom at the London International Conference in January 2010. The two countries were tasked with stabilizing the regime in Yemen. However, by February 2011, Yemen was engulfed in a powerful, initially peaceful, youth protest movement that threatened to escalate into a civil war with the participation of the army.

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*In November 2011, the Yemen crisis entered the phase of externally managed political transition (a smooth and peaceful transfer to a normal situation) under the agreement known as the GCC Initiative.*

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The process was aimed at implementing a peace plan roadmap under auspices of the United Nations. Over 30 countries and international organizations participated in the implementation of this unique peace plan under the supervision of the UN Security Council. In February 2012, the power in Yemen was peacefully handed over to Saleh's deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who is of South Yemeni descent. As part of the peace plan, all the country's major political actors who had up to then enjoyed semi-legal status were legitimized. The key event in the political transition was the launch of the inclusive National Dialogue, the success of which was largely thanks to the role of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy Jamal Benomar.

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*The controlled phase was interrupted on March 26, 2015 by the military intervention of a Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which also included Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates and received the support of the USA and the UK.*

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The March 2015 transition of the military phase of the conflict into the hands of foreign actors had an extremely negative effect on the political situation in Yemen, effectively splitting the

country into north and south. However, all the efforts of the coalition command to mobilize the south to take part in the military campaign to the north of the 1990 border came to nothing. The backbone of the coalition forces on the ground was still represented by al-Islah units, as well as by Yemeni and foreign mercenaries, who were armed and financed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Now, two-and-a-half years into the war, the humanitarian situation in North Yemen is best illustrated by the following statistics: around 15,000 civilians killed by aerial bombings; approximately 3 million internally displaced persons; 7 million starving individuals; 20 million people experiencing chronic food shortages; and 500,000 people infected with cholera (including over 2500 people who have died from the disease).<sup>2</sup> Yemen's economic losses amount to billions of dollars in direct damage, and the country's GDP shrank by 40 per cent in 2015–16.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Active Phase of the Crisis and the Political Forces in Yemen**

The participants in, and the curators of, the Initiative have failed to reach any progress with regard to the three key issues of the Yemeni settlement: developing a consensus-based solution to transform Yemen into a federal state; eliminating the split in the army caused by General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar's defection to al-Islah in March 2011; and devising a solution for South Yemen's problem that would be approved by the people in the south.

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*As elections approached in late 2015, the race for leadership between the key contenders – the GPC and al-Islah – reached a pitch that gave the Houthis a chance to create, in North Yemen, an alternative third center of power within the revolutionary flank.*

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As a result of this, al-Islah was forced to fight on two fronts at once, and consequently disappeared from the list of leading parliamentary

<sup>2</sup> Compiled from the following sources: 1) Yemen Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (EFSNA) – 2016. URL: [http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/efsna\\_-\\_preliminary\\_results\\_public\\_final1.pdf](http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/efsna_-_preliminary_results_public_final1.pdf); 2) Taqirir hukuki: Al-yaman tahawwala ila maqbara lamaiya, Sabanews, September 2017

<sup>3</sup> Major Macro Economic Indicators. Yemen // COFAS. URL: <http://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Yemen>

candidates. The leading role in this victory was played by the Houthi movement, which chose a nationalist ideology aimed at protecting traditional values. It was not just the Muslim Brotherhood that got defeated; the tribal wing of al-Islah led by Sheikh Hamid al-Ahmar also lost. Al-Ahmar fell out of favour with the leading tribes in the Hashid confederation, on which the al-Ahmar clan had been leaning for over 200 years. Those tribes sided with the Houthis and the former President Saleh.

Witnesses believe that President Hadi's role in this confrontation, which ended in the peaceful introduction of Houthi militants into Sanaa on September 21, 2014, consisted in collaborating with the Houthis "in order to undermine his rivals from the al-Ahmar family, and to remove irrelevant Yemen's Islamist al-Islah party," which had failed to take root in Yemen.<sup>4</sup> Saudi Arabia considered the victory of the Houthis, its primary opponents in Yemen, as evidence that an anti-Saudi alliance with the participation of GPC leader Ali Abdullah Saleh had been formed in the country. The issue of Yemeni identity protection began turning into an acute political problem that involved neighbouring states. The alliance was deemed hostile for standing up against the Muslim Brotherhood inside the country.

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***The conflict of identities has become central in the political process. The objective of preserving the Yemeni historical and cultural features played a decisive role in the alliance's ability to drive al-Islah out and then mobilize the population for offering resistance to the Saudi coalition in the country. This turned the conflict into a patriotic war.***

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In his recollections of personal meetings with the late Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, President Hadi notes that as early as in

2012, Saudi Arabia's attitude towards the Houthis was based on the following premises: "Iran wants to thwart the Initiative for two reasons: 1) because that Initiative was proposed by the Gulf states, and 2) because it was signed in Riyadh, and Iran is against the success of any peace initiatives coming from Saudi Arabia [...] Iran wants to turn Yemen into a corridor for the purpose of destabilizing Saudi Arabia and seizing Mecca and Medina, which is a part of its strategy; its other objective is to establish control over maritime navigation via the Mandeb Strait."<sup>5</sup> These considerations, clearly based on assumptions, are what apparently moved the key Saudi-led curators of the Initiative to discontinue the UN peacekeeping mission in the country by way of a military intervention.

The Arab coalition's massive military superiority over the Saleh–Houthi alliance, coupled with interim President Hadi's request for help from the Gulf states, the support in the south for the military campaign against Sanaa, and the fact that General Mohsen and other al-Islah leaders who had stayed in Saudi Arabia from September 2014 possessed serious clout in North Yemen, all offered opportunities for a sweeping victory in Operation Decisive Storm commanded by Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammad bin Salman. However, as early as May 2015, the United Nations warned about the disastrous humanitarian consequences of air raids in civilian areas. By September 2015, the United Nations had named Yemen as the centre of the gravest humanitarian crisis in the world.<sup>6</sup> In October 2016, Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said: "There can be no humanitarian solution to the conflict in Yemen. There needs to be a political solution, beginning with an immediate cessation of hostilities."<sup>7</sup> The Zaidi populated territories, particularly Saada Governorate, found themselves under the most intense air raids by allied aviation, which are associated with the religious hatred against Zaidis in the minds of Yemeni people. International humanitarian organizations have registered dozens of incidents that fall under the category of military crimes against humanity.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad al-Shalafi. Talking to Yemen's Hadi: A President Resisting Defeat // Al-Jazeera, April 14, 2016. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/04/talking-hadi-president-resists-defeat-160414100122324.html>

<sup>5</sup> Jameeh M. Al-Rais al-Yamani: musammimun ala al-hall al-askari // Al-Quds al-Arabi, September 11, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Yemen Conflict: How Bad is the Humanitarian Crisis? // BBC News, March 28, 2017. URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34011187>

<sup>7</sup> Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien. Statement to the Security Council on Yemen // UNO, October 31, 2016. URL: [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/ERC\\_USG\\_Stephen\\_O'Brien\\_Security\\_Council\\_Statement\\_on\\_Yemen\\_31Oct16\\_CAD.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/ERC_USG_Stephen_O'Brien_Security_Council_Statement_on_Yemen_31Oct16_CAD.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Yemen Events of 2016 // Human Rights Watch, World Report 2017. URL: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/yemen>

This goes both for the destruction of civilian facilities and for the use of prohibited ammunition.

The war in Yemen has progressed far beyond the timeframe identified at the beginning of the campaign, and has taken on a multi-vector nature.

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*Along with the stifling impact of the land frontlines, the coalition air raids and the blockade in the north of the country, where 20 million people live (three-quarters of the country's entire population), South Yemen, which has been considered free of the Saleh–Houthi alliance since August 2015 and unaffected by active hostilities, has succumbed to a grave humanitarian situation.*

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The political situation in the areas controlled by the Saleh–Houthi alliance is noticeably better than that in the areas controlled by the legitimate President, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The consolidation of the population of North Yemen to repel the “Saudi–U.S.” aggression, as it is being described by Sanaa-based media, has been instrumental in the complete ousting of AQAP terrorist groups from North Yemen, and in uniting the people around the unrecognized political regime set up by the alliance in Sanaa. That regime insists that its legitimacy stems from its strict commitment to the constitution and laws of the Republic of Yemen. The country's Supreme Political Council, its government and parliament (elected in 2003) are confident in control of the situation, despite the acute shortages of funds, food and medicine. The relocation of the Central Bank of Yemen from Sanaa to Aden in September 2016 has left public servants and MPs without remuneration. Nevertheless, the massive rallies staged in Sanaa on August 24, 2017 in support of “continuing perseverance in counteracting escalation” staged by the GPC on the occasion of its 35th anniversary and supported by the Houthis, demonstrated the high morale of the defending party. In his speech, Saleh called on the UN Security Council to stop the war in Yemen.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, the political and legal situation in South Yemen, which is controlled by the coalition and President Hadi, has been growing increasingly chaotic.

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*The unforeseen impotence of President Hadi in the south of the country has been the key factor in the political activism of AQAP groups. These groups cooperate with the Muslim Brotherhood and provide support to the coalition in its offensives against the Saleh–Houthi alliance positions in the north.*

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Local tribes have created serious obstacles to the Saudi-led coalition's offensive operations in the direction of Sanaa. These tribes continue to represent a serious traditional military force. They do not formally side with any party to the conflict, and may switch allegiances based on their own assessment of the current situation. The military power of the Hashid and Bakil tribal confederations is easily comparable to that of large military formations. It is impossible for military troops to cross tribal territories safely without the prior consent from the sheikhs. Driven by the desire to prevent splits within their tribes and avoid the fate which befell the tribes that disintegrated under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the AQAP into factions that went on to engage in fratricidal warfare against each other and eventually fell prey to attacks from U.S. Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAV), the sheikhs keep to the principles and values that are well known to them. Any attempts to put these tribes under foreign control for any prolonged period of time are doomed to failure due to the ethnic and cultural specifics of this group of the Yemeni population.

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*The particularist sentiments within individual traditional social groups or regional associations across Yemen, which were a pain in the neck of the state during peacetime, have turned into allies in the face of the military crisis.*

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This is why, despite the fact that the southern and northern parts of Yemen have different attitudes towards the Saudi-led coalition's operation, the coalition command encountered similar problems in both parts of the country. The majority of North Yemen's traditionally informal actors eventually sided with the Saleh–Houthi alliance, which they continue to regard as the

<sup>9</sup> Kalimat Muhimma Li-Zaim Ali Abdulla Saleh. 23.08.2017. Al-Methaq.

true holder of Yemeni statehood (as opposed to President Hadi, who has remained in Riyadh). South Yemen, for its part, supported the local factions of the al-Hirak movement, which announced the restoration of statehood in the south of the country as its goal.

## **The GCC and External Players: Interests and Capabilities**

From April 2015 to April 2016, almost the entire coast of the Arabian Sea, from Ash Shihr in the east to the approaches to Aden, was controlled by Ansar al-Sharia, a terrorist jamaat loyal to the AQAP. The coastal line was cleared of the terrorists at the initiative of the United Arab Emirates, and involved forging agreements with the terrorists. The religious extremists thus returned to their camps, waiting for the next opportunity to arise.

The policies of the coalition command in South Yemen lack transparency. Saudi Arabia is trying to secure the support of groups within the Muslim Brotherhood that support al-Islah while simultaneously letting representatives loyal to al-Hirak assume key posts in the administration and the security services. The United Arab Emirates, a vocal opponent of the Muslim Brotherhood, is training special task force units (al-Hizam al-Amni and Nukhbat Hadramiyah) in South Yemen to fight AQAP and Muslim Brotherhood extremists. The United Arab Emirates has established close cooperation with al-Hirak, and is prepared to contribute to the realization of its political programme.

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*President Hadi, who resides in Riyadh, is an important financial channel for the administrative bodies he set up, but those bodies criticize him and make attempts to create autonomous administrative structures (such quasi-government bodies have already emerged in Aden and Hadhramaut).*

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Since they came to power in some regions in South Yemen, the extremists have already established their own brand of law and order: they blew up local Sufi religious centres, handed all the major mosques over to the Wahhabis and are using the administrative bodies to persecute and eliminate opposition members. The Houthis' warnings about the Muslim Brother-

hood's threat to traditional values have proved just as topical for the Sunni population of South Yemen. There is no doubt that the southern population has been severely "vaccinated" against terrorism, but following through with the fight on the Muslim Brotherhood and the AQAP requires a stable system of political institutions. This is something that President Hadi is apparently unable to create.

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*Disruptions to the electricity and water supplies, the emergence of rivalling power centres within the security agencies, the creation of factions within those agencies based on loyalty to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and anarchy in the legal sphere are eroding the social and political fabric of South Yemen, putting it under the threat of fragmentation.*

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The opacity of Saudi Arabia's plans and the threat of South Yemen being divided into areas under foreign influence have created tensions within the GCC, which unites all the monarchies in the Arabian Peninsula. One manifestation of these tensions came in the form of the Qatar crisis in June 2017. Qatar's independent role in Yemen began during the Houthi wars, when Doha acted as a broker for a peaceful settlement. Meanwhile, Riyadh opposed such a scenario. In 2011, Qatar demanded that President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh step down immediately, so that Doha could implement its plan. This cost Qatar its right to participate in the creation of the GCC Initiative, but the country still retains contacts with the al-Islah leaders. President Hadi welcomed Qatar's withdrawal from the coalition, complete with its 100 troops guarding the Saudi part of the border and 15 aircraft, even though Qatar had both supported Hadi and posed as a major donor in humanitarian projects in Yemen. Any possible change to Qatar's position with regard to the Yemen crisis would only aggravate the problems within the GCC, the only member of which that has thus far been firmly intent on non-intervention is Oman.

Saudi Arabia, the country that initiated the campaign, is also facing serious direct military threats. In addition to the regular operations against Saudi military installations in the country's three southern provinces (Asir, Jizan and

Najran), the Yemen side has recently intensified ballistic missile launches inside Saudi Arabia, to distances of over 1000 km from the border.

The coalition's active use of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait to deliver military cargo to Yemen has resulted in several dangerous incidents in the Red Sea, including the sinking of several large coalition vessels. In October 2016, a U.S. Navy warship constantly stationed in the conflict zone and assisting the coalition in the enforcement of Yemen's maritime blockade, destroyed coastal radar installations in an area controlled by the Saleh-Houthi alliance.<sup>10</sup>

Of the leading global actors, the United States possesses the greatest military capability in the region. Washington provided Saudi Arabia with logistic support during the military operation in Yemen. U.S. servicemen are represented in the coalition command headquarters, and U.S. special services regularly carry out direct military operations as part of the ongoing anti-terrorist campaign. In January 2017, U.S. special operations forces conducted the first major operation under the new U.S. administration. The operation resulted in the killing of 14 suspected AQAP members and 16 civilians in Bayda Governorate.<sup>11</sup> Both President Hadi and the Saleh-Houthi alliance condemned the killing of civilians.

In addition to the United States, the coalition headquarters is also represented by British officers, seeing as the United Kingdom is among the major arms suppliers to Saudi Arabia. In 2016, Saudi Arabia ranked third in the world in terms of military expenditures. The United States and the United Kingdom have vague political interests in Yemen. Both countries admit to being interested in exporting more arms to the Gulf region, but they faced fierce criticism from humanitarian and human rights organizations, as well as from the political opposition at home.

One extremely dangerous trend that has been inserted into Yemeni politics by the Trump administration is the resurrection of the supposed Iranian threat and the positioning of the Houthis as religious extremists on the same level as the AQAP. Unverified and doubtful

claims to the effect that Iran is supplying the Houthis with arms in fishing boats, thus bypassing the dense blockade, are fuelling the positions of the "hawks" in Washington. President Hadi said that the two leading actors in the military campaign in Yemen – the United States and Saudi Arabia – doubled down in their intent to fight to the bitter end in September 2017 in order to exclude Iran's naval presence in the region, which would be unacceptable to Israel's security.<sup>12</sup>

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*Russia's role in the Yemen crisis has been the persistent promotion of all peacekeeping projects in the country and providing humanitarian aid to the population.*

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Russia has built up a reputation as a country that adheres to international law, respects sovereignty and demonstrates zero tolerance to neo-colonialist scenarios. This, in turn, opens up the prospects for establishing contacts with all the major actors in Yemen, which is the key to settling the crisis.

The United Nations continues to hold the most prominent role among the international political actors in the Yemen crisis. However, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the new UN Special Envoy for Yemen, was declared a persona non grata in Sanaa in summer of 2017, based on the Saleh-Houthi alliance's claims that he sympathized with Saudi Arabia. Ould Cheikh Ahmed is currently trying to use proxies to implement the project to turn the port of Al Hudaydah over from the Saleh-Houthi alliance to the UN control. This is the largest port on the Red Sea and is the last remaining sea gate of the Saleh-Houthi alliance. Even though the mission is aimed at mitigating the humanitarian risks connected with the hostilities, with 80 percent of all humanitarian aid to Yemen passing through Al Hudaydah, the Saleh-Houthi alliance believes that the project is insufficient. The alliance is pressing the United Nations to make general decisions that would be aimed at stopping the war and lifting the blockade.

<sup>10</sup> 'Limited Self-Defense Strikes': U.S. Military Destroys 3 'Radar Sites' in Yemen // Russia Today, October 13, 2016. URL: <https://www.rt.com/usa/362582-yemen-radar-sites-airstrikes/>

<sup>11</sup> 57 Dead in First U.S. Raid on Qaeda in Yemen under Trump // Gulf Times, January 29, 2017. URL: <http://www.gulf-times.com/story/530845/57-dead-in-first-US-raid-on-Qaada-in-Yemen-under-T>

<sup>12</sup> Jameeh M. Al-Rais al-Yamani: musammimun ala al-hall al-askari // Al-Quds al-Arabi, September 11, 2017.



## Development Scenarios for the Yemen Crisis

Given that Saudi Arabia and the United States are intent on continuing the war, the most likely scenario for the Yemen crisis within its current parameters and with the current actors involved would be to pass through all the typical phases and enter a smouldering phase. Rather than making the people of Yemen capitulate, this scenario would consolidate society, as has been repeatedly demonstrated in the course of the military conflict. On the other hand, this same scenario will make a humanitarian collapse inevitable. Earlier in 2017, the United Nations warned that it would be technically impossible to supply 20 million starving Yemen people with humanitarian aid. This scenario is fraught with unpredictable risks for the entire region and for Saudi Arabia. If air raids continue, this will result in an environmental catastrophe, create unbearable living conditions in the country and lead to such powerful cross-border migration flows that the Treaty of Jeddah between Yemen and Saudi Arabia signed in 2000 will lose all sense.

Another possible scenario would be to end the coalition's military operation under a plausible pretext, without adopting a comprehensive crisis settlement plan under international monitoring. In this case, the foreign actors in Yemen will start to use their own levers of power, and the situation in the country may quickly turn from hybrid warfare into a civil war, which would be fraught with no less grave consequences for the region.

The third scenario, which is best in line with the interests of Yemen and of regional security, is the cessation of hostilities and the simultaneous adoption by the UN Security Council of a new comprehensive settlement plan that would take both the lessons of the past and the present realities into account. This scenario is impossible to see through unless the current parameters of the crisis change and new powerful external actors emerge.

## Conclusions

- The fast approaching humanitarian collapse in Yemen is noticeably increasing the importance of the Yemeni problem on the international political agenda. The insistence of Saudi Arabia and the United States to continue with

the war is causing growing concerns among Washington's European partners, as well as in Middle Eastern and Asian countries. The possible humanitarian collapse and deaths of hundreds of thousands of Yemen people would result in irreversible processes on the Arabian Peninsula, which would affect the entire security system of the countries in the Horn of Africa, as well as those of Kenya, Ethiopia and Egypt, and would also impact negatively on the Mandeb Strait, through which a quarter of the world's freight trade passes.

- The complex nature of the Yemeni conflict and the decisive role of foreign actors in the initiation and continuation of the military phase of the crisis make it possible to define the situation as a specific form of hybrid warfare. The course taken by the United States under the Trump administration towards escalating the conflict is hampering the peace process in Yemen and undermining the region's security, including by creating additional risks to Saudi Arabia and aggravating the situation within the GCC.
- The nature of the crisis changed completely during the course of Operation Decisive Storm. At the same time, the objectives and motives of the leading international actors remain opaque and are pushing the country towards more dire chaos and poverty, which threatens extremely grave social and political consequences for the entire region. All the forces fighting against the Saleh–Houthi alliance and involved in air raids in Yemen are either armed or funded by foreign actors. Arms supplies to Yemen from the coalition countries run counter to the UN Security Council's resolution and have resulted in the prices of firearms falling below the price of potable water in some regions of the country. The current phase of the Yemen crisis represents hybrid warfare, which tend to transform into cross-border international conflicts. It has nothing in common with the original provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 2216.
- The essence of the conflict as explained in the resolution boils down to the confrontation between President Hadi (the legitimate authority) and the Ansar Allah movement (the rebels who staged the coup). In actual fact, the conflict between these parties took place in mid-January 2015 and concerned a controversial bill calling for the federalization of Yemen,

which would split the country into six states. The bill caused a wave of criticism across the country. The Houthis demanded that the document be returned for further discussion prior to its adoption as part of the new constitution, whereas President Hadi insisted that the bill be adopted as is. The UN representative supported the Houthis, which detonated the situation and forced President Hadi to submit his resignation on January 22, 2015.

- It is difficult to describe the ensuing events as a coup staged by the Houthis. After Hadi relocated to Aden in late February 2015 and withdrew his resignation, it was not the Houthis he found himself in conflict with, but rather the army command in Aden, which refused his request that the members resign. For objective reasons, neither the Houthis nor Saleh were interested in staging a coup against Hadi: both represented the forces which had won over al-Islah and were leading the parliamentary race.
- The resolution does not mention the primary culprit of the escalation: the radical wing of al-

Islah, under whose pressure the two opposing forces in the political arena were forced to form an alliance in order to avoid losing. Nor does it mention the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood openly cooperates with the AQAP, which the United States believed to be the main terrorist threat in the world. Meanwhile, this cooperation has only grown stronger since the beginning of the military campaign in South Yemen. Finally, the resolution completely ignores the attitude of the Yemeni army towards the conflicting parties. The lion's share of Yemeni servicemen remained loyal to former President Saleh, meaning that they sided with the Saleh–Houthi alliance. Could these troops have been expected to disarm, and if so, to whom should they have surrendered their arms? The above-mentioned omissions and shortcomings in the resolution doomed the military campaign in Yemen to failure from the start, and put its command in a difficult situation. This is why all the actors striving to settle the conflict should be interested in revising the text of the resolution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Russia commands the diplomatic and political resources and has a moral right as Yemen's historical partner to break the deadlock in the settlement. The extremely grim experience of the two-and-a-half-year war in Yemen that is going nowhere suggests that there will be a positive response from the international community to the possible launching of a peace process in that country. This goes for both the United Nations and regional actors (including members of the Saudi coalition). The European Union and those Asian countries that have a vested interest in the security of the Mandeb Strait could become active partners of Russia on this issue.
- The greatest humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and the absence of any signs of a settlement under UN Security Council Resolution 2216 of April 2015, make it imperative for the international community to take urgent measures in new formats for the purpose of stopping the hostilities and initiating political talks.
- Russia has a solid peacekeeping potential in Yemen; it enjoys a hefty credit of trust with the majority of the key actors in the country, as well as with the GCC and Egypt. It is also in Russia's interest to use the trade partnership potential of the BRICS association to facilitate the settlement of the crisis. BRICS involves all the countries for which the safety of the shortest route into Europe via the Mandeb Strait is of great economic significance.
- All the key parameters of the Yemen crisis have changed since the beginning of the war two-and-a-half years ago. Seeing as the humanitarian aspect of the crisis takes absolute priority, as corroborated by reports submitted by specialized UN agencies, this warrants a thorough revision of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, from which Russia abstained. During the vote, Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin stressed that the text of the resolution failed to reflect the full picture of what was going on in Yemen and contained inadmissible references to sanctions that were capable of escalating the crisis. Churkin also pointed out that the resolution contradicted prior resolutions adopted by the Security Council with regard to Yemen.<sup>13</sup>
- Yemen will be in need of major financial resources in order to restore its destroyed economy. These resources could be provided by the Gulf countries, international banks and the member nations of the Friends of Yemen club (established in London in 2010 for the purpose of supporting and stabilizing Yemen). The reconstruction process will create a basis for equal cooperation among all the Gulf countries in Yemen; this, in turn, will improve the regional situation and will help overcome the existing fears as to the emergence of dangerous and unwelcome foreign actors in the region. If Russia manages to turn the settlement process in this direction, it will gain many allies and partners both in Asia and in Europe.

<sup>13</sup> Security Council Demands End to Yemen Violence, Adopting Resolution 2216 (2015), with Russian Federation Abstaining, SC/11859 // UNO, April 14, 2015. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11859.doc.htm>



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