

## **U.S. Intervention in the Yemeni Civil War**

### **House Committee on International Relations**

#### **Background**

Yemen, a Middle Eastern country, is currently threatened with a civil war stemming from a Houthi takeover and requires attention by the United States Government. Yemen is a valuable location of interest for the U.S. in the Middle East. Currently, Saudi Arabia is supporting the Hadi government to repel the Houthi rebellion, backed by Iran. The United States is focused on returning stability and supporting a government that will follow U.S. counterterrorism programs. The United States is supporting the Saudis with only logistics and intelligence but also has warships close by in the Gulf of Aden if the need for extreme intervention arises. The Saudi Coalition is not holding back and has led several bombing runs against the Houthi rebels.

Yemen was not one united country, as it is today. In 1967, a South Yemen was formed. Two years later, Marxists gained control of South Yemen. Like Korea's situation, Yemen was split into two countries, the South influenced by the Soviet Union and the North by America. In North Yemen, 1978, President Ali Abdallah Saleh is elected. After years of skirmishes between the two Yemens, the single country of Yemen was created in 1990 and led by Ali Abdullah Saleh, the previous president of North Yemen. Yemen has been plagued with crises including Al-Hirak, in which Yemenis in the south rebelled claiming they had a lack of rights. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has also been present in Yemen, taking territory from the south. Al-Qaeda bombed the USS *Cole* while it was docking in the port of Aden in 2000, causing concerns for the U.S., who then lent Yemen about \$1.2 billion dollars for counterterrorism. The previously mentioned Houthi group of north Yemen has rebelled several times in the past 10 years, starting in 2004 under Hussein al-Houthi. In September of 2008, the U.S. embassy of Yemen was bombed. A ceasefire was brokered between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels in 2010 and one year later Saleh backs down and gives leadership to Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, his vice president. Al-Hadi was favorable with the U.S. government and in 2013 hosted a UN National Dialogue Conference to revise their constitution in regards to all of Yemen's political/religious groups. The conference was unsuccessful as the participating groups could not agree on the distribution of powers.

The United States has approached foreign intervention differently through multiple crises. The most infamous is undoubtedly the Vietnam War, which cost the U.S. 58,000 lives and 350,000 casualties. In Vietnam, the U.S. adopted a very aggressive role, trying to quickly end the communist Viet Cong's attacks and reestablish South Vietnam's democratic rule under President Lyndon Johnson by deploying 536,000 troops and beginning airstrikes in 1968. The war outlasted Johnson and was handed over to President Nixon. It was clear South Vietnam could not win, so in 1968, talks to end the war began. 5 years later, the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam and in 1975, South Vietnam officially surrendered to the communist North. The Vietnam War stands as the first real war lost by the United States as well as a cautionary tale against direct intervention.

In the Libya crisis of 2011, the U.S. chose a different approach. For over 40 years, Libya had been ruled by Muammar Qaddafi. The United States and Libya have had strained relations including the U.S. bombing Libya in 1986 and implementing economic sanctions. More recently, however, relations have improved and George W. Bush dissolved the sanctions in 2004. Then, in early 2011, protests in Libya erupted against Gaddafi. The United States stationed soldiers to protect the

citizens and facilitated Gaddafi's overthrow. Taking a very limited stance, U.S. troops were pulled out and the Libyans were left to clean up the mess. In a few short years, Libya is arguably worse than before U.S. involvement. Former Republican Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana said, "There wasn't enough thought given to how we were going to make sure these people had the security and freedom we wanted them to have." Libya is now seen as a warning against limited foreign involvement because the U.S. destroyed the government but did not help rebuild it.

Recently, the situation has become much worse, early in 2014, the Houthis captured Yemen's capital, Sanaa. As stated above, the Saudi forces have advanced their efforts and engaged in air strike campaigns against the Houthis, killing as many civilians as rebels. There is no doubt the Yemeni Civil War needs to end soon but U.S. officials are at odds on the solution.

### **Democratic Point of View**

The Democrats are in favor of continuing to limit their support to intelligence and logistics gathering. U.S. officials have warned the Saudi to back off or end the bombings. Democrats want to preserve the innocent Yemeni lives. The left wing wants to establish peace and order in Yemen but believes this doesn't justify any extreme acts of violence. They have concerns about Saudi's goals for the campaign have shifted from returning to a stable condition to just overtaking Yemen. They argue that, just like the Vietnam War, the Republican method would only result in chaos, more loss of life, and the possible victory of the rebels.

The Republican Party disagrees. They are in favor of continual support of the Saudi forces and if possible, actual military aid. Drone strikes have been used in the war on terror and been proved effective. The Republicans believe that the U.S. needs to protect its interests in Yemen and cannot let the Iranian-backed Houthis gain control of Yemen. The Libyan Crisis exhibits the downfalls of the Democratic method, if the U.S. lets the Saudi Coalition destroy the insurgency and not take an active role then Yemen will be plagued with even worse conditions in the future.

To conclude, the Yemeni Civil War requires immediate attention, whether it be in favor of the Democrats and look for a more diplomatic solution and end the bombings or follow the Right Wing and continue the campaign to attempt to end the uprising as quickly and cleanly as possible. Both options have dangers and costs. The Iranian-supported, northern Houthi rebels have advanced quickly and captured the capital of Yemen. Given its location in the Middle East, Yemen is crucial to the U.S. for its war of terror and transportation of oil.

### **Questions to Consider**

- i. Why is Yemen important?
- ii. Why should the US support (or not support) the Saudi Coalition?
- iii. Are the current airstrikes by the Saudi Coalition justified?
- iv. Why are the Houthis rebelling?
- v. How has the Houthi rebellion gained such momentum?
- vi. Should the US attempt to negotiate with the Houthis?
- vii. Should the US abandon involvement in the Yemeni Civil War?
- viii. Should the US increase involvement?

- ix. Is the Yemeni Civil War like proxy wars in the Cold War? (ie. Vietnam, Korea)
- x. What possible bipartisan solutions are there?

### Sources for Additional Research

- International Crisis Group: Yemen at War
- <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/b045-yemen-at-war>
- The World Factbook: Yemen
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>
- Washington Post Opinion on the conflict
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/07/forget-what-youre-hearing-the-civil-war-in-yemen-is-not-a-sectarian-conflict/>
- The Christian Science Monitor: Security Watch on the Yemen crisis
- <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/Backchannels/2015/0715/As-Yemen-s-civil-war-grinds-on-fears-of-a-potential-breakup>
- Foreign Affairs Hearing
- <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-yemen-under-attack-iranian-backed-houthis>
- Guardian article on the conflict
- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/06/yemen-conflict-war-houthi-sanaa>
- NPR summary of the conflict
- <http://www.npr.org/2015/04/01/396757504/understanding-the-forces-at-play-in-yemen>
- Council on Foreign Relations: Yemen in Crisis
- <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/yemen-crisis/p36488>
- BBC articles on the conflict
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>
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- Jost, Sarah. "U.S. Intervention in Libya." *The Urchin Movement*. Last modified March 24, 2011. Accessed September 27, 2015. <http://www.urchinmovement.com/2011/03/24/u-s-intervention-in-libya/>.