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# Yemen: a Forgotten War and an Unforgettable Country

An Analytical Report Published by the Centre For International Development Issues (CIDIN)Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands), in Collaboration with Qatar University, Qatar and AWAM Foundation, Yemen.



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## Revolution in 2011

In Yemen, the goal of the revolution in 2011 was to unite the people's

wishes for restructuring of the dominant system in Yemen in all its aspects: corruption, nepotism, tribalism, etc. This movement, where the mobilization came from the bottom up, was a threat for the ruling political, tribal and military classes. The Yemeni Spring united all those forces that had had enough of the dominant manipulators. Like many movements the spirit was high when the revolution started and the National Dialogue was established. Many young, creative Yemenis put their hearts in it. But over time a tiredness emerged and that was the time when the old elite stepped in: the military, the politicians and parties, demanding to be paid by UN for their advice and slowly bringing back the old system again.

The initiators of the revolution were slowly removed from the decision-making levels and the old struggle between the rulers resumed. They all claimed that they were presenting revolutionary thoughts. In essence, only President Saleh was removed. His clique was still there, through which Saleh could undermine the new president's power. The new President, who was the Vice-President under Saleh, was just part of the same old system, according to the revolutionaries. Consequently, in the end nothing changed in the way foreseen during the Yemen Spring. Corruption, nepotism, tribalism still dominated the system.

Sectarianism was not mainly a cause of the current war

Originally religion did not play a major role in the revolution.

Pre-revolutionary parties were not religion-bound. The opposition party was a combination of a lot of smaller parties with all different social backgrounds. The ruling party was not religion-based either. Influenced by the developments in Egypt, a stronger polarization emerged between Sunnis and Shiites. This was further brought about by the Houthi struggle, which was named a Shiite group internationally, versus the government supported by the Saudis that now became a Sunni party. The north-south polarization became less clear: the Shiites got support from Iran and the government from the Saudis. It became a game between two foreign countries who could occupy most of Yemen. The Iran supported the Houthis on the ground, and the Saudis supported the government from the sky. The Yemeni answer to all this violence became less and less clear,

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On 25 March 2015, a Saudi-led international coalition launched air strikes targeting the armed Houthi group under the title of fighting Shiites in Yemen, which sparked a full-scale armed conflict. The conflict expanded in the next two years and drew fire across the country. There have been horrific human rights violations and war crimes in various parts of the country, causing unbearable suffering for civilians. In addition to relentless aerial bombardment by coalition forces, rival factions are engaged in fierce fighting on the

ground between the Houthis, an armed group whose members belong to the Shiite Zaydi sect, allied with supporters of former President Saleh, and the Houthi forces allied with the forces of the current President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia.

Most of the victims  
are civilians

Civilians have been caught in the midst of this fighting - more

than 42,000 of them have been killed or injured. According to UN statistics, up to the end of May 2017, Yemen received about 90,000 air strikes by coalition forces, meaning an average of one air strike every 12 minutes. The cost of air raids, strikes and ground-force operation was 250 billion. If this much was spent on development—or even a quarter of it—the declared and undeclared war objectives would be met. The United Nations says that at least 10,000 people are the victims of aerial bombardment and war, but if we count that each air strike killed a person (directly or indirectly), there must be ninety thousand victims. The numbers of the victims by air strikes or military operations in the ground by the Houthi-Saleh Front and other opposing fronts was not yet considered and needed specialized teams throughout Yemen, in both the south and north.

The war in Yemen is random and arrogant from all parties involved, whether the internal fronts or external Saudi led-front. A desperate toll is being paid by the poor and other displaced people, who are starving. In Yemen, there are 3 million refugees or displaced people. Many of them have moved into schools or made informal settlements, with

limited access to basic services. The humanitarian crisis has escalated and 10 million people are hit by famine. Seven million people do not know where their next meal will come from, and one in two children suffers from severe food shortages.

Yemen's conflict and the Saudi-led blockade have hampered the import of basic commodities. Imports are estimated to account for 80-90 percent of food, fuel and medicines in the country. Yemen's main port, Hodeida, operates partially, and it is where the basis of life for 60 percent of the food-insecure population comes from. Medical supplies in Yemen have fallen seriously, and many doctors and nurses work for free or get reduced wages. Humanitarian workers estimate that a child under five dies of preventable causes every 10 minutes, and more than 63,000 children under the age of five have died as a result of the humanitarian disaster. More than 8 million people suffer from lack of clean water and sanitation, putting them at risk of outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and scabies.

The Yemeni crisis has cast a heavy shadow on girls and women. They are subjected to abuse, exploitation and forced marriage. UNFPA estimates that violence against women has increased by more than 63% since 2015, which means that some 2.6 million women and girls are at risk. The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that a million pregnant women are at risk of cholera, a month after the outbreak of the epidemic on 27 April 2017. The number of 'people who have died from cholera is almost 1,073. There are almost 155,000 suspected

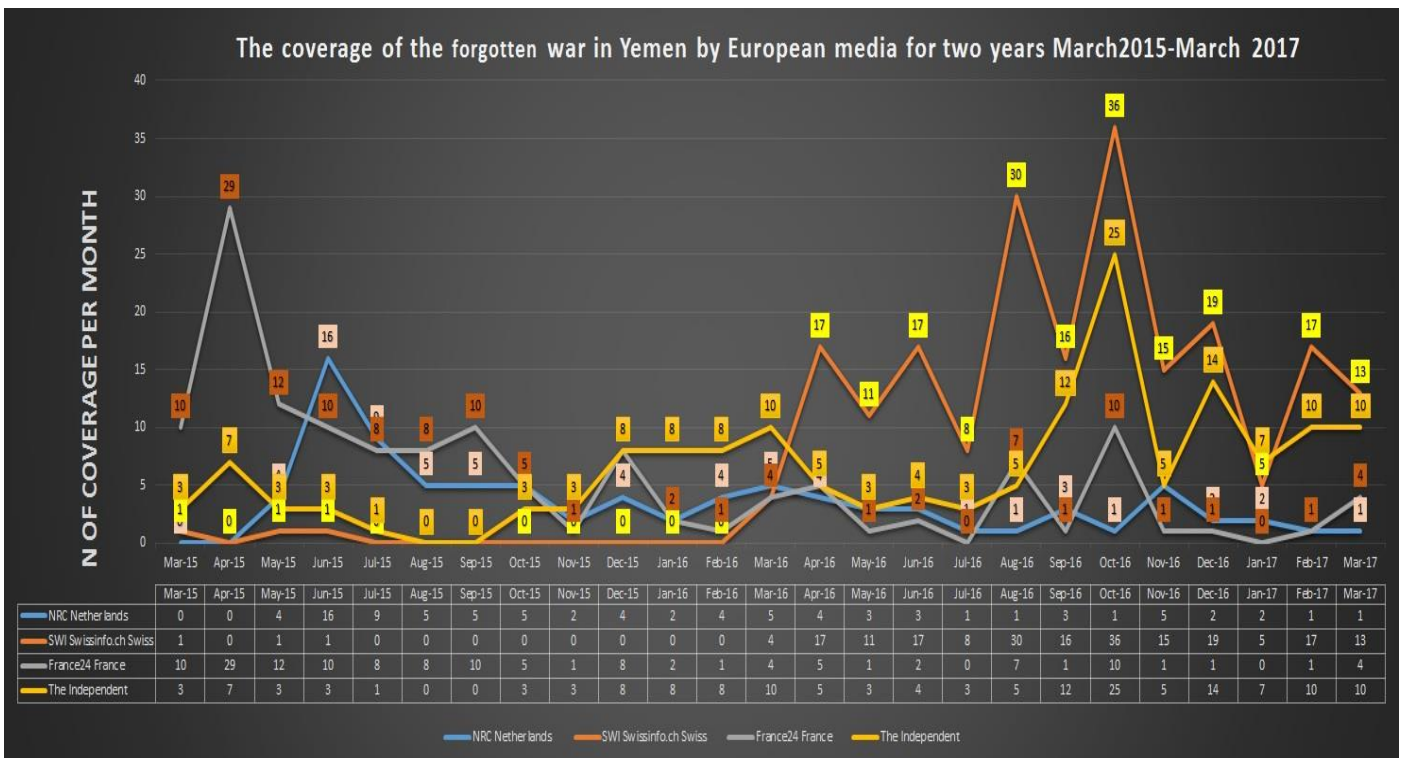
cases, and around 55,000 confirmed cases, in 19 of Yemen's 21 governorates.

Already, this struggle is called: The Forgotten War

Throughout the twenty-six months of Saudi-led war on Yemen, the

world has ignored the conflict, with little mention about its devastating consequences in many media

Europe. In an unpublished study by Elayah et al. (2017) entitled: "Agenda-setting theory and the role of the Western media in shaping public opinion for the Yemen war", the researchers examined the coverage of the Saudi-Yemen war by the European media for two years (March 2015 to March 2017). The main question of this study was to find out the extent to which the Saudi-Yemen war is important in the agenda of international policymakers, especially in Europe, and what



Source: Elayah et al (2017)

outlets, relevant international organizations, and in the world's political industry. It is clear that international politicians are only interested in the way Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups are growing but as long as they limit themselves to Yemen, no urgency is shown in peace-keeping or enforcement efforts to stop the killing of Yemenis. Already this struggle is called: The Forgotten War in many outlets sources. Once in a while, a small article appears on page 6 of a newspaper, but all attention is focused on the problems of how to house Syrian refugees in

frames are used to present the Saudi-Yemen conflict. This study initiated research into the nature of news coverage of the Saudi-Yemen war by the European media. Its objectives were as follows: (1) to identify the amount of coverage of Saudi-Yemen war by the following media outlets: The Independent (the UK), NRC Handelsblad (the Netherlands), France24 (France), and SWI Swissinfo.ch (Switzerland); (2) To identify the primary frames used in reporting the Saudi-Yemen war by the four media outlets; and (3) To identify whether these media outlets differ in their news coverage on the Saudi-Yemen war.

Based on content analysis, as the figure below shows, this study collected 605 articles reporting on the Saudi-Yemen war. It was found that SWI Swissinfo.ch devoted the largest amount of coverage (410 articles), followed by The Independent (160 articles), France24 (141 articles), and NRC (94 articles).

The results of this review were not surprising—we found poor media coverage of the Saudi-Yemen war, both in terms of the operations of the war itself or its complications or humanitarian consequences. There have been major differences in the nature of coverage. SWI Swissinfo.ch (Switzerland) concentrated intensely on the consequences of war, particularly in 2016 and 2017 after the raised voices of the United Nations and other relevant organizations for the importance of avoiding the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen. The Independent (UK) and France24 (France), both in nations in which the governments are supporting Saudi Arabia in this war, have been more delicate about the conflict and marking it as a conflict amongst Shiites and Sunnis or a sectarian Saudi-Yemen war. With respect to the coverage of the NRC (Netherlands), there was surprisingly poor coverage, despite the fact that the Netherlands is one of the primary promoters of human rights on the planet. The International Court of Justice is situated in the Netherlands, which is responsible for investigating human violations in wars and conflicts. The NRC was balanced on the introduction of the course of the war and its humanitarian consequences.

While the war in Yemen is globally forgotten, the country is unforgettable in regional and the international political circles. Yemen has

Yemen is not a forgettable country

for some time been affected

by Saudi Arabia according to the economic variable. Saudi Arabia is a rich nation and Yemen is a poor nation, yet they are neighbours. They have wide common land and sea borders and even tangled frontiers. There were disputes between the two nations on Yemeni territories possessed by Saudi Arabia after the foundation of the second kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the early nineteenth century. Yemen has gone into a few wars with Saudi Arabia, yet could not take back its lands controlled by Saudi Arabia. From that point forward, Saudi has made considerable endeavours inside Yemen itself, or in the area, to prevent the existence of a strong and capable Yemeni state, because it is well known that a strong Yemen can destabilize the Saudization of the Arabian Kingdom.

The presence in Yemen of Iran, Saudi Arabia's biggest enemy, is via the al-Houthi movement, which is one of Iran's backbones in the region. The Houthis taking control of Sana'a on 21 September 2014 stunned the Saudi administration and it was important to keep Iran from getting a position close to the Saudi land and sea borders. Particularly since Iran plans to have a solid state neighboring Saudi Arabia in its grasp to be used against Saudi, or if nothing else, to make the second Hezbollah in the Arab peninsula against Saudi, like the first Hezbollah in Lebanon against Israel.

Through the incendiary map in the Middle East, it is conceivable to elucidate the strategic equation drawn by Iran and its



security structure and strength in the area. For the last few years, Iran has turned out to be ready to control four Arab capitals - Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Sana'a, and so the Saudi Kingdom has been forced to work to stop the expansion of Iran in the Arab region. Saudi began a proxy war against Iran in Yemen and to destroy the Yemeni military force that was built during the rule of Saleh of Yemen and before that by ex-president Al-Hamdi.

Yemen, under the control of al-Houthi, would be a burning barrel alongside the oil wells in Saudi, and close to areas where more than two-thirds of the world's oil reserves are located. What's more, in this manner a state loyal to Iran and possessing ballistic weapons may pose a major threat to the Saudi economy, and to the global economy reliant on the oil and gas originating from the Middle East.

MAP 5  
**Middle East Oil Transit Chokepoints**



**SUEZ CANAL.** In 2013, 915.5 million tons of cargo transited the canal, averaging 45.5 ships transiting each day. The 120-mile-long canal is an increasingly important transit route for European oil imports from the Persian Gulf.

**BAB EL-MANDEB STRAIT.** This strait, 18 miles wide at its narrowest point, is an important transit route for Persian Gulf oil exports to Europe.

**STRAIT OF HORMUZ.** Nearly 17 million barrels of oil per day, or almost 20 percent of the world's traded oil, pass through the strait, making it the busiest passageway for oil tankers in the world.

Source: Heritage Foundation research and analysis provided elsewhere in this paper.

heritage.org

Israel has its interest in the Saudi war in Yemen, as controlling Yemen by the militias of al-Houthi will give Iran the ability to control the Strait of Bab al-Mandab. In such a manner, Iran can keep the Israeli military constrained from effortlessly entering the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea to strike Iran if there is a war between the two countries.

Houthis' control of Yemen means much for Saudi Arabia from the economic side. Yemen is situated in the Strait of Bab al-Mandab in the Red Sea. The Bab Al-Mandeb is a chokepoint for worldwide maritime trade and energy shipments, as it connects the Arabian/Persian Gulf via the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean Sea via the Red Sea. It is similarly as vital as the Suez Canal for the sea shipping paths and exchange between Africa, Asia, and Europe. For instance, 3 million barrels of oil a day go through the Gulf of Aden and the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait to Europe. A large portion of this oil originates from Saudi Arabia and other Arabian gulf countries, as the map below shows.

The United States of America and the other Western countries allied with it also have their own geopolitics behind the war in Yemen. The Western alliance, especially America, believe that the security of Israel and Saudi Arabia is part of their national security and thus the prejudice of these two countries is a serious threat to global peace and security. America believes that Iran's rule and control over Yemen will be catastrophic for American influence in the world. Iran's control of Bab al-Mandab via the Houthis means giving Iran's allies, Russia and China, a position in this important chokepoint for the



whole world. Hence the global competition and the proxy war is occurring again in Yemen.

Accordingly, there has been a convergence of interests among many countries in the importance of destroying the power of Yemen, especially after Houthi militias' control of Sana'a, and to prevent the occurrence of security hurdles in Bab al-Mandab, which could threaten international shipping traffic. Yemen is forgotten in the international media, but the country is not forgotten in the strategic calculations and the national security patterns of most of the Western countries and some of the Arab countries. The media totally concur that Iran's malicious activities in the area and its support of guerilla movements by all means is unsuitable and unacceptable. However, they are overlooking an entire people who are dying of hunger. The economic and media blockade has been suffocating over the past two years of Saudi war on Yemen and efficient annihilation of the Yemeni society.

### What is the solution?

By analyzing the conflict in Yemen, it seems that the prospects, hopes

and solutions of the Saudi war in Yemen are not clear, as a result of the complexity of global interests and link of the war with global geostrategic issues and conflicts, in the sense that there is interdependence in global political conflicts. Yemen cannot be taken in isolation from the global accounts of the international superpowers.

It can be said that the solution is not in the hands of the Yemenis, but there is a great

need for a serious direct regional dialogue in which Iran and its allies, Russia and China, as well as Saudi Arabia and its allies from the USA and other Western countries, are directly involved. Dialogue must be in accordance with convictions by all parties to solve the problems of Yemen and motivate the conflicting parties to engage in a direct and serious dialogue at local levels, and to come up with a clear vision and peace road map.

The international parties must prevent military and weaponry support by the concerned regional parties to the conflicting parties in Yemen. There must be full respect for Yemen and non-interference in its internal affairs from both Saudi Arabia and Iran. It should be there a clear policy to overcome the Saudi-led blockade of the country.

The United Nations must find an effective relief programme with coordination with regional and international forces involved in stifling and starving the Yemeni people. However, already long before the start of the revolution, the overseas Development Program had already focused its interest in selling their expertise and materials to Yemen in the form of water and related programs, ornamented by some gender projects. Little interest was shown in the revolution: most funds went through UN sources, and most aid programmes were suspended, waiting till the old system was reestablished. Alternative programmes proposed during the National Dialogue were not taken into consideration.