

Yemen: Roles and Impact of Local, Regional and International Actors

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Abstract: The Yemeni conflict is complicated due to the numerous internal crises and disputes in the country. In addition, the external correlations and their linkages to the internal actors have increased the intensity of the conflict. There is a need to identify these internal and external actors and analyze their role, impact, strengths, and weaknesses. This study identifies the internal and external actors of the conflict in Yemen, then examines their roles and impact and shows that the conflict resulted from internal conflicts between local actors and took on different dimensions through regional and international interventions. The political, ideological, and self-interest differences are the causes of the disunity among the elites and the political and military forces, and in turn, they led to the exacerbation of the conflict and the negative role in peacemaking.

Keywords: Houthi; Legitimacy; Southern Movement; Tribal; Yemen Conflict.

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Introduction

For decades, Yemen has been inflicted with numerous crises and conflicts sparked by various factors. Some of these upheavals were the result of regional, ethnic, ideological, and political divisions and disparities between the North Yemen and the South Yemen. Despite the unification of the two regions in 1990, the country continued to exist in a state of turmoil politically, economically, and socially. The state of political instability in Yemen is attributed to the

sporadic calls for secession by southern separatists and to institutional fragility in general. In a similar condition, the Yemeni economy is afflicted by economic depression, unemployment, unfair wealth distribution, and, above all corruption and nepotism. In addition, the social structure of the country is ravaged by the unrestricted arms proliferation and dominated by the outdated tribal ideology which has impeded cultural development. As a result of these deteriorating life conditions of the Yemeni citizen, public dissatisfaction has developed, aggravating the situation and leading to the youth revolution in 2011 against the ruling regime.

The significant geopolitical location of Yemen compounded with the factors stated above made it the most vulnerable and fragile country in the Arabian Peninsula. Recurrent interventions by external powers, through their local allies, to achieve their goals and greed for wealth and control created a fragmented Yemeni society with several factions and cantons fighting for different interests. This multifaceted conflict has hindered any attempt to form an effective national government. This is a threat not just to Yemen's stability and security but also to the security of the region and beyond.

In late 2014, the country plunged into civil war. An alliance was formed between the Houthis and the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh leading to a counterrevolution against the internationally recognized government led by Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi. This anti-Hadi coalition resulted in armed clashes and the seizing of the capital city, Sana'a. President Hadi was placed under house arrest which he managed to escape to Aden with the assistance of his loyalists. As the Houthi-Saleh coup took hold over the northern governorates of the country, President Hadi sent calls for regional aid and intervention. In March 2015, a coalition of ten Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, launched an air campaign against the Iran-backed Houthis to roll back their expansion and restore the legitimacy of Hadi's government which was internationally recognized by the United States, the United Kingdom and France.

According to Saudi Arabia and Hadi's government, the Houthis are Iranian proxies in Yemen and they depict the conflict as a fateful battle to stop Iranian expansion in the region (Juneau, 2010). Furthermore, the use of the term "proxy war" to characterize the conflict can reflect the growing influence of external actors on the ground (Clausen, 2015; Durac, 2019); therefore, the Yemeni conflict is not a single war but a mosaic of interlinked, complex and multi-layered conflict. Besides, it has been portrayed as either a civil war between the Houthi group and the legitimate government or a regional war between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Al-Kahwati, 2019). According to Phillips (2011), the conflict results from the Saudi regional rivalry with Iran. Moreover, there are other international, regional, and local actors in the conflict, such as the US and United Arab Emirates (UAE) which escalated the conflict further.

However, focusing solely on the regional influences on the war of Yemen diverts us from the internal causes of the war and the domestic actors directly involved in the

conflict. In addition, it is the complex relationship between all the participants in this quagmire that led to the current catastrophic situation (Brandt, 2017). It is crucial then to understand the complexity of all the linkages and relationships that tie all the domestic players in the Yemeni scenario and examine their influence whether positive or negative. This analysis is consolidated by measuring the impact of the intervention of the external actors and their role in exploiting internal differences and supporting various internal allies in igniting the conflict.

The aim of this article is to highlight the major events that were the fire starter of the multifaceted war in Yemen. It also critically identifies the internal actors responsible for the outbreak as well as it highlights the regional and international as external actors whose intervention caused a noticeable escalation in the conflict. Moreover, it provides a close study of the web of connections and the different types of support the external actors provided their loyalists in the Yemeni inside just to achieve their geopolitical ambitions. The major contribution of this article is: highlighting the involvement of actors in the Yemen conflict, analysing the role of the main actors based on their strengths, weaknesses, differences, and similarities, and classifying both internal and external conflict actors based on their role and impact.

Internally, the civil war erupted between two archrivals: The internationally-recognized government led by President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his loyalists and the Houthis, formally known as Ansar Allah movement, backed by the loyalists of the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The Legitimacy of the Government

Legitimacy is a complex notion with legal, political, and social dimensions (Scott, 2011). In other words, the term legitimacy refers to the legal and constitutional form represented by a specific authority of governance and conduct of state affairs, which has been elected and appointed in conformity with the law and constitution. To analyze the concept of legitimacy in Yemen, it is necessary to understand and grasp the local and historical framework. Yemen is a republican state with representative governance, where the Yemeni people are the source of legitimacy expressed through direct elections. In accordance with Article four of the Constitution (1991), "the people of Yemen are the holder and source of authority that they practice directly through public plebiscites and elections or indirectly through the authorities of the legislature, executive, judiciary, and through elected local councils" (The Constitution of the Republic of Yemen, Article 4, 1991).

After years of erosion of popular support or "legitimacy" for the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, protesting rallies were held by the opposition parties in 2011. Since January 2011, state security and military organizations have used violence against protestors.

As a result, there was an internal division within the regime (Brownlee *et al.*, 2013). As the state lost control of security and its ability to provide services, Saleh came under increasing pressure from Western diplomats to resign (Salisbury, 2011). By the end of 2011, Saleh's political legitimacy was in a grave existential crisis, or better to say collapsed. The rampant violent reaction Saleh's regime directed against the protesters throughout 2011 had raised public outcry and further weakened his international legitimacy. Consequently, the President was ousted by the end of the year, after he was compelled to resign and to hand over power to his deputy, Hadi, in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative, endorsed by the UN (Mancini & Vericat, 2016). As a result, an escalating conflict was subdued, but it was later triggered during the next two years of the transitional period (Salisbury, 2018).

It is worth stating that Hadi was elected following a rare set of circumstances, including political consensus, constitutional rules, and a popular vote. Therefore, Hadi continues to be the internationally-recognized president of Yemen and represents its legitimacy (Alshuwaiter, 2020). Hadi's government, which was subsequently elected by the Yemeni people on 21 February 2012, has been seen as legitimate and is recognized globally and was confirmed when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution (2216) that described Hadi as Yemen's 'legitimate president,' underlining international support for him (United Nations Security Council, 2015). The process of legitimizing Yemen's leader has been aided by international recognition and support (Mansour & Salisbury, 2019).

The conflict reached its climax after the Houthis stormed the capital on 21 September 2014. Stability was initially restored in Sana'a following the Peace and Partnership Agreement (PNPA), and the Houthis were incorporated into the security establishment (Al-Moshki, 2014). However, the political disputes between Hadi and his cabinet, including Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, have destabilized the political and security atmosphere. The situation worsened with the submission of a draft constitution for the transition to a federal system, as the Houthis stormed the presidential palace with the help of Saleh and placed Hadi under house arrest. In addition, the Houthis took other measures that would enforce their control over their territorial gains. On 21 February, Hadi managed to escape from house arrest to Aden, where he declared the decisions made since September to be invalid (UNSC, 2015).

On 24 March, Hadi's government sent a consent for a military intervention from the GCC to confront the Houthi-Saleh rebellion, retrieve the overtaken cities, and restore order. Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia when the Houthi-Saleh forces entered the suburbs of Aden the following day. Shortly after that, to combat the Houthis and restore Hadi to power, the Saudi-led coalition, which included the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, and Morocco, declared the launch of Operation Decisive Storm (Abdallah & Aboudi, 2015). On the other hand, disputes and disagreements emerged on various levels among and between the allies: Hadi's government and its regional partners and-

mong the coalition members themselves. This in return has weakened the performance of the government and its partners, thus undermining its legitimacy (Al-Kahwati, 2019).

In the context of the chaotic state of the Yemeni inside, the internationally recognized Yemeni government has hardly retained any influence and has gradually lost the substantial political back up it once had. Its authority has dwindled due to internal divisions, reduction in public representation and the failure to build a strong governance system in its territories, “with the exception of Marib, Al-Mahra, and Hadramawt governorates” (Ahmed & al-Rawhani, 2018). The legitimate government led by Hadi represents the highest authority in the country, in addition to the support of the international community, but it lacked wisdom to rule effectively and has been unable to enforce order in the so-called liberated areas due to internal divisions.

The Houthi Group

In the aftermath of the opening that followed North-South unification in 1990, political activity was sought by the Houthis group through the founding of the Party of Truth “Hizb al-Haq”, while its leader Hussein al-Houthi concentrated on social activities across and ensured “the Young Believer” at the grassroots level (Brandt, 2013). Hussein al-Houthi was killed in 2004 when combat ensued between his supporters and government forces. This intensified the conflict further and was followed by five more rounds of war between 2004 and 2010 (Salmoni, 2010).

The political participation of the Houthis predates the 2011 revolt, which, however, gave them a chance to join the national scene. By early 2011, the Houthis, along with other Yemeni opposition groups were actively participating in uprisings calls for reform, as a shade of the Arab Spring that dominated the atmosphere in the Middle East during that time. They endorsed the protests’ main theme: the expulsion of President Saleh and his dynasty from power. Moreover, the demonstrations also provided an opportunity for them to grow their political profile in the capital and create networks (Alwazir, 2017). In March 2011, they clashed with the government forces in Sa’ada, which enabled them to take over the whole governorate (Arimatsu & Choudhury, 2014). Since then, the Houthis have been the controlling authority in Saada governorate, controlling the most important government institutions, collecting taxes, and supervising local government administration (ICG, 2014).

The political wing of the Houthis has started to enter mainstream politics at the start of the transition phase, where delegates were sent to the National Dialogue Conference by the Houthis (Schmitz, 2014), there were increasing clashes, as the Houthi group boosted their control over the bulk of Saada district and crept closer to Sana’a. The Houthis took over some state institutions after taking charge of the capital city, Sana’a, in late 2014 and established new ones (ICG, 2014). They formed the “Supreme Revolutionary Council” and colluded with Saleh and his GPC, who, from his part, desired to reclaim his

sovereignty. As a result, an open confrontation and cycles of armed clashes took place between the Houthi-Saleh alliance and Hadi's globally recognized government. However, the Houthi-Saleh coalition didn't last for long; it was rife with mistrust and it eventually fell apart with the assassination of Saleh by the Houthis on the 4th of December 2017. After Saleh's death, his followers were exposed to different types of Houthi harassment and oppression such as deposing, detaining and in some cases murdering. As a result, the Houthis have consolidated their grip on northern Yemen (Salisbury, 2017).

The Houthi group used a nationalist pretext, whereby they claim that they are fighting an external aggression represented by Saudi Arabia, the US and Israel, and that they maintain national sovereignty (Brandt, 2017). The Houthis may be competent fighters, but they lack governing expertise and appear to only know how to rule through intimidation, threat and brutality in the shape of a rudimentary police state (Al-Kahwati, 2019). For instance, in December 2017, when Saleh tried to reconcile with Saudi Arabia, the Houthis did not hesitate to kill him. Thus, they were able to increase their freedom of action and take more territory after his death, but, at the same time, they have added another foe to their list, Saleh's supporters (Akin, 2019).

According to Heywood (2015), when coercion is a regime's primary mode of governance, popular support and public acceptance of the ruling regime are eroded. This is evident in the Houthis' domination over the capital city, justifying their invasion as to put an end to President Hadi's political manoeuvring and his government's corruption. However, after they gained a strong grip on power and eliminated their ally Saleh, the use of suppression became the basis of their influence, including arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture, and looting private property. As a result, they are no longer accepted, as they were at the beginning of their campaign, and they have no political actor to support their authority over the areas they control.

Local Sub-Actors

This section focuses on how the multi-faceted interaction between the internal and external actors has deepened the divisions in the already fragmented country. It provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of the internal actors' and the external actors' influence on the two archenemies fighting the war. This part of the article also discusses how external powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and UAE have fuelled the war through their local loyalists. The political manoeuvre of these players along with the existing disputes and divisions in Yemen have directed the course of the war to an irreversible state of anarchy to an extent not seen before. Due to such state of chaos, the future of this war is unforeseeable from the point of view of the Yemeni Elites. Some believe it is a short-term crisis; others see it a long-term war (ICG, 2015).

Saleh and his Supporters

Ali Abdullah Saleh, as the legitimate president of the country for over three decades, had three key levers to maintain his grip on power, which are tribal, political and military. His Sanhan tribe is the core of the tribal element, while the political part is focused on the General People's Congress (GPC). For the continued influence of Saleh, the military aspect is more significant because he had the personal loyalties of many of the high-ranking officers whom he had picked during his term of office (Arraf, 2017). His networks were maintained across branches of the military and the GPC even though he officially handed over authority in November 2011. Moreover, several military units stayed sincere to Saleh despite Hadi's process of the military sector reformation during the transitional phase (Kendall, 2017).

In a mutual interest-based alliance with the Houthis, Saleh initially hindered the performance of the transitional government. The coalition with Saleh gave the Houthis a hard grip over roughly 60 percent of the forces of Yemen and 68 percent of the military arsenal and being combat-trained personnel (Kendall, 2017). At the end of December 2017, this coalition broke down definitively, where initially Saleh's political structures were purged from Sana'a and northern Yemen by the Houthis. Following that, Saleh was assassinated by Houthis (Nevola & Shibani, 2020), and several of his main associates and members of his family were arrested.

The nephew of Saleh and former head of the Presidential Guards Tareq Mohamed Saleh regrouped his uncle's networks in Aden and transferred his attention to the battle for Hodeida, reactivating and building on Abu Dhabi's historical links. He, subsequently, gained significant military, financial, and logistical support from the Emiratis. This marked a return to form for the Saleh networks, which had traditionally opposed the Houthis and retained strong ties with the Gulf. Tareq and other leaders of the Saleh network spent considerable time in UAE-backed military bases and repeatedly travel to Abu Dhabi (Baron, 2019). Paradoxically, the GPC headed by Saleh, which coerced him in 2011 to resign from power, is the Houthis key supporter locally. Saleh fought against the Houthis when he was the president but stood by their side to reclaim power (UNSC, 2015).

The Southern Transitional Council(STC)

A variety of groups within the Southern Movement are represented by the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The Southern Movement emerged from the fallout of the unification of Yemen and consists of People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) army holdovers. In 2007, pensioners initiated a series of demonstrations and an unorganized coalition of political factions seeking to bring back sovereignty to the South and regain independence, thus the Southern Movement was formed. However, partly because it lacks a cohesive leadership, the movement has failed to convert public

appeal into political gains (Baron, 2019). The movement was followed in the subsequent years by other social movements and their demonstrations have taken place in different provinces of the South. Their key grievances were economic marginalization, illegal acquisition of southern wealth, moving most bureaucracies to Sana'a, and depriving the citizens of the south of government job opportunities and the advantages of patronage (Phillips, 2017).

Since the Houthis were expelled from Aden, the governorate has been unstable. In mid-April 2017, attacks and armed clashes took place between militias affiliated with Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, then the governor of Aden, and the military forces of the Hadi government at Aden airport. As a result, on 27 April 2017, Hadi reacted by deposing both Al-Zubaydi and the former Minister of State of Yemen Hani Ali bin Burayk. Nevertheless, this served as the impetus for the establishment of the STC consisting of 26 members which was announced in Aden on 11th May 2017. Their primary objective is improving southern governance and working in direct defiance of Hadi for a complete autonomy for the southern region (Salisbury, 2017). This event is considered the most significant divergence in wartime within the legitimacy structure that opposes the Houthi militant group (Forster, 2017).

Late in January 2018, an armed battle broke out in Aden between President Hadi's forces and those aligned to the STC, both are on the same side of the Yemeni conflict opposing the Houthis. More than 40 persons were killed, and dozens of others were injured. However, the UAE, a member in the multi-national Saudi-led coalition, has dedicatedly contributed to the military and political enforcement of the southern resistance to Hadi's ruling in various ways, revealing a split in the coalition that is backing Hadi's authority (Dahlgren, 2018). This illustrates how various actors strive to outmanoeuvre competitors when putting themselves as the most politically important elite (Forster, 2017).

Slightly more than two years later, the STC laid hold of power in Aden by instigating riot and sporadic street fights against President Hadi's forces in August 2019. This, in return, created a new breach in the body of the legitimate government, adding a new doubt on the legitimacy and efficiency of Hadi's cabinet to confront their main enemy, the Houthis and fulfil peace prospects. After days of fighting, on 20 August, Saudi Arabia mediated between the two sides for a ceasefire and the Riyadh Agreement was produced through peace talks in Jeddah and then continued in Riyadh until 5 November 2019 (Forster, 2019). The peace deal was signed by both parties, which is a power-sharing agreement of the Hadi government with the break-away STC, 12 weeks after its takeover of the interim capital, Aden, in August 2019.

The state's incapacity to provide basic services in southern Yemen and the historical legacy of the southern issue and allegations of injustice have fuelled aspirations for southern secession. This has helped to give popular momentum to a growing independence movement in south Yemen. The STC has attempted to take up the banner of

southern independence from its inception. With the help of the UAE at first, the STC grew swiftly and began attempting to exercise state powers alongside the Hadi government. These endeavours have mostly failed, and STC actions are frequently viewed as hampering local government functions. However, thanks to UAE sponsorship, the STC's military authority in many locations, especially the Aden governorate, exceeded that of the government, with STC-affiliated forces acting independently and frequently in opposition to Yemeni armed forces (Ahmed & al-Rawhani, 2018).

Political Parties

The conflict in Yemen has another dimension, where political parties play a prominent role in the conflict. The General People's Congress (GPC) and Islah have always been the most influential parties in the country. The role of the GPC Party was referred to above, as it represented the political hand of former President Ali Saleh; the Islah party and its role in the Yemen conflict is discussed below. *Islah Party* was formed shortly after unity in 1990 and is commonly referred to as Al-Islah. This occurred a few months after the unification of both parts of the country, accompanied by the introduction of the democratic structure of unified Yemen with multi-party arrangement. What distinguishes al-Islah is that its members belong to prestigious dynasties of the country in addition to a web of regional connections with some Gulf countries such as the Saudi Arabia (Bonnefoy, 2010).

In general, Islah is one of the main local political powers in Yemen. In the post-unification era, both in the run-up to and after the 1994 civil war, Islah was allied with the ruling GPC party, partly as a reserve against the Yemeni Socialist Party (Lackner, 2017). The dispute between Islah and Saleh began after the presidential elections in 2006, when opposition parties, including Islah, presented a candidate against Saleh. The dispute became intense when the Arab Spring revolution erupted in Yemen. This new political development led the Islah to change its policy by supporting the popular revolution and those who demanded that the government led by Saleh must step down (Al-Tamimi & Venkatesha, 2020). In the post-Saleh period, the rift among the political parties deepened and their struggle to remain in power soared, and their strife to retain regional support have persisted until today.

Despite the fact that the Islah party is one of the significant players in the current Yemeni scenario, the UAE has deliberately worked to weaken its stand and brutally interrupted its path for a crucial post-war political role, claiming that they are linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. This has led to friction and tension with Saudi Arabia, which is a strong pro-Islah relation (Juneau, 2020). Through several statements Islah party has declared its rejection to any organizational or political links to the Muslim Brotherhood and that its priorities and rules as a political party are purely national (Al-Masdar Online, 2016). Some analysts have suggested it is the relationship between the Yemeni Islamic

movement and the Muslim Brotherhood is one of voluntary coordination and cooperation. In Yemen, the Islamic movement came into the country in consonance with its geography, and there was no pull back or renouncing of its national affiliation and is a consequence of its community, including its culture, identity, customs, and civilization (Mussed, 2020).

In addition, many other political parties declared their support for the legitimate government headed by Hadi against the Houthis. However, they did not have a prominent role either on the ground or at the political level. Moreover, an internal division occurred as some parties were divided between supporters of legitimacy and supporters of Houthi. The most prominent of these parties are the Socialist Party, the Nasserist Party, the Rashad Party (Salafis), and the Justice and Construction Party.

The Tribal and Military Elite

One of the actors shaping the Yemeni reality was the tribal and military elites, as the Saleh regime was based on the patronage system. In comparison to the elites, common protestors demanded fundamental reforms in 2011. They were firm on one goal that this corrupt regime should be eliminated and a civilian state headed by civilians must take over. It should ideally involve no military or tribal elite and be in compliance with democratic practices. With the rising number of demonstrators and the failure to address the political crisis, street violence intensified further. The "Friday of Dignity" was one of the bloodiest days of the 2011 uprising. On 18 March 2011, over 50 demonstrators were shot dead in Sana'a at Change Square. As a result, many regime loyalists, the General People's Congress and the security establishment broke off Saleh's grip (Al-Shargabi, 2013).

Foremost notable defections were General Ali Mohsen, President Saleh's closest and long-standing ally and his right-hand man in the armed forces and Sadeq Al-Ahmar, the Hashid tribal federation's supreme sheikh. Because Ali Mohsen belongs to the Sanhan tribe, President Saleh's tribe, these defections had tribal and military dimensions. The Hashid tribal federation is led by the Al-Ahmar family, including Sanhan. Therefore, this breakaway produced an irreparable rift inside the military and among Hashid tribes in general, particularly the Sanhan tribe (Soudias & Transfeld, 2014).

This was the reason for achieving the demonstrators' demands for a change in Saleh's regime. However, some of the elites remained loyal to former President Saleh, which subsequently fueled the situation and led to the current state of the war. At the beginning of the current conflict, the Houthis entered and took control of the capital with the help of some tribal and military personnel under Saleh's command.

Tribal traditions have long played an important role, both local and regional. Rather than working with or in opposition to the Yemeni state, tribals penetrate it on several

levels. This is what led to the consideration of the elites of the tribal and military groups as influential actors.

Regional Sub-Actors

Maintaining a balance of power in an area governed by political and religious dominance in the region is the paradox of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The rivalry emerges primarily from the power struggle between the two competing states, raising influence and security dilemma. However, after the wave of the Arab Spring, the changing dynamics of the Middle East altered the essence of threats tremendously and encouraged non-state actors in state structures. Moreover, the conflict is indirect, involving proxies and the propagation of ideology (Shujahi & Shafiq, 2018).

Thus, the Yemeni scenario can be interpreted, in a broader sense, as part of Saudi Arabia and Iran's greater power struggle. As its strongest rival in the region, Saudi Arabia has accused Iran of arming the Houthis to produce a copy of Hezbollah near its southern border (Al-Kahwati, 2019). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has consistently backed the legitimate Hadi government and some political parties in the country (Ali, 2015). This section provides a critical overview of the regional actors involved in the current Yemeni conflict, highlighting their influence on the course of the war whether positively or negatively.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

Saudi Arabia has the longest borderline to Yemen. A range of variables has influenced Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Yemen, including the steady flow of Yemeni immigrants to Saudi Arabia, issues with security and economic, and tribal relations (Hill & Nonneman, 2011). In Yemen, Saudi leaders have preserved vast patronage networks, where the Saudi rulers' relations with former Yemeni President Saleh have had ups and downs, as the Saudis worked against and with him, aligning with altering national and external dynamics (Rugh, 2015).

Moreover, the Saudi ruling elites have pursued Yemen's political stability and territorial integrity, which they claim will be potential only via a powerful centric government. Therefore, Saudi Arabia is working to support the legitimate government headed by Hadi and, through its direct military intervention in Yemen, aims to restore Hadi to power (Rugh, 2015).

According to Saudi Arabia's national strategic interests, there are four fundamental causes for its readiness to stabilize Yemen under the administration of Hadi's regime: "Secure its border with Yemen, curbing the regional plans of Iran for expansionism, battle against terrorist attacks and maintaining security in the area" (Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

The Impact on the Ground: Not surprisingly, given their common borders, Saudi Arabia plays an outsized role in the internal affairs of its neighbor, Yemen. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia assumed the lead in managing Yemen's political transition from Saleh's regime (Al-Tamimi & Venkatesha, 2020). Three years later, in 2015, Saudi Arabia felt obligated to intervene militarily in Yemen to restore President Hadi's government.

Although Saudi Arabia has not yet lost the war in Yemen, it is practically inevitable that it will not succeed. This is reflected in the fragile state of the Hadi government that is characterized by weakness and dispersion on reality. As a matter of fact, the Houthis still dominate significant swaths of the north, virtually functioning as a nation-state, and a destructive air campaign that has lasted six years has done little to shake or even loosen their grip on power and its ties to Iran.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The most powerful foreign player in the South of Yemen is the United Arab Emirates, a member of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia. However, the UAE has shrewdly built a base of loyalists in the South and west coast of Yemen and, in particular, Aden, while the Saudi Arabia has concentrated on the airstrike campaign. They have supported and trained UAE control teams but have provided numerous armed militias with operational and material support. The UAE was criticized for utilizing the existing authority void to gain command of Yemen's vital areas (Jerrett, 2017), especially the ports of Yemen, as they put their hand on one of the busiest world transportation routes, "Bab Al-Mandab". The UAE-Hadi relationship is tense, leading to direct armed encounters between the militias backed by the UAE and the forces loyal to Hadi (Clausen, 2018).

In addition to mobilizing secessionist groups against the Hadi government in the South, the UAE has also formed well trained and equipped local militias such as 'Elite Forces' and 'Security Belts'. Some of those organized groups belong to Salafists who work to target those affiliated with the Islah party and loyal to the Hadi regime, in addition to the Houthis. This approach can be considered one of the long-term strategies for the UAE to protect parts of the Red Sea coastal region, along with a passage to the Horn of Africa, where Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti have already built military bases.

The Impact on the Ground: The UAE's backing for the Southern Transitional Council (STC) lies at the heart of its strategy. The UAE provides the STC with financial and logistical assistance. It has also mobilized, trained, and equipped 90,000 troops from the southern militias with fairly strong command and control over them. In addition, on Yemen's west coast, The UAE's interests include the Bab al-Mandeb Strait in the southwestern corner of the country and Hudaydah, the country's second port. The UAE's strategy on the west coast has centered on supporting Tareq Saleh and the Giants "Amaliqah"

Brigade, over which UAE command and control is not as strong as it is over southern militias (Juneau, 2020).

Nowadays, some territories of Yemen, particularly in the southern governorate of Aden and Mokha city, have become an Emirates control region through its local proxies, and their influence is growing by the day.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab Coalition

In the regional context, the Gulf countries have continuously interfered in Yemen's internal politics, both in the pre or post conflict periods. The military operation in which the Gulf countries, except Oman, participated against the Houthi group is an intervention with a declared aim to support and reinstall the legitimate government represented by President Hadi. Regardless of any other undeclared goals, the beginning of this intervention represents a historic opportunity for the Gulf states to bring to a halt the influence that Iran is seeking to achieve in the region (Ali, 2015).

So far, the GCC, consists of Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, has pledged to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen. Most Council members, except Oman, are also participating in the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis. However, in 2017 Qatar withdrew from the alliance after falling into a diplomatic crisis with other Gulf countries. To oversee the transition to political stability and implement the weapons embargo on rebels in Yemen, the UN has agreed to collaborate with the GCC to the degree that it supports Saudi interference in Yemen.

The Saudi-led coalition, which was launched with the proclaimed objective of combating the Houthi rebels and reestablishing the authority of the legitimate government, has been the key external actor in the Yemeni war scenario since March 2015 (Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Originally, it consisted of Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, and Morocco); nevertheless, after the Qatari diplomatic crisis, the latter was cast out from the coalition in June 2017.

The USA, the UK, and France contributed indirectly by providing logistic assistance and information to the coalition. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the spearheads of the coalition's military operations, and each one of them pursues its own interests in Yemen. The airstrike operations of the coalition are operationally managed by a mutual command headed by Saudi Arabia and located in Riyadh. In addition, Saudi Arabia maintains operational control of ground operations in Marib, while the United Arab Emirates retains operational control over ground operations in Aden and the western coast (Arraf, 2017).

Iran

It is clear that Yemen was not on the list of foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic until recently, and there are no proofs that Iran offered any cooperation to the Houthis.

before the start of the 2004 war. However, since the moment of the first war between the Houthis and the Saleh regime, the Houthis and Iran had more continuing connections, and Tehran began to supply them with military, financial and political support (Terrill, 2014).

In 2009, Iran began exporting low quantities of arms to the Houthis, according to a report in April 2015 to the Committee on Iranian Sanctions of the UN Security Council. The weapons transferred by sea were established, and seven potential occasions of such shipments were detailed. In one of those instances, in April 2009, a ship belonging to Iran transported arms boxes to Yemeni vessels in international waters; in the other one, a fishery ship affiliated with Iran that was confiscated by Yemeni powers in February 2011, was found to hold 900 Iranian anti-tank and helicopter missiles (Landry, 2015).

Iran's patronage of the Houthis seems to have grown beyond 2011. US officials who had previously denied the Yemeni allegations of Iranian funding for the Houthis have begun to admit that Iran is likely to offer very limited aid, including low quantities of automated weapons and grenade launchers, bombing equipment and cash in the amount of several million dollars (Schmitt & Worth, 2012). According to Conflict Armament Research (CAR), in contrast to the Houthi rebels' claims that they designed and built UAVs, they deployed Iranian-made missiles and drones like the Qasef-1 type UAV (CAR, 2017). According to a July 2018 report by a UN panel of experts, despite the UN arms embargo placed on Yemen since 2015, Iran colluded in providing Yemen's Houthi rebels with ballistic missiles and drones that "display features similar" to Iranian-made weapons (UNSC, 2018).

According to Western officials, Iran has increased military and financial assistance to the Houthis from the beginning of Operation Decisive Storm. Particularly since the collapse of the Houthi-Saleh alliance. They said that many Iranian advisors were on the ground in Yemen, along with hundreds more from Lebanon's Hezbollah (Baron, 2019).

The Impact on the Ground: After the Arab Spring uprisings, Iran's presence has increased regional political tension. It would be fair to say that the Middle East's post-revolutionary developments have expanded Iran's room for regional maneuvering. As Broder rightly points out, contemporary politics in the region reflects Tehran's weight. Its presence extends over a strategic region from Lebanon to Syria and Iraq, and then Yemen. The religious rhetoric of Shi'a plays a significant mobilizing function behind this influence (Broder, 2017). To extend its presence in the region, Iran has established its relationships with governmental and non-governmental actors. Governmental actors, including Syria and Iraq. As for non-governmental actors, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen to enhance its presence in the region (Zweiri, 2016).

The chain of events that started with the Houthis takeover of Sana'a in September 2014 has led Iran to a greater lifting of its funding. Since mid-2014, there have been various

media reports citing the US and Western officials acknowledging a higher degree of support from Iran to the Houthis. According to these reports, there could be dozens or hundreds of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) advisors in Yemen (Strobel & Hosenball, 2015). In addition, it is alleged that Houthi fighters have traveled to Iran and Lebanon for training, as Hezbollah has played a major role in grooming the Houthis' military capabilities (Strobel & Hosenball, 2015).

Iran also started to be more transparent about its position in Yemen around this time. For example, President Rouhani characterized the Houthi seizure of Yemen's capital in 2014 as a "splendid and thunderous victory", a statement that would have been unlikely to be made by an Iranian official in the past. Then the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister officially promised political assistance to the Houthis in February 2015 (Bayoumy & Ghobari, 2014). Shortly after that, a deputation of Houthis returning from Teheran in March declared the approval of Iran to supply Yemen with a package of economic support, including assistance for the expansion of Yemeni harbors and the development of power generation stations, and a one-year supply of oil. In March 2015, the establishment of two daily flights between Tehran and Sana'a was also declared by Iran and the Houthis (Juneau, 2016). It is also important to state here that Iran is the only country that officially approved the legitimacy of the Houthi coup, despite its official denial of supporting them, by reopening the embassy and assigning an ambassador in Sana'a. This contradictory stand reveals the depth of the relationship between Iran and the Houthi allies.

International Sub-Actors

Besides the main domestic belligerents, minor actors, and regional actors, the Yemeni conflict drama also involved international actors, especially when the conflict expanded and became internationalized in 2015. The role of a number of countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and above all the United States in the Yemeni war whether directly or indirectly is discussed critically below.

The United States

Prior to 2015, the US primary role in Yemen was fighting against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which included mainly Unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) strikes against terrorist cells and leaders (Arimatsu & Choudhury, 2014). In addition to battling the network of terrorists and extremists, the United States funded the operations of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen in 2015. Because of its ties with the government of President Hadi, Washington has expressed its dissatisfaction with the Houthi forces' overthrowing of the globally acknowledged legitimate government. Therefore, the US provided military logistical and intelligence assistance and deployed American warships in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea to support the Saudi-led operation against

the Houthis to restore legitimacy and order to Yemen. In addition, it also supplied the fuel for coalition air forces warplanes to conduct the airstrikes in Yemen to preclude Iran from any direct involvement with the dispute (Rugh, 2015).

Overall, Houthi statements and attempts to establish a government have not officially been recognized by the United States and others in the international community, maintaining that President Hadi remains Yemen's legitimate president. The United States has demanded that both parties stick to previous internationally brokered agreements, such as the transition plan for the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2011 and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement in September 2014 (Sharp, 2015).

The risks posed to commercial and military ships by the Houthis in the Red Sea have made the situation more serious and fragile. Consequently, in August 2018, General Votel, the Commander of the US Central Command, reported that: "As far as we're concerned, Bab-el-Mandeb is open for business. And I'd say it's major waterway, not only for the United States, but in terms of going through that specific region for many countries. Therefore, one of our main missions here is to ensure freedom of navigation and trade, and we will strive to do so throughout the country" (Al Dosari & George, 2020).

The Impact on the Ground: There is no doubt that, internationally, the US is one of the most influencing actors in the current mayhem in Yemen. For the past two decades, the US has launched unilateral attacks in Yemen against what it considers to be terrorist targets. Concerning the Yemeni conflict, it has also played a crucial diplomatic role, vigorously lobbying for the execution of the "Gulf Initiative" in 2011, which resulted in Saleh's resignation in exchange for immunity. Even while the US insists it is unbiased and takes no part in the conflict, it has recently backed the Saudi-led coalition's military action in Yemen, giving logistic and intelligence support.

The US wields considerable influence over the Saudi-led coalition and is, therefore, a crucial role in pressuring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to reach an agreement to eliminate the regional dimension of the conflict (Johnsen, 2018). This is especially true of Saudi Arabia, with which the United States has had the longest association of any Middle Eastern country, specifically in the oil and arms industries (Riedel, 2018). However, the US has failed to use its diplomatic clout with Saudi Arabia to influence or reverse the war's present course (Johnsen, 2021).

The United Kingdom and France

The two nations have been provisioning the coalition led by Saudi Arabia with arms and military equipment on a wide level. Since the military operation by the coalition started in March 2015, amid reports of repeated violations of International humanitarian law (IHL) by the coalition, more than £ 3.3 billion in weapons and military equipment has been licensed by the UK (Amnesty International, 2017). Last July, the High Court

in London dismissed a legal challenge to the UK government's weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. Besides increasing its weapons and military equipment exports to the coalition of Saudi-led since March 2015, it is reported that France has given training to Saudi air force pilots (Mohamed & Fortin, 2017).

Information was issued by the United Kingdom Foreign Secretary in 2016 as: "In Saudi Arabia, we have a military presence and we work with the Saudis to ensure that proper protocols are followed to prevent violations of international humanitarian law, to ensure that target sets are properly identified, and processes are properly followed and that only valid military targets are achieved. We also use the staff present as a rapid verification of international humanitarian law violations. So far, our people on the ground have confirmed, in every situation, that there is no proof of intentional violations of international humanitarian law" (Lewis & Templar, 2018).

The United Kingdom backed Saudi Arabia's and the United Arab Emirates' policy objectives of eliminating Iranian influence from Yemen. Since the United Kingdom realized that the resolution of conflict and rehabilitation of Yemen would take years, if not decades, they chose to constantly participate via Yemen's neighbors, who stood to gain or lose the most from their successes or failures (Brehony, 2020).

The European Union

The EU is the major Western body with a working relationship with all the main war actors. Before Griffith was appointed as the UN mediator to Yemen, Antonia Calvo Puerta, the leader of the EU Track-2 activities inclusive of many Yemeni tribals, was the only Western diplomat to visit the Houthi leadership. The EU even had the capacity to promote the mediation attempts of Griffith, in addition to collaboration with the tribes. The United Kingdom has previously vetoed Brussels' increased participation on several occasions, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU implies, however, that it now has a revived chance to advocate and mediate for solutions (Al-Muslimi, 2018).

Russia

Until the spring of 2019, Russia had no profound presence in the Yemen war. It took part in the mediation efforts by influencing many Yemeni parties, like the Houthis and the Southern Transitional Council. (STC). This is because of their strategic reasons and their historic links (Ramani, 2018).

The Yemeni issue in the Security Council was marked by the unanimous vote of members on the resolutions issued, except in one case, as Russia was the only country that withdrew from the vote on Resolution 2216 that makes it seem quite neutral in the eyes of the Houthis, which Russia might use to its benefit to compel the Houthis to participate in negotiation processes. This has happened to a certain degree already. Moscow has

engaged with the Houthis more than any other great force since 2014, forcing them to participate in versatile diplomacy.

Discussion and Analysis

The Arab Spring revolution in Yemen ended with the signing of the GCC Initiative and its implementation mechanism. After that, procedures to be followed within a particular phase, called the transitional period, were identified, which included presidential elections and dialogue between the various Yemeni communities, and then the approval of the new constitution and the start of a phase for the new Yemen. However, during the transitional period and the state's preoccupation, the Houthis consolidated their power in the Saada governorate and its environs until they reached the capital, Sana'a, and controlled it along with all the state institutions there. They placed the president and state officials under house arrest. Thus, a *coup d'état* stopped the transitional process and ushered in a new conflict that has been running until this day.

Yemen has not known stability nor peace since the Arab Spring revolution of 2011 until the present time due to the continuing conflict, political upheavals and deeply rooted disparities between the parties. During this period, the country has witnessed a group of influential forces, whether political or ideological, with shifting positions and degrees of power, as shown in Table 1.

The analysis of the conflict in Yemen indicates the occurrence of divisions that led to the failure of the transitional political process agreed upon in accordance with the Gulf initiative and the NDC. These divisions were initially represented by the Houthi invasion of the capital and control of state institutions, and the restriction of the legitimate government from carrying out its work. Thus, the failure of the transitional phase led to the invocation of external intervention. This was followed by a split led by some leaders belonging to the Southern Movement after the formation of the STC, which is considered to have enough legitimacy to confront the government. Finally, with the help and support of the UAE, the militias of the Council took control of Aden and expelled the legitimate government from it, thus weakening legitimacy and dispersing the common goal which is supposed to unify them in confronting the Houthi rebels.

The conflict in Yemen is extremely complex, due to the increase in number of actors, which makes it more difficult to reach a solution to alleviate the miseries and grievances of the Yemeni people and ensure a constant peace. Initially, the war started between a legitimate ruling political structure and a militia of rebels. However, those main arch enemies are just two actors among an array of other actors, local, regional and even international. Adding insult to injury, those actors are themselves facing intra-war tensions and clashes, as evidenced by the Houthis' rivalry with the loyalists of the former president Saleh in Sana'a as well as by the Hadi forces' sporadic clashes with the supporters of the STC in Aden.

The more parties involved in a dispute, the longer it will likely last and the more difficult it will be to reach a peace agreement. As Christopher Phillips argues, the more external actors are involved in the Yemeni affairs, the longer the civil war is likely to remain. They are unlikely to halt their involvement until their objectives are realized and goals achieved, and the more agendas in play, the more difficult it is for any resolution to please all parties (Phillips, 2016).

Consequently, the Houthi group turns to be not the only threat to the government, the representative of legitimacy in Yemen. There is the STC, as well, which is a stubborn obstacle since it is sustained by the UAE backing. Although the STC signed the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement in November 2019 to avoid further clashes, there are no indications that the agreement has been executed in reality. The STC most recently announced a state of emergency and self-rule over the South on 26 April, despite Saudi Arabia's rejection of the announcement (Doucet, 2020).

Therefore, given the current state of the Yemen conflict, this study classifies the conflict actors into three main actors: the legitimate government, the Houthi coup, and what can be described as the coup of the Southern Transitional Council. Table 2 shows the strengths that characterize each of these actors compared to the weaknesses of each, clarifying the differences and similarities between them.

The legitimacy of Yemeni state institutions has perpetually been brittle and in crisis, as it has failed to address the state's complex social and political structure. This in turn has been the main trigger of the current conflict and increasing tension. The fragility of the legitimate government has resulted in the appearance of many non-state players contending for power and control of resources in Yemen disregarding the common interest of the Yemeni people, the real stakeholders. Aiding the reestablishment of legitimacy is definitely crucial to the country's reconstruction and long-term peace and stability. But unless all the national powers and political bodies within the regime pay strenuous efforts and show sincere will for reform, Yemen legitimacy will remain a dilapidated structure and accordingly the country will continue in its state of anarchy and political vacuum. Yemen's political and social structure is complicated, and for the government to entertain strong legitimacy, it must encompass the diversity and address the interests of the country's diverse populations rather than the interests of a small group of elites.

Hadi's government is supported by regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who consented to be involved in the conflict to restore the "legitimacy" of the Yemeni government in Sana'a. The Saudi-led coalition, and particularly Saudi Arabia, has indeed been propping up the government in the sense that without Riyadh's military, financial, and logistical support, the government would have dissolved years ago. But, on the contrary, the coalition has been undermining the legitimacy of the very Yemeni government it claims to support. Both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have established direct relations with Yemeni groups that operate beyond the government's jurisdiction,

Table1: The Conflict Actors Timeline Analysis

Year	Conflict Actors	Local Supporters	External Supporters	Description
2011	Youths Revolution	Joint Meeting Parties, Part of the Yemeni tribe, Houthis movement, Southern Movement	USA, KU, Russia, Qatar	At this stage, external actors were supportive of the Yemeni people for change. The youth revolution ended with the signing of the Gulf Initiative and its implementation mechanism, and thus began the transitional period headed by Hadi.
	Against: Saleh's regime	General People's Congress, other part of the Yemeni tribe	KSA, UAE,	
	2012–2013 The transition period, which witnessed some kind of calm and preparations for change.			
2014	Houthis Group	Saleh and his followers with Part of GPC, Part of Salafis, Part of the Yemeni tribe	Iran, Russia	Russia's support was demonstrated through its objection to some of the Security Council resolutions.
	Legitimacy Government	Islah, Part of GPC, Al-Rashad Union, Southern Movement, Part of the Yemeni tribe	KAS, UAE, USA, UK, France	
	Houthis Group	Saleh and his followers with Part of GPC, Part of Salafis, Part of the Yemeni tribe	Iran, Russia	
	Legitimacy Government	Islah, Part of GPC, Al-Rashad Union, Southern Movement, Part of the Yemeni tribe	The Arab Coalition, USA, UK, France	
2015				At the request of President Hadi, formation of the Arab coalition was announced and began operations against the Houthis to force him to return to the political track.

2017 to current time	Houthi Coup	Saleh, Part of GPC, Part of Salafis, Part of the Yemeni tribe	Iran, Russia	The Southern Transitional Council was formed demanding the Autonomous Administration of the southern governorates, which worked to confuse the legitimate government and began the dispersion in the confrontation of the Houthis and focus on problems within the components of legitimacy. A dispute arose between Saleh and the Houthis, as Saleh announced to his followers to leave the Houthis, which resulted in confrontations between them that ended with the elimination and killing of Saleh.
	Legitimacy Government	Islah, Part of GPC, Al-Rashad Union, Part of the Yemeni tribe, Part of Southern Tribes	The Arab Coalition, USA, UK, France	
	Southern Transitional Council	Part of GPC, Part of Salafis, few of Southern Tribes	UAE, UK, Russia	

Table 2: Comparative analysis of the main local actors in Yemen conflict

Comparisons Aspects	Legitimacy	Houthis	Southern Transitional Council
Strengths	<p>Internationally recognize.</p> <p>They have a wide popularity throughout the country.</p> <p>They have some economic resources, including ports and oil areas.</p> <p>They have major external support by KSA as the main supporter.</p>	<p>They seized state institutions after taking control of the capital.</p> <p>They rely on dynastic, tribal and regional nervousness.</p> <p>Unity of leadership and decision with clarity of goal.</p> <p>They have major external support by Iran.</p> <p>They grip the financial resources of the areas under their control, the most important is the port of Hodeidah.</p>	<p>They almost completely control the temporary capital.</p> <p>They have major external support, from UAE.</p> <p>They grip the financial resources of the areas under their control, the most important is the port of Aden.</p>
Weaknesses	<p>Its leadership and decisions are dispersed because it includes the various portions of society.</p> <p>The government's inability to provide require basic living services to the Yemenis.</p> <p>Development failure.</p> <p>The suspension of oil and gas exports, which led to the economic collapse.</p> <p>They have not succeeded in representing the state that was Yemeni's dream.</p> <p>Ruling the state from outside the country.</p>	<p>Not recognized internationally except Iran recognized them.</p> <p>They do not have a popular base except from some stakeholders.</p> <p>Ruling through threats and violence in the form of a police state.</p> <p>Monopolizing authority and state resources.</p> <p>Lost the influential political ally "Saleh" by killing him.</p> <p>Lack of commitment to pay the salaries and entitlements of Yemenis in their control areas.</p>	<p>Not recognized internationally except within the parts of legitimacy.</p> <p>They do not have a popular base except from some stakeholders.</p> <p>Dependence on external support.</p> <p>Division among the various factions in the southern governorates.</p>
Differences	<p>They urge all parties to resume dialogue and complete the transition process.</p> <p>They have a popular base.</p> <p>Weak control over their areas of rule.</p> <p>They have international recognition.</p> <p>They have unity of leadership but are scattered.</p>	<p>They want to take control of the remaining areas and the restoration of their prior kingdom back.</p> <p>They do not have a popular base.</p> <p>Tight control over their areas of grip.</p> <p>They do not have international recognition.</p> <p>They have unity of command.</p>	<p>They demand secession and the restoration of the southern state to its pre-unification borders.</p> <p>They do not have a popular base.</p> <p>Weak control over their areas of grip.</p> <p>They do not have international recognition.</p> <p>They have unity of leadership but are divided within the national framework.</p>
Similarities	<p>External funding.</p> <p>Control of a specific region of the country.</p> <p>Indifference to answer the aspirations of the Yemeni people and improve their status.</p>		

and they provide support to those groups. According to public criticism, Hadi's coalition allies are accused of using his "legitimacy" as a cover and justification for their military and business activities on the ground (Ahmed & al-Rawhani, 2018).

During the transitional period in 2014, the Houthis turned against the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, as they took control of the capital after their alliance with former President Saleh. Since this event, Yemen has witnessed a violent conflict that has led to external interventions. Table 3 provides an analysis of the various types of actors in this conflict and their diverse positions, roles, and impact up to the present time.

Table 3: Analysis of the Conflict Actors Based on their Role and Impact

No.	Actor	Type	Political	Military	Popular	Funding
1	Legitimacy Government	Key Actor	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Islah	Local Sub-Actor	✓		✓	
	• Part of GPC	Local Sub-Actor	✓		✓	
	• Southern Movement	Local Sub-Actor	✓		✓	
	• Part of the Yemeni tribe	Local Sub-Actor	✓		✓	
	• Part of Salafis	Local Sub-Actor				
	• The KSA	Regional Sub-Actor	✓	✓		✓
	• The UAE	Regional Sub-Actor		✓		✓
	• The USA	Regional Sub-Actor	✓	✓		
	• The UK	International Sub-Actor		✓		
	• France	International Sub-Actor		✓		
2	Houthis	Key Actor	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Saleh and his followers with Part of GPC	Local Sub-Actor	✓	✓	✓	
	• Part of the Yemeni tribe	Local Sub-Actor	✓		✓	
	• Part of Salafis	Local Sub-Actor				
	• Iran	Regional Sub-Actor	✓	✓		✓
	• Russia	International Sub-Actor	✓			
3	Southern Transitional Council	Key Actor	✓	✓	✓	
	• Part of Salafis	Local Sub-Actor			✓	
	• Southern Tribes	Local Sub-Actor	✓		✓	
	• The UAE	Regional Sub-Actor	✓	✓		✓
	• The UK	International Sub-Actor	✓			
	• Russia	International Sub-Actor	✓			

Studying the many actors participating in Yemen's conflict and their characteristics aids in analyzing their viewpoints and predicting their actions. As can be observed from the above discussion, the conflict's complexity stems from the large number of parties involved in it and the fluid nature of their connections, which is influenced by personal

interests and fueled by other actors. Alliances are formed due to common adversaries working against a third opponent, as evidenced by current alliances. For instance, being against the Houthis does not essentially require to be a pro-Hadi. Likewise, becoming against the external intervention does not necessarily imply being a pro-Houthis. The nature of these connections has resulted in strange and unexpected partnerships between originally opposing factions, such as the case of the Houthi-Saleh brittle alliance, who were permanent enemies.

Moreover, although most factions claim to be opposed to external involvement in the Yemeni inside, most alliances, whether explicitly or implicitly, are backed up by external actor, as revealed by the above analysis. It is important to highlight, however, that these alliances are not straightforward. For example, Yemeni parties accept financial aid, but they are protective of their sovereignty and identity and may oppose foreign parties' advice and commands occasionally. As a result, it is impossible to label Yemen's conflict as a proxy war, given the intricacy of the actors involved, even within a single organization. This is evident in the internal divisions that occur inside groups due to differing beliefs and viewpoints.

Some scholars have supported this point of view, as Maria-Louise Clausen (2015) argued that the Houthis' existence and onslaught are far more credibly regarded as a product of Yemen's political and economic backdrop than a result of Iranian strategy. Moreover, Durac also pointed out that the conflict in Yemen is being described as a proxy war between Iran, which supports the Houthis, and Saudi Arabia, which supports the legitimate government. This narrative, in his point of view, is nothing but a simplification of the idea and a contradiction of history and reality (Durac, 2019). However, it can be said that the external intervention in Yemen especially from the regional actors is a result of the competition for control between Saudi Arabia and Iran over the region (Al-Tamimi & Venkatesha, 2021).

Conclusion

Yemen has entered a dark tunnel, a state of chaos and civil war, since the moment the coup of the Houthi-Saleh alliance put their grip on the state institutions in Sana'a. Then, a vicious war raged between the legitimate government and its supporters and the Houthi-Saleh alliance and their supporters. Moreover, the interference of external actors has exacerbated the intensity of the conflict in Yemen, making these outsiders inevitably dominant players in the Yemeni local affairs. Therefore, it can be said that this dispute has two sides, internal and external. On one side, the Yemen conflict is multi-faceted struggle due to the internal divisions and intra-alliance disagreements of the country's political elites. On the other side, the external players, whether regional or international, have goals and ambitious to achieve in order to secure their borders or simply satisfy their greed for power. Therefore, the prospects for restoring state and security while

also achieving peace are bleak and uncertain except for returning to completing the transitional phase based on the Gulf initiative and its executive mechanisms.

The conflict in Yemen is endless and no winner appears in the horizon. The legitimate government and its supporters are ineffective and divisive, and the Houthis are sufficiently supplied through illegal and twisted networks to fight a long-term war. What is left is a country that is shattered by indiscriminate bombing by the Houthis and ruthless airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition, suffering from acute shortage of the simplest vital public services such as water, food and electricity.

In conclusion, by excluding the external players whose interference is primarily for their own ambitions of power and domination, the solution to this conflict is purely an internal responsibility that mainly lies on the Yemeni political, military, and tribal elites. The peacemaking process must include all conflicting actors and sectors of the society to address all the causes that led to the conflict and to prevent the reoccurrence of future conflicts. Peacemakers must consider sustainable long-term prosperity in the country and seek the support of the international community for a smooth peacemaking experience. However, the process of political transition in Yemen depends mainly on restoring state institutions, controlling security, returning to complete the stages of the transitional period, and resolving problems and disputes over the outcomes of the national dialogue.

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