Crisis in Yemen: Causes and Implications

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Abstract

The crisis in Yemen is the latest of the trouble spots in a long list of flashpoints in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and its allies initiated an air campaign against Yemen in 2015. The objective was to dislodge Houthi tribesmen who had taken over eastern parts of Yemen. This military campaign persists till date in one form or the other. The Yemeni tribal feuds are ancient and perennial. How did they catapult into a regional conflagration? Saudi Arabia alleges that the Houthis receive backing from Iran. This situates the Yemen crisis within the Saudi-Iranian geopolitical competition. The geopolitical aspect pertains to the regional balance of power, and the aspect of geopolitical alliances. Another implication of the meltdown of the Yemeni state relates to the future of democracy as a model of governance, in view of rising sectarianism in the region.

Keywords: Yemen, Crisis, Middle East, Balance of power, Democracy

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Yemen, after Saudi-led alliance's intervention against Houthis in 2015, is among the most severe crises in the region in years. Although under developed, Yemen's strategic location means that a crisis here carries implications for Yemen, and also for the entire Middle East. To understand the recent conflict, one must be aware of the history of disputes that have plagued Yemen for centuries.

With a population exceeding 25 million, Yemen's population is mostly divided along tribal as well as religious and sectarian lines (Book, 2005). Two major sects are Sunnis from Shafi school of thought, and Shias of Zaydia sect. According to UNCHR, the Shias make up 45 percent of the total population, while Sunnis are 53 percent. The Houthi Zaydis, among the Shias, form about 30 per cent of the total population. The tribal divisions also play an important role in the current power struggle (UNHCR, 2009).

The role of ideological postures and regional groupings is a significant field of investigation in the Middle East. This study attempts to focus on the role of ideological/sectarian divide and its impact on democracy within the context of the Yemen Crisis, with a view to the implications for the broader region. In this sense, this study spans the twin domains of security studies and democratization studies. In terms of the Saudi-Iranian competition, the relationship between the two Middle Eastern states is analyzed in a regional and global context. The Saudi-Iranian geopolitical competition defines the region's political landscape (Yamani, 2008). The

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Persian-Arab rivalry persists within the geopolitical framework. There is an international dimension because the US, European Union and Russia are also involved.

This work seeks to answer the following question: What does the Yemen crisis signify in the context of regional political alliances, and the future of democracy?

The hypothesis of the study is that, "The Yemen crisis signals another split along the axis of regional geopolitical alliances. Further, the rise of sectarianism deals a blow to democracy."

The methodology of the study centers around the different roles played by three key actors: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the GCC. The study ends with recommendations for an inclusive mechanism of regional crisis management and conflict-resolution. This work's main premise is that only local powers can settle intra-regional disputes. The conflict-resolution mechanism would include bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia to the table to stabilize regional balance of power. It would also include dealing with Salafi jihadism, controlling sectarianism by legislating and ensuring recognition, protection and due rights to national minorities, and supporting fledgling states like Yemen.

In the aftermath of the Yemen crisis, Saudi Arabia is known to have made overtures toward the Hamas in Gaza (Iblish, 2015). This demonstrates that Saudi Arabia wants to take the initiative away from Iran in the popularly emotive Palestinian issue. Turkey too might perceive a looming competition for regional primacy with Iran (Cengiz, 2005). This signals a regional fissure developing along the sectarian fault line. The rise of sectarianism deals a blow to democracy. The way forward for democracy in the Muslim World is the gradual reformation in the values and standards of governance through pluralistic reforms as happened in Tunisia (Stepan, 2012). The split in the region along sectarian lines, and emergence of Salafi jihadism does not bode well for the democratic future of the region.

Historical Perspective

Historically, by the time of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) demise in 632 AD, Yemeni tribes had converted to Islam. Zaydi tribes migrated to northern areas of Yemen from the Mesopotamian region in the Ninth century. The Imam, religious leader of Zaydi tribes, subsequently extended his control to the southern Sunni tribal areas. The Ottoman Empire conquered the region in 1517, albeit with limited control. The Zaydis led the rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. The local tribes, including the Sunni tribes, often proclaimed autonomy under the leadership of the Zaydi Imam (Dresch, 2000).

During the colonial era, Britain took control of the port of Aden in 1839. The northern areas of Yemen remained divided amongst the Ottoman Empire and local tribesmen. By 1914, most of the neighboring Arab rulers had signed treaties of protection with Great Britain. The First World War ended with defeat of Ottoman Empire, and

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Mutawakkilite Zaydi Imam, Yahya, initiated an armed movement for Yemen's independence from the north (Saudi Arabia), and from the south (British). Eventually, the fighting ended with the 'Treaty of Taif' with Saudi Arabia, and 'Treaty of Sanaa' with the British in 1934. The British retained control of Aden Protectorate, using it as a shipping port.

In 1962, the reigning Imam was deposed in an army coup. This caused hostilities to break out in northern Yemen. The rebellious republicans under the army were on one side, and the royalists of the Imam on the other. Saudi Arabia supported the Mutawakkilite royalists with military aid, while republican government enjoyed the support of Egypt. In 1965, the then president of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Saudi King Faisal held a meeting for a peaceful settlement to the civil war in northern Yemen. Both countries decided to withdraw their support. However, the fighting continued until 1970, when a new republican government was formed with some representation given to the royalists. Saudi Arabia recognized the republic government, and diplomatic ties were established with North Yemen.

In the southern region, the British formed a coalition government comprising various local tribal leaders in 1963. The new country was named as the, "Federation of South Arabia". This arrangement proved fragile, and Marxist rebels soon overthrew the Sheiks, and seized control of South Yemen. Great Britain granted full independence to the region in 1967, and the Marxist rebels formed a government in the south: People's Democratic Republic of Yemen - PDRY. Yemen was thus bifurcated into the Republic of Yemen with capital Sanaa, and PDRY with Aden as capital. In the PDRY, the tribal and ideological divisions between the two factions of the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party continued to be the main source of tensions (Gart, 1989). In the Republic of Yemen, the military under Col Ibrahim al-Hamdi staged a bloodless coup in June 1974, alleging that the government had lost control (Sttokey, 1978).

After another two decades of infighting, by the late 1980s, the administrations in both regions made significant changes in government in order to allow a smooth transition for unification. As per the negotiations, the South Yemen government relaxed its Marxists principles before unification. Eventually after decades of civil war and bloodshed, the country was integrated in 1990 and became the Republic of Yemen. Sanaa, capital of North Yemen, was designated the capital of newly formed state. President Ali Abdullah Saleh from the north became the new president of United Yemen.

In 1994, an armed rebellion broke out with an attempt to re-establish a separate state in the south. However, after a two-month civil war, the northern army defeated the rebels in the south. President Saleh strengthened the political system, and in 1999, the United Yemen held presidential elections for the first time. President Saleh won the election and continued serving as president. He was re-elected again in 2006. Despite the apparent democratic progress, civil and political violence persisted in Yemen.

The Houthi movement began in northern region of Yemen. The fighting began in 2004, when a Zaydi cleric Hussain al-Houthi launched a rebellion against the Yemeni government. The war has mostly been limited to northern region, with some expansion to the neighboring regions. The war has huge strategic implications for the entire region, because of the role of two major states in the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The fighting has so far resulted in thousands of casualties, both of militants and among civilians. The center of the rebellion is Saada province in the north, close to the Saudi border. The fight has raged for over a decade now.

Role of Saudi Arabia

This section deals with Saudi Arabian foreign policy in the region, and toward Yemen. Why did Saudi Arabia choose to raise its regional profile in Syria and Yemen? What were the motivations behind the Saudi assertion in Yemen and what are its likely implications for regional security? One of the reasons put forward for the Saudi Arabian behavior was the Iran nuclear deal (Pasha, 2016). There was concern among the Arab states that region's balance of power might tilt in Iran's favor. The fear was that the nuclear deal would take the form of a Grand Bargain with Iran to the detriment of Arab states.

Three types of views exist within Saudi Arabia in view of the Saudi military action in Yemen termed as Operation Decisive Storm (Brandt, 2015). The first is that it is a sectarian battle to defend Sunnis and to stop Iranian expansion. The second view is that it is a political war against Iranian influence to support legitimacy and stability of the Yemen state. The third view is based upon the nationalist perspective. It sees Saudi Arabian military involvement in Yemen as a way to restore respect to the Arab nation vis a vis Iranian Safavid regional expansion.

Yemen-Saudi Arabia relations have mostly been tensed historically (Xia, 2010). Saudi Arabia's brief war in Yemen right after its independence in 1934 was a bitter start of foreign relations between the two countries. This brief war resulted in the "Treaty of Taif" which gave right to Saudi Arabia to incorporate two ethnically Yemeni provinces into its territory resulting in border issues between both countries, which remain one of the world's largest undefined border between any two countries.

After the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia during 1960s and 1970s, Yemeni workers got the opportunity to work in Saudi Arabia, and remittances sent by these workers in Yemen became an important source of revenue for Yemen's economy. This also made Yemen economically dependent on Saudi Arabia, providing an opportunity to Saudi Arabia to interfere in Yemen's internal politics. Yemen has always been strategically important to Saudi Arabia, which shares 1500 kilometers long border with Yemen. The border security was a source of contention for both countries for long. The divergences in claims of both countries made it difficult for any resolution feasible for both. Saudi Arabia's aggressive approach such as building multi-billion dollar "military city" near the northwestern end of the border in Jizan and giving citizenship

to ethnically Yemeni border tribes in Shabwa, Hadramaut and Al-Maqara provinces, made the situation tense (Whitaker, 2015). Finally, this complex issue of border demarcation was settled in 2000, after an agreement was reached in the Treaty of Jeddah (Al-Enazy, 2002).

Another important issue that kept both neighbors at odds with each other was support of Saudi Arabia to southern separatists in 1994. Interestingly, in 1962 civil war erupted in Yemen and the rebels wanted to turn Yemen into a republic, and thus threatened the rule of the Mutawakkilite Imam. Saudi Arabia involved itself in Yemen's civil war to secure the Mutawakkilite Zaydi Imamate. However, the country split in two, creating the northern Republic, and PDRY in the south. Yemen's 1990 unification, followed by the Gulf War when Iraq invaded Kuwait, also affected Yemen-Saudi relations negatively.

Saudi Arabia's attitude toward Yemen remained hostile due to many factors. One factor was the multi-party system, which according to Saudi Arabia could threaten the monarchical system of governments in the region (Worth, 2018). The concern in Saudi Arabia was that a domino effect could cause spillover in the region, with people of other Arab kingdoms demanding greater political rights and participation in decision-making processes of their respective countries. Moreover, the discovery of oil in Yemen, especially in areas near Saudi Arabia and Yemen's undefined border, was another source of conflict between the neighboring countries. It was a rare opportunity for Yemen to have an independent revenue source (Middle East Monitor , 2019). Saudi Arabia feared that Yemen would slip away from its sphere of influence and started a campaign to prevent further discovery of oil in Yemen. Saudi Arabia's support for opposition groups was another cause of concern for Yemen.

The relationship between both countries hit a new low when during the Gulf War, Yemen refused to stand with GCC countries in their military campaign against Iraq's former president Saddam Hussain. Resultantly, Saudi Arabia cut financial aid to Yemen and expelled 750,000 Yemenis from Saudi Arabia. This mass expulsion was a great burden on Yemen's fragile economy, and resultantly Yemen faced high unemployment rates, and sudden increase in poverty (Feltmen, 2018).

Yemen has a history of internal discord, with political as well as strategic consequences for the entire region. From 2004 till now, the Houthi rebellion in Yemen has caught international attention. The military campaign under Saleh presidency was launched in 2009 aimed at crushing the Houthi rebellion, but that ended in ceasefire. In 2011, a wave of demonstrations broke out throughout Arab world, termed as 'Arab Spring'. In Yemen, opposition groups along with Houthis sought to remove the Saleh regime, which they eventually did. During these events, Saudi Arabia backed Saleh because of its national interests.

Saudi Arabia also gave military aid to Yemen for the fight against al-Qaeda terrorists, which emerged as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and threatened Saudi Arabian security.

The Houthi expansion, which has managed to wipe out Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in areas under Houthi control, has given birth to an alliance between the Houthis and former president Saleh. In the past, former president Saleh used forced against Houthis to crush their rebellion, but this new alliance has changed the dynamics of the country. It's not unlikely that their cooperation will convince the international community of their legitimacy as rightful rulers of Yemen. Further, both share common rivalry against al-Qaeda.

The major cause of concern for Saudi Arabia is that Houthi expansion might provide the Shia opposition in the kingdom a pretext to increase their efforts against the monarchy. Saudi Arabia is concerned that Houthi-controlled Yemen will destabilize security, and undermines the regional interests of Saudi Arabia with or without Iran's backing.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is former president Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi's mismanagement and bad governance, which led to worsening of situation, and full-fledged revolt by the Houthis. The former president Saleh's unexpected alliance with the Houthis further complicated the situation. Saleh's successor, Hadi removed Saleh's nephews and sons from the army, including Gen Ali Mohsen who was regarded as an important military figure. This led to massive fragmentation within the army, which lost its professionalism and willingness to serve the transitional government. Another factor was Hadi's unpreparedness to handle the militant groups. The defeat of the national army at the hands of the Houthis cost Hadi the support of army, and other important political parties such as *Islah* and Yemeni Socialist Party. Corruption, mismanagement of authority, bad governance, shortage of basic necessities such as food, electricity and gas aggravated the situation for average Yemenis. All these factors contributed in the seizure of Sanaa by Houthi rebels.

Saudi Arabia initiated an air campaign against Houthi positions in Yemen in 2015, when the Houthis seized power in Yemeni capital Sanaa and overthrew president Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The ousted president appealed for international help, and is currently in self-exile in Saudi Arabia.

Role of Iran

The Iranian identity revolves around three factors. The first factor is the Persian language and culture with its Imperial legacy. The second is the Shia identity. The third is the post-1979 identity of Iran, which is an ideology of resistance against the U.S. and its allies.

Under Pahlavi monarchical rule, Iran worked closely with Yemen to prevent the Mutawakkilite Imamate from being overthrown. But after Iran's Islamic revolution,

and creation of two independent states of Yemen, Iran became friendlier with southern Yemen. This close cooperation between the two was due to the fact that both shared their common distaste for Western intervention and the Arab monarchial imperialism. During the 1986 civil war in southern Yemen, Iran supported the hardline Marxist faction. This Marxist faction was able to defeat the faction of Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi. This explains former president Hadi's estrangement from Iran (Salibury, 2015).

After the unification of Yemen in 1990, the former president Saleh tried to maintain cordial ties with Iran, to neutralize the effects of East-West Cold War, which could undermine Saleh's own interests. The former president Saleh's policy was to mobilize external backing for his administration, and to turn external forces against the domestic opposition forces operating against a united Yemen, while preventing external support for them (Hinnebusch, R. A., & Ehteshami, A, 2002). The Gulf War dramatically affected Yemen's relations with Iran. Yemen abstained from voting in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against Iraqi attack of Kuwait, and voted the GCC states. Even after Iraqi defeat in Gulf War, Yemen continued to maintain cordial relations with Saddam Hussain, which irked Iran because Iran had fought a decade-long war with Iraq.

The Yemeni officials expressed concern in 2008 about Iran supporting the Houthis, Hirak- al-Janoubi and the southern separatists movement. Ali Salim al Beich, a former southern president was accused of being close to Iran. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Iran is training militants who are aligned with a separatist movement in southern Yemen, while Iran's Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, is providing some funding and media training to the group," as reported by the WSJ on June 20, 2013. The report pointed to the Hirak faction of al-Beidh, and cited Western and Yemeni official sources – though there were scant details (Habib,2013).

The Yemeni government's representatives accused Iran and Western officials for backing Houthi insurgency when fighting between Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels broke out in 2004. They accused Iran for financial, logistic and military help to the Houthis. However, the Houthis denied receiving any Iranian backing. Ali-al-Bokhaiti, a Houthi spokesman stated that Zaydism was similar to Sunni-ism rather than Twelver Shia-ism practiced in Iran, making Iran and Houthis natural rivals (Salsibury, 2014).

Iran denied allegations of involvement as baseless, however, statements given by some Iranian officials added fuel to the fire. Ali Akbar Velayati, an associate of Ayatollah Khamenei reportedly stated that, "Tehran supports the Houthis in their rightful struggle". Ali Reza Zakani, an Iranian member of the *Majlis*, who is also believed to be close to Ali Khamenei, issued a provocative statement, "Houthi takeover of Sanaa was a victory for the regime in Tehran". He further added that Iran hence controls four capital cities, "Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus and Sanaa"(Middle East Monitor, 2014).

Iran condemned Saudi airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen, and warned of further instability in the region due to 'use of force'. The Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called for "an urgent dialogue among the Yemeni factions without external interference".

Role of GCC

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a sub-regional organization with six members including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and the UAE. Yemen has always been keen to join GCC. Currently, Yemen enjoys the status of an observer. It seems quite unlikely that Yemen will be accorded membership of GCC. The current members have always been opposed to the inclusion of any other state in the GCC. In matters of foreign policy, the other five members of GCC would not want to contradict Saudi Arabia, given Yemen's strategic importance for the kingdom. But this does not mean that they do not have their own independent foreign policy stance on Yemen.

Kuwait has opposed the inclusion of Yemen in GCC, because of the perceived betrayal by Yemen in the First Gulf War. However, Kuwait has pledged huge sums of money for financial assistance in Yemen in recent years. At the same time, Kuwait has expressed doubts over the Yemeni government's capacity to spend this aid efficiently for developmental purposes.

The UAE has always been a supporter of KSA's foreign policy toward Yemen. The UAE is cognizant of Saud Arabia's sensitivity toward Yemen in terms of its strategic importance, and impact of Yemen's domestic instability on Saudi Arabia. Despite these issues, the UAE was the largest donor of aid to Yemen in 2009, which was over 772 million US dollars to help internally displaced persons (IDPs). The UAE Red Crescent society established camps (Burke, 2012) which provided housing for up to 7,000 people in Saada who were forced to flee the war.

Oman not being as wealthy as other GCC countries competes with Yemen for its share of assistance from the regional organization. Despite being a recipient of aid, Oman pledged 100 million US dollars for financial assistance and infrastructural development in Yemen(Burke, 2012). Oman also supported Yemen's accession to GCC, and has jointly completed *Shah-al-Gheida* highway, which will improve bilateral and commercial relations between the two countries. Oman is supportive of Yemen's efforts to fight separatist movements, and for this purpose Oman stripped former president of the southern PDRY of Omani citizenship, after he continued his efforts of secession from Yemen. Oman was the sole GCC country that declined participation in the Saudi offensive in Yemen. Oman has tried to pursue the strategy of relative neutrality, and offered its services as a party mediator. Yusuf bin Alawi, Oman's foreign minister stated, "Oman is a nation of peace and we cannot work on peace efforts at the same time we were part of a military campaign" (Al Monitor, 2015).

Qatar has been keen for a resolution to Yemen's domestic instability. During the Houthi revolt in 2007 and 2008, Qatar played an important role in persuading both sides to observe ceasefire, and resolve their dispute through dialogue. Qatar's efforts finally bore fruit in 2008, and both sides agreed to a ceasefire, which also included an aid package, and exile of the Houthi leader to Doha. Qatar is supportive of Yemen's membership to GCC however, Qatari government is concerned about destabilizing effects of Yemen's domestic turmoil on the region. Bahrain, unlike other GCC countries, has been a generous donor and even indicated its willingness to carry out technical assistance projects in Yemen. Bahrain is also a significant investor in the underdeveloped financial sector of Yemen.

The GCC countries condemned seizure of power by Houthis, and vowed to support Saudi Arabia's air campaign against Houthi targets in Yemen. In response to the letter written by ousted president Mansour Hadi, the GCC assured its unconditional support to ensure regional order. In this framework, the GCC issued the following statement, "our nations have decided to respond to the request of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi of the Republic of Yemen to protect Yemen and its dear people from Houthi militias' aggression, which was and is still a tool in the hands of foreign powers that did not stop tampering with the security and stability of brotherly Yemen"(The National, 2015).

Houthi Rebellion

The Zaydi leader Hussain al-Houthi, a former parliamentary member (MP), led a movement protect the Zaydi community of North Yemen from discrimination and persecution by the government. The government headed by president Saleh accused the Houthi leader of seeking government overthrow and re-establishment of the Zaydi Imamate that ruled in northern Yemen for centuries, contemporaneous with the Ottoman Empire, until the middle of 20th century.

After a first few months of clashes, al-Houthi died at the hands of the Yemeni army. After his death, his brother Abdul Malik Houthi became the movement's leader. The fight continued, and the Yemeni government launched a major army offensive against the rebel group in 2007, resulting in hundreds of casualties on both sides. However, no major breakthrough was achieved. In late 2007, the rebels and government forces agreed on a ceasefire. However, ceasefire (Haj, 2016) did not last long, and fighting restarted again the next year.

In October 2009, the war expanded into Saudi territory, after the Houthis accused Saudis of supporting Yemeni government. According to the government, Saudi Arabia was acting in defence of its border territories. In November 2009, Houthis and Saudi Arabian army clashed along the border, and Saudi government launched air strikes against the Houthi rebels. The Saudi Arabian forces seized the border territories from Houthi control within few weeks of the clashes. The Saudi Arabian involvement in the war was a move directed against Iran. The Houthis were believed

to receive support from Iran. The two countries have been engaged in proxy wars in parts of the Middle East in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Syria for a long time.

In February 2010, the two sides once again signed a ceasefire agreement, however, it proved to be short-lived after the Houthis captured the Monaba district in April 2010. The fighting continued throughout the country during the anti-Saleh protests that erupted in early 2011. The protestors demanded Saleh's stepping down as president. The Houthis supported the protestors in their demands. In March, the Houthis took complete control of the Saada province, and declared their independent government. However, the Sunni Salafist tribes continued fighting the Houthis in the border areas of Saada province.

In November, Yemen's president Saleh announced stepping down after 33 years of rule, and transferred power to vice-president Mansour Hadi. The agreement signed in Riyadh ensured Saleh had complete immunity from persecution. The fight continued until August 2014 when the Houthis stormed government offices in Sanaa. This forced president Hadi and his government to quit in January 2015, after losing control of the capital. The Houthi fighters announced a committee to run the government after dissolving the parliament (Reuters, 2011).

The ousted president Mansour Hadi sought exile in Saudi Arabia. On March 26, Saudi Arabia announced an aerial operation against the Houthis, in an effort to re-establish Hadi's government. Saudi Arabia was joined by a coalition of ten, mostly Gulf, countries(Daily Herald, 2015). The fighting has since continued with Saudis leading the air strikes on Houthi-controlled regions, and supporting the local Sunni militias. In April 2014, the Saudi-led coalition announced an end to military operations against the Houthis. Saudi Arabia declared that all targets of air strikes were achieved. The coalition announced that the next objective would be to rebuild the country, besides seeking a political solution to the crisis. However, military operations have continued in one form or the other (PR, 2015).

Conclusion

The crisis in Yemen retains strategic salience for both Iran and Saudi Arabia. For Saudi Arabia, stability on its southern border is a matter of national security. Instability on Saudi Arabia's borders would provide its rival Iran with a strong foothold on its border. Meanwhile for Iran, Shia-controlled Iraq and Syria remain significant. Strategically, these states are buffers between Iran and its Sunni rivals in the Middle East. According to one opinion, stable Shia-led government in Iraq is a strategic objective for Iran's national security. As for Yemen, with the rise of Houthis, Iran is deemed to possess a stronghold on the doorstep of its rival Saudi Arabia. In the Saudi Arabian view, Iran seeks to pressurize Saudi Arabia – by using the Yemen card - to gain its objective of Shia governments in Iraq and Syria, by posing a danger to Saudi Arabian border security through strong Iranian-supported rebels on its doorsteps (Al Jazeera, 2015).

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The sectarian conflict has reached its apogee in Yemen. From Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to Yemen, the sectarian conflict has reached full-blown conflict status (Richard N, 2014). The emergence of Salafi Islam is a distinct phenomenon with its own dynamics (Roy, 1994). In both cases, it was the failure of charismatic appeal, which resulted in the ascendency of a violence-stricken 'shock and awe' approach (Zubaida, 2000).

The immediate context of the Yemen Crisis contains the twin factors of the fractious internal Yemeni politics, and the bitter legacy of the Yemen-Saudi Arabian relationship (Ayub, 2004). The internal politics of Yemen have not been stable since the Cold War years (Roy, 2007)). In 1962, the 900-year old Zaydi Imamate was overthrown in a coup, and the Nasserite-influenced groups battled the Saudi backed tribal factions for power. This led to the breakup of Yemen, which was undone in 1990 when the two parts of Yemen were reunited (Carapico, 1993). However, the problems of poor governance and sense of disenfranchisement felt by various groups, led to fighting that continues till date. The most important foreign player in Yemeni politics is Saudi Arabia with which there does not exist any demarcated border. During the inter-wars years, while the al-Saud dynasty was consolidating its rule, there was a war with Yemen in 1934, which led to some portions of Yemeni territory falling into Saudi hands, and remain so today giving the Yemenis a point of grievance, and the Saudis a sense of wariness. Later, Saudi interventions in Yemeni affairs have also caused resentment inside certain segments of the Yemeni population.

The declared United States policies of 'Asia pivot' and 'rebalancing' entailed partially expanding attention more broadly in the Middle East (Barno, Bensahel, & Sharp, 2012). This meant improving relations vis a vis Iran, and at the same time, managing Saudi anxiety (Nasr, 2014). This was not to immediately revert to the Twin Pillars policy of the 1970s, which envisioned joint Iranian- Saudi Arabian support for the US-led anti-Communist effort. However, it required a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia for apportionment of zones of influence in the region.

Yemen is among those countries where archrivals Saudi Arabia and Iran are pitted against one another for regional supremacy, but the problem is deeper than that. The major cause of concern threatening the stability of not just Yemen but the entire region is the internal security problem of Yemen. Different groups with diverse political and ideological aspirations are fighting to attain major share of power in the government. The recent Houthi insurgency should be seen within this framework of power struggle.

The complex political situation and intermingled demography has made it clear that the solution to Yemen crisis can only be home grown, and any solution implemented from the outside would not be sustainable. The military intervention from external forces has not helped matters. Saudi Arabia's intervention for the 'legitimate' government of Mansour Hadi in Yemen can have disastrous consequences, as the unrest could spread inside Saudi Arabia as well. The international intervention in Yemen is also out of question, as can be seen from the situation in Libya, where international intervention has given rise to sectarian violence, civil war and emergence of jihadi groups controlled by al-Qaeda and ISIS. Only a political option offers a solution out of the current Yemen crisis. A compromise/agreement ought to be reached to satisfy all domestic players.

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