

# Yemen: How the Violation of the Arms Trade Treaty by the West Created the ‘World’s Worst Humanitarian Crisis’

by: Sakshi Agarwal

FALL  
2018



**Nonviolence**

International New York

[www.nonviolenceinternational-ny.org](http://www.nonviolenceinternational-ny.org)

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	1
A Timeline of Yemen's History and Relationship with Saudi Arabia .....	2
Violation of the Arms Trade Treaty by the West .....	7
Gender Dynamics in Yemen: Gender-based Violence and the Impact of War on Women and Children .....	13
Conclusion .....	18
References .....	20

## Abstract

Yemen has now been deemed the world's worst humanitarian crisis ever. Since 2015, fighting between the US-backed Saudi-led coalition and the Houthi coalition has resulted in thousands of civilian casualties and an estimated 22.2 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. This publication examines the history of the republic of Yemen and its relationship with Saudi Arabia to argue that the current crisis in Yemen is the product of a long history of tensions between the two countries in the Arabian region. In addition, the aim of this publication is to demonstrate that the Western countries, most notably the United States, in supporting the Saudi coalition, are violating the Arms Trade Treaty ratified in 2014. The violation has subsequently resulted in an unprecedented level of humanitarian crisis, gender-based violence, as well as poverty and man-made famine in Yemen.





# A Timeline of Yemen's History and Relationship with Saudi Arabia

Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, is now in the throes of the world's worst humanitarian crisis ever. After more than four years of escalating conflict between the Saudi-led coalition of Gulf Arab states and the Houthi coalition, Yemen continues to experience unprecedented social, political and economic crisis. The country's GDP is estimated to have plummeted by 50% since 2014. Malnutrition and critical food insecurity have skyrocketed as the struggle for control over strategic port facilities has disrupted vital imports (including food, fuel, and international aid). Oil and gas production is operating at about 10% of pre-war capacity and exports have been suspended [1].



The plight of Yemenis is getting worse every day. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project reports that more than 50,000 people have died between January 2016 and late July 2018 [2]. The UN Human Rights Office has documented that between 26 March 2015 and 8 November 2018, there have been a total of 17,640 civilian casualties in Yemen, including 6,872 dead and 10,768 injured. The majority of these casualties - 10,852 resulted from airstrikes carried out by the Saudi-led Coalition [3]. Over 3 million people have been forced to flee from their homes, of which 2 million remain displaced.

Approximately 22.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, with more than half of them requiring acute assistance. Almost one-third of Yemen's 333 districts are descending into chronic famine and hunger, marking an increase of 13 percent since April 2017 [1]. A total of 5.2 million children across Yemen are now at risk of starvation. Moreover, an estimated 400,000 children under the age of five are also severely malnourished. Yemen is also facing the worst cholera outbreak in the world, with roughly 10,000 suspected cases now reported per week, according to the World Health Organization [4]. Local institutions that provide basic health and nutrition services are struggling to provide services at even the most basic level. Only half of all health facilities are functioning, and even these face severe shortages in medicines, equipment, and staff.



At least two million children, nearly 27% of those of school age, are out of school, with more than 1,690 schools currently unfit for use [1].



However, the military confrontation and bombardment of the country should not come as a surprise, since it occurs within the historical context of more than 80 years of tensions between Saudi Arabia and Yemen [5]. The Republic of Yemen is only less than three decades old. For centuries the country was divided into north and south -- North Yemen is the northwest of the territory and South Yemen includes the south and all of the east [6]. In the 19th century, North Yemen fell under the rule of the Ottoman empire and only achieved its independence when the latter collapsed in 1918 following the end of World War I. The north was then governed as an imamate led by a Zaydi Shiite religious leader. Zaydi Shiism is a branch of Shiite Islam found almost exclusively in Yemen, and it predominates in North Yemen [6]. The Kingdom of Yemen declared war over a border dispute against its northern neighbor, Saudi Arabia, within a year of the latter's emergence as a unified state in 1932. During the conflict, the Saudi Bedouin army were able to annex

the Yemeni coastal region of Asir and the northernmost provinces of Najran and Jizan. The subsequent 1934 peace accords, known as the Treaty of Taif, demarcated a border that granted Asir, Najran, and Jizan to Saudi Arabia. The contested status of these territories remains at the heart of Yemeni grievances today [5].

In 1962, the last Yemeni imam and the king of North Yemen, Muhammad al-Badr, was deposed and the different territories of North Yemen united to form the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) [5]. The founding of the new Yemeni republic in 1967 signalled the beginning of a new era of conflict with the Saudis. The founders of the new republic declared the Treaty of Taif invalid and emphasized their commitment to regain the disputed provinces. The threats came to a head when 70,000 Egyptian soldiers arrived to support the republic against a guerrilla opposition led by the deposed Imam Badr and his former tribesmen. The Saudis were proponents of the Badr camp through 1968 as Yemen quickly descended into a bloody civil war [5]. When the war officially came to an end in 1970, Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, finally recognized the state of North Yemen and even offered financial support, even though various Yemeni leaders continued to label Asir, Najran, and Jizan as Yemeni territory [5].

The Saudis were willing to concede to this rhetoric as long as the core principle of their grand strategy in Arabia was upheld - the Yemeni central government had to remain so it did not pose as a challenge to the Saudi hegemony in the region.



Thus the Saudis were alarmed when on May 1990 the YAR united with the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen as the Republic of Yemen with Ali Abdel Saleh as president. Tensions further escalated when the Yemeni delegation to the United Nation voted against a UN Resolution sanctioning military action against Iraq. The Saudis, who supported the US military invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, retaliated by immediately expelling hundreds of thousands of Yemeni migrant

workers from the country. The lost remittance and unemployed migrant returnees pushed Yemen into an economic crisis, which spurred a second period of civil war between the southern separatist movement and northern republic government in the country.



The Saudis exploited the tensions between the North and the South as an opportunity to reestablish power over Yemen, supporting the southern government with ammunitions during the conflict and the north with increased aid after the war

ended [5]. The Saudis extended their financial influence over the government to such an extent, nearly \$4 billion in bribes to local Yemeni sheikhs and officials, that then-president Ali Abdullah Saleh was compelled to sign a treaty in 2000 reestablishing the borders demarcated by the Treaty of Taif.

Instead of consolidating a stable, democratic nation, Saleh over the years devoted most of his time using his political capital to strengthen his position [7]. Amidst the rising poverty, corruption and the weak judicial system, al-Qaeda slowly gained ground in the 1990s, signaled most strongly in the 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole off Aden's harbor [7].

Moreover, much of the country continues to be divided amongst local tribes, with the separatist Shiite Houthi being the most prominent. Their rise to prominence occurred in 2004, when hundreds of people were killed as troops fought the Shia insurgency led by Hussein al-Houthi in the north [8]. Saleh's acquiescence on the border issue and the increasing Saudi influence over Yemeni politics were the key grievances for the rising Houthi movement against the central government. The present-day Houthi movement originally formed as a collective effort to re-educate the northern region in traditional Zaidi branch of Shia Islam and resist the growing Saudi Wahhabi religious influence. After al-Houthi's assassination in 2004, the



northern tribes allied with the movement and began a protracted military attack against the central government. Realizing in 2009 that the movement presented a serious threat to the pro-Saudi leadership in Sana'a, the Saudis sent troops to fight the Houthis across the border with disastrous results, as over 130 ill-trained Saudi personnel were killed. After months of battle, Al-Houthi was later killed along with 20 of his aides by the Yemeni Armed Forces.

Fighting between government forces and supporters of the slain rebel cleric continued until November 2011, when President Saleh agreed to concede his power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, after months of protests [8]. A unity government including the Prime Minister from the opposition then formed. Despite his inauguration as President in 2012, Hadi was unable to counter the al-Qaeda attacks in the region. As part of a deal to accommodate Houthi and southern demands, the Presidential panel approved for Yemen to become a federation of six regions in 2014. Nevertheless, following two weeks of anti-government protests, Houthi rebels seized control of most of Sana'a and rejected the draft constitution proposed by the government. The Houthis appointed a presidential council to replace Hadi, who fled to his southern stronghold of Aden [8].

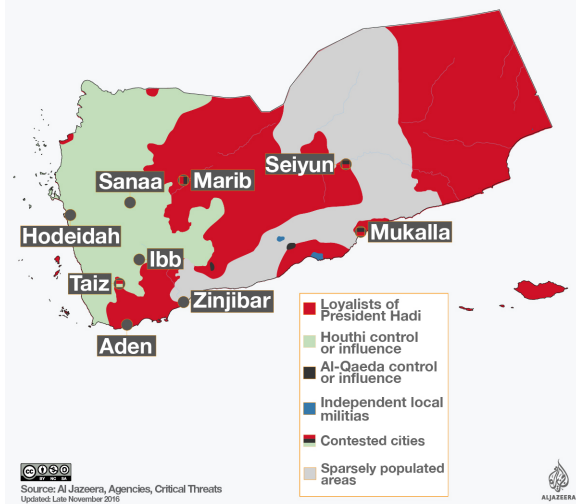


They were supported not only by Yemenis frustrated with the failures of the transitional government, but also by factions of the Yemeni security forces that were still loyal to Saleh [6].



Subsequently, a civil war broke out in Yemen in March 2015, as a Saudi-led coalition of mainly Gulf-Arab states launched airstrikes against Houthi targets and imposed a naval blockade in order to stem the advance of the rebels on Aden. The coalition has been responsible for thousands of civilian deaths in Yemen, and Saudi Arabia is known to have violated international humanitarian law by bombing civilian targets, even hospitals [9].

### Yemen: Who controls what



The current intervention of Saudi Arabia in the region is thus a response to the Houthi movement's increasing popularity and the strength of its tribal alliances. The occupation of Sana, rapid military advancement southward, and the impending annexation of Aden (the headquarters of the internationally-recognized Yemeni government) pose serious threats to the Saudis' regional strategy. Alongside their military gains, the Houthis have emerged as a potential political force that can form a strong central government with an anti-Saudi agenda. For now, the Saudi coalition continues to gain the support of Arab and Western countries.

The Gulf Arab states, most notably the United Arab Emirates, have launched air strikes and imposed naval blockades to halt the expansion of the Houthis. Both Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State in Yemen (IS-Y), exploiting the ensuing chaos, have also claimed responsibility for many suicide and other bombings (The Human Rights Watch).

The situation has subsequently further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis brought on by Houthi battles with multiple opposition groups and the expanding air campaign[5].



## Violation of the Arms Trade Treaty by the West

Throughout the conflict in Yemen, countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, have been major suppliers of arms and ammunition to Saudi Arabia [10]. This transfer of billions of dollars' worth of arms to the Saudi-led coalition is a violation of the global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The ATT is a multilateral treaty that entered into force on 24 December 2014, with the goal of regulating the international trade in conventional weapons to reduce human suffering and promote cooperation, transparency and responsible action by and among states [11]. The main provisions of the treaty are to establish rules for the transfer (export, import, transit, transshipment and brokering) of conventional weapons, including battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery system, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles and missile launchers, as well as small arms and light weapons (SALW). Currently 90 UN member states are party to the treaty, with five of the world's top ten arms producers -- the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain-- having ratified the treaty (Rowlands).



The US government finally signed the treaty in September 2013, assuring that it “would never think about supporting a treaty that is inconsistent with the rights of American citizens to be able to exercise their guaranteed rights under our constitution” [11]. Parties to the ATT are expected to evaluate the risk of these weapons being utilized to Member states are also obligated to ensure that the munitions they sell will not be used to abuse international humanitarian law, commit genocide or commit crimes against humanity, including committing or facilitating acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children [12].



Western diplomats and politicians have claimed that their precision-guided arms and the sharing of intelligence with Saudi Arabia should guarantee that the rules of



war meant to protect civilians are upheld [13]. Nonetheless, 86 percent of the victims of the aerial bombardments, which have killed more than 5,000 people and injured 9,000, are civilians. In a report by the Group of Regional and International Eminent Experts on Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition have repeatedly neglected to consult their own “no-strike list” of more than 30,000 sites in Yemen, including refugee camps and hospitals.

This report also said the Saudi Air Force has not cooperated with investigators about its targeting procedures. The report also estimates that there have been 18,000 such strikes in little more than three years, inflicting a level of damage on civilians that have “certainly contributed to Yemen’s dire economic and humanitarian situation” [14]. The Saudi coalition has indiscriminately attacked homes, markets, hospitals, schools, civilian industrial factories and mosques. As the Panel of Experts Report of the UN Monitoring Sanction Committee on Yemen reports, routinely flying second airstrikes results in more casualties among already-wounded civilians and first-aid personnel [3]. Airstrikes killing Yemeni civilians when bombing medical facilities, markets or other densely populated areas such as the capital Sana’a are also breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Aerial bombardments of hospitals or humanitarian aid warehouses of international aid organizations contravene Articles 9 and 11 of Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions, which requires that medical and religious personnel should be respected and protected. The aerial and naval blockades imposed by the Saudi-led coalition are in breach of Articles 14 and 18 of the Additional Protocol II, which prohibit the use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare

and require the protection of humanitarian activities providing relief to civilians. The Geneva Conventions Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions sets out a general humanitarian principle by which all parties to a non-international armed conflict should abide. Each warring party must treat persons taking no active part in the hostilities humanely in all circumstances.

Article 13 of the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions states that the civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations [13].



The continuing irresponsible arms flow has thus resulted in catastrophic harm to Yemeni civilians and society (Amnesty International). The United Nations stopped counting its civilian death toll two years ago, when it hit 10,000. An independent estimate by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, which tracks conflicts worldwide, concluded that approximately 50,000 people, including combatants, died between January 2016 and July 2018 [15]. The Saudi-led coalition forces have used internationally banned weapons such as cluster munitions, manufactured by both the US and Britain [16]. According to the Control Arms

Coalition, which works to “end the flow of arms and ammunition that fuel conflict, poverty and human rights abuses” [17], evidence of cluster munition use has been available for a while but the UK has continued to ignore the vast amounts of information of violations of human rights and the laws of war in Yemen. Cluster bombs are designed to release dozens of smaller bombs over a wide area, but the latter do not always explode, thus posing a future threat to civilians. The UK government has confirmed that 500 cluster munitions were delivered to Saudi Arabia between 1986 and 1989 [18].

The weapons were banned in 2010 under the Cluster Munitions Convention signed by Britain and also violates the ATT because it has been unable to monitor the use of these weapons and has continued to sign arms deals with Saudi Arabia, having sold £841m worth of arms and security equipment between April and June 2017 despite growing evidence that the indiscriminate use by the Saudi-led coalition has killed thousands of civilians and subjected millions to famine and disease [19]. Even Germany has continued to export arms and military equipment to Saudi Arabia despite foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel’s announcement in 2014 that Germany would stop arming unlawful regimes and amend its arms export policy accordingly.



Nevertheless, in the third quarter of 2017, Germany licensed arms exports worth €148 million which was three times more than in the same period in 2016. These approvals included patrol ships, military transporters and parts/components for military aircraft. In 2016, the German government licensed €530 million worth of exports mainly involving military helicopters, radar systems and components for fighter jets [13].

Similarly, the United States has supported Saudi Arabia’s coalition and supported its war in Yemen against the Houthi rebels since 2015. From 2009 to 2016, the administration of former President Barack Obama authorized a record \$115 billion in military sales to Saudi Arabia. Of that total, US and Saudi officials signed formal deals worth about \$58 billion, and Washington delivered \$14 billion worth of weaponry [20]. Much of those arms and munitions is being used in Yemen. For example in October 2016, warplanes from the Saudi coalition bombed a community hall in the capital city of Yemen, Sana’a, where locals had gathered for a funeral, killing at least 140 people and wounding hundreds of Yemenis.

The Obama administration pledged to conduct an immediate review of its logistical support for the Saudi military and suspended the sale of some of its weaponry [20].



However the current administration of Donald Trump has been escalating its military backing of Saudi actions in Yemen, signifying a larger policy shift of the administration which has voiced constant support for Saudi Arabia and criticism of its regional opponent, Iran, the Houthi group's main supplier for arms and ammunition [15]. According to a statement by the White House, the United States supports Saudi Arabia's aim to expose the Iranian regime's support for Houthi militias, including the supply of illegal arms such as ballistic missiles. "We condemn the Iranian regime's activities and stand with Saudi Arabia and all our Gulf partners against the Iranian regime's aggression and blatant violations of international law. These missile systems were not present in Yemen before the conflict, and we call upon the United Nations to conduct a thorough examination of evidence that the Iranian regime is perpetuating the war in Yemen to advance its regional ambitions" [21]. The current administration has continued to

provide the Saudis with arms and ammunition, with President Trump having signed an estimated \$110 billion defense deal with Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud during his maiden visit to the country in May 2017. Its assistance to the Saudi and Emirati-led war in Yemen also includes mid-air refueling and targeting information (Pillar). Since President Trump took office, the number of American drone attacks in Yemen has significantly increased, from 37 drone attacks in 2016 to 105 attacks by October 2017 [16].



The US has conducted at least two ground raids in Yemen since January 2018, reportedly alongside the UAE, one of which killed at least 14 civilians, including nine children. It has also been implicated in providing the bomb that targeted a school bus, killing 40 children and wounding 79 people in August 2018 [10]. The Trump administration has claimed that it has mainly been attacking AQAP, a group that has been long considered by Washington as among the most dangerous branches of the global terror network [22].



Furthermore, the administration also reversed a decision by former president Barack Obama to ban the sale of over \$500 million in laser-guided bombs and other weapons to the Saudi armed forces. In late 2017, after the Houthis fired ballistic missiles at several Saudi cities, the Pentagon secretly deployed US special forces to the Saudi- Yemen border to aid the Saudi military in locating and targeting Houthi missile sites [15]. Although the US military did not directly engage with the Yemeni rebels, the covert mission marked an escalation of American participation in the civil war.

Several human rights groups, members of Congress, and the United Nations have denounced the American support of the Saudi coalition. Nevertheless, the Trump administration has maintained its alliance with Saudi Arabia. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 2018, President Donald Trump exalted the actions of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for “pursuing multiple avenues to ending Yemen’s horrible, horrific civil war” [23]. He instead blamed the kingdom’s regional rival Iran for funding “havoc and slaughter,” neglecting to mention that Yemen’s current conflict escalated dramatically in early 2015, after Saudi Arabia spearheaded a coalition of Arab countries to intervene in the civil war [20].



Although recently the US government has condemned Saudi Arabia for their part in the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi back in October 2018, both the Departments of States and Defense have echoed that “degrading U.S.-Saudi ties would be a grave mistake for the national security of the U.S. and its allies” [24]. Both the US and the UK governments have issued joint statements declaring that Washington would no longer refuel Saudi aircraft operating over Yemen [25]. The decision will not affect the volume of US arms sales to the kingdom, however. Many human rights activists such as Radhya Almutawakel, who is the chairperson of Mwatana, one of the few still operational

civilian organizations in Yemen, have regarded such US actions as “toothless” [26].

According to Almutawakel, these small steps are not enough, as the “US should be taking the lead in moving the world toward peace in Yemen because they’ve been taking the lead in supporting the war” [26].



Unfortunately, the US as well as other Western countries in prioritizing financial interests by aiding Saudi Arabia, are subsequently complicit in violating international humanitarian laws and treaties such as the ATT, in Yemen.

# Gender Dynamics in Yemen: Gender-based Violence and the Impact of War on Women and Children

Historically, Yemen has been a traditional society where women are culturally and socially condemned to a lower status in the community. Women in Yemen are subjected to various forms of violence, such as physical and psychological abuse within the family, deprivation of education, early and forced marriages, sexual harassment, restrictions and control over freedom of movement, forced pregnancy, exclusion from private and public decision-making processes, polygamy, denial of healthcare, and female genital mutilation [27]. Yemeni society has traditionally had a strong preference for male offspring and promote toxic forms of masculinity such as violent or aggressive behavior amongst boys, male adolescents and adults towards females. Women and girls are often punished for attempting to defend themselves against such abusive behavior. Moreover, the Personal Status Law in the country allows for marriage on the provision that the girl or young woman is 'fit for sexual intercourse': "The marriage of a little girl is legally valid but she is not to be wedded until she's ready for sex, even if she exceeds 15 years old.

And marriage of a little boy is not legally valid unless it is proven for the good" [27]. The ambiguity of the law implies that girls under 15 years of age may be forced to marry, if found by someone in a position of power in the family or community to be able to engage in sexual intercourse. The law also disregards the fact that despite physical or psychological 'ability' to engage in sexual intercourse, the decision to do so should be the personal choice of the individual woman.



Nevertheless, marriage of minors is widespread in Yemeni society, particularly in rural areas where traditional attitudes and practices encourage such practices. The Personal Status Law does not provide protective measures for health-related dangers faced by girls forced to engage in sexual intercourse at early ages. Hospitals receive many girls who suffer severe injuries resulting from this practice, yet these incidents are not reported [27].

Additionally, the predominant culture of male superiority in Yemeni society also has an impact on women's safety in both public and private spaces. Physical harassment in public spaces such as modes of transportation, streets, and parks is a routine occurrence in Yemen. Due to social

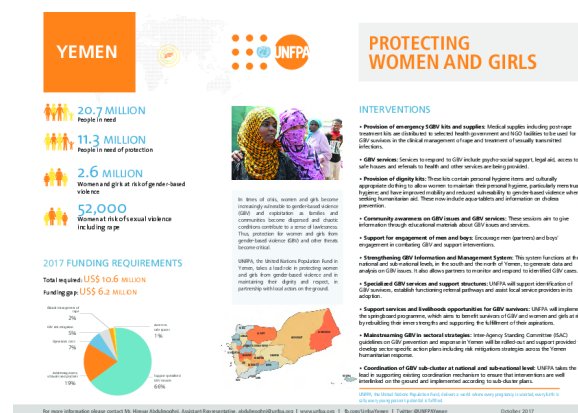


stigma and fear for their personal safety, women generally do not report incidences of abuse, especially domestic violence. The most recent information of violence against women (VAW) is dated 2003, included in the Annual Report on the Status of Women 2007 published by Women's National Committee (WNC) [27]. More than half of the women who were subjected to beating (56.4 percent) claimed that they were beaten by their husbands. Illiterate women living in rural areas were more susceptible to abuse. Only 5 percent of women reported the incident to law enforcement. This indicates that Yemeni women tend to revert to their relatives, instead of the police, since VAW is considered a stigma according to the norms, which just complicates the situation further.



In addition women rarely revert to police, because they rarely find supportive response from police staff. Women that complain against their male family members (husband, father, brother) are perceived as disgraceful [27]. Thus, violence against women in Yemen occurs both in the private sphere, specifically in the form of domestic violence, and in the public realm as institutional or community-based violence.

The escalation of the conflict between the Saudi coalition and the Houthis have steadily exacerbated the existing structures of violence against women and children in Yemen. In financially and militarily supporting the coalition, countries like the United States are complicit in the violation of a core tenet of the ATT, which is ensuring that the use and sale of armaments are not perpetuating violence against women and children. Human Rights Watch reports that incidences of gender-based violence have increased by 63 percent, meaning more than 3 million women are susceptible to such violence and 60,000 women are at risk of sexual violence, including rape [28].



Many cases of gender-based violence remain unreported. Personnel of the Saudi coalition have been the main perpetrators of VAW and sexual assault in the country. The Group of Experts on Yemen have investigated incidences of sexual violence committed by personnel from United Arab Emirates, including rape of adult male detainees. Since July 2015, the UAE ground troops have established detention centers in the Bureiqa district of Aden,

a Yemeni city under control of the Saudi coalition [29]. Human Rights Watch has revealed a network of at least 18 secret prisons across southern Yemen run by the UAE and local forces it backs. At the Bureiqa coalition detention facility for example, detainees described being interrogated while naked, bound and blindfolded, sexually assaulted and raped. Survivors and witnesses described to the experts how each night guards selected women and boys for abuse. One former detainee described a guardroom with three beds where several guards assaulted several women simultaneously. Women were told to submit to rape or commit suicide. Others reported that individuals trying to resist or intervene were beaten, shot or killed [3]. At the Bir Ahmed prison in Aden, forces of the UAE raided the facility and perpetrated sexual violence. In March 2018, nearly 200 detainees were stripped naked in a group while personnel of the United Arab Emirates forcibly examined their anuses. During this search, multiple detainees were raped digitally and with tools and sticks [3]. Rates of forced marriage, including child marriage, have also increased. The age of first marriages for girls has lowered, with as many as half of child brides under the age of 15. Most of these marriages are arranged by families, mainly because of the family's inability to support their daughters or as a means of receiving a dowry [26]. Despite slight improvements, some of the main challenges in providing services for reproductive health and gender-based violence in conflict areas in Yemen are due to damaged or non-operating health structures, limited movement of aid agencies on the ground, and limited transportation of supplies to health

facilities. The Saudi-led coalition has repeatedly bombed medical facilities and put health care personnel in danger since the start of the war. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) reported that 39 hospitals were bombed during the first 7 months of the conflict despite the fact that they were clearly marked as medical centers and their GPS coordinates had been shared with Saudi authorities. Both MSF and Physicians for Human Rights have reported that assaults on hospitals, mobile clinics, ambulances, and cholera treatment centers continue to occur [30].



“Yemeni women and girls are the ones who are truly paying the price of war,” Suha Basharen, Gender Specialist with CARE Yemen, states, as the “situation for women is extremely difficult.

They are now having to step into roles that are traditionally filled by men, because so many men are now being killed or injured or are forcibly disappeared” [28]. Millions of people have lost their jobs, while thousands more have had their salaries frozen indefinitely. Meanwhile, the war has driven up the price of food, fuel, and other necessities, leaving two-thirds of Yemeni families unsure of their next meal. As

Almutawakel notes, “There is no more normal life—life is just a daily struggle to survive” [26]. An estimated 1.1 million pregnant and lactating women are also facing acute malnourishment as a result of the conflict [31]. “In traditional Yemeni society men and boys eat first, and only then can women and girls eat. Even with food shortages, men still eat first, and women and girls – including pregnant and lactating women – still eat last. There is nothing left for them by the time it is their turn,” notes Basharen. The situation is a result of rising food prices and the continuing blockade on imports of essential food items that are exacerbating the crisis and leaving more than 8.8 million women and girls in need of urgent food assistance.

There is also mounting evidence that much of the hunger is a result of deliberate strategy. Increasingly, humanitarian experts describe “starvation as a weapon of war” being utilized by numerous parties in the conflict. The Saudi coalition campaign combination of “economic war” with “physical destruction to create a mass failure in basic livelihoods,” is a clear war crime based on the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I [32].



Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the United Kingdom and France are signatories to the 1977 Protocol I, which gives the fullest statement in International Humanitarian

Law on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population [32].

Along the Western coastline of rebel-held areas, Saudi-led air strikes often target fishing boats that pilots apparently believe could be smuggling weapons to the Houthis from Iran. More than two hundred boats have been destroyed, and fishing communities suffer high levels of malnutrition and starvation [33]. International aid groups have accused both the Houthis and the coalition forces of obstructing vital humanitarian aid, while foreign observers and press have been all but barred. Currently, an ongoing assault on the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeida located on Yemen’s Red Sea coast by the Saudi and UAE-led coalition is blocking access to the main route through which commercial goods and humanitarian aid arrive in Yemen [34].



Since Yemen typically imports more than 80 percent of its food, the UN had stated that any major fighting in Hodeida could halt distributions to eight million Yemenis dependent on them for survival [33].





The port is part of an important strategy of the Saudi coalition, as losing Hodeidah would cut off the Houthis' access to the rest of the world, thus signifying the beginning of the end for their movement. It is also a crucial source of income for the rebels, as the Houthi-controlled government collects docking and off-loading fees. Were the Saudis to capture Hodeidah, it would put them in a much stronger position over the Houthis in peace negotiations [35]. All sides in the conflict are thus responsible for this slow killing, by forcing people into poverty and blocking vital access to humanitarian aid without any regards for the mass human suffering [26].

Women and children are consequently acutely vulnerable as a result of displacement, poverty, and indiscriminate violence.

## Conclusion

Much of the country's suffering is man-made, as the organization Mwatana points out, "it's been created by people who are choosing to continue fighting, who are turning a blind eye to the Yemeni people and thinking only about their own political agendas" [26]. If the coalition forces and the Houthis had a ceasefire, if they reopened Yemen's ports and airspaces and cooperated with humanitarian aid organizations, these steps could save lives and alleviate the suffering of millions of Yemenis. Instead, the conflict and humanitarian crisis has steadily exacerbated, leaving more than 75 percent (i.e., 22.2 million) of the the population in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The US has recently called for a ceasefire and announced its decision to terminate refueling Saudi aircraft involved in the conflict, but unless the West decisively follows through and actually stops providing military, diplomatic and economic support to the Saudi coalition, the conflict in Yemen will continue to worsen.

However, there is still hope for Yemen as US Senators Bernie Sanders of Vermont, Mike Lee of Utah and Chris Murphy of Connecticut have introduced a bill as of November 2018, that would invoke the War Powers Resolution, which prohibits the

United States from playing a substantial role in any conflict that has not been authorized by Congress [34].

Germany, Denmark and Sweden have already suspended arms exports to Saudi Arabia over Khashoggi's murder and because of the Yemen war [36]. The Saudi coalition is dependent on the military and political support of these countries, therefore the subsequent termination of such aid will have a significant impact on the ability of the Saudi-led coalition to continue its offensive in Yemen. Moreover, the delegations of both warring parties, that is the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, will be convening in Sweden in December 2018 to discuss confidence-building measures and a transitional governing body [36].

These peace talks and resolutions would thus serve as a vital foundation for a wider ceasefire from both parties that would halt coalition air strikes which have killed thousands of innocent Yemeni civilians since 2015.



## Endnotes

[1] "The World Bank In Yemen." 2018. World Bank. The World Bank Group. October 11, 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview>.

[2] Pavlik, Melissa. 2018. "Fatalities in the Yemen Conflict." ACLED. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. November 8, 2018. <https://www.acleddata.com/2018/11/08/fatalities-in-the-yemen-conflict/>.

[3] "Situation of Human Rights in Yemen, Including Violations and Abuses since September 2014." 2018. Rep. *Situation of Human Rights in Yemen, Including Violations and Abuses since September 2014*. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

[4] Nebehay, Stephanie. 2018. "Yemen Cholera Outbreak Accelerates to 10,000 Cases per Week: WHO." Reuters. Thomson Reuters. October 2, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-cholera/yemen-cholera-outbreak-accelerates-to-10000-cases-per-week-who-idUSKCN1MC23J>.

[5] Orkaby, Asher. 2015. "Saudi Arabia's War with the Houthis: Old Borders, New Lines." The Washington Institute. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. April 9, 2015. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/poli>

[cy-analysis/view/saudi-arabias-war-with-the-houthis-old-borders-new-lines](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-arabias-war-with-the-houthis-old-borders-new-lines).

[6] Duncan, Clare. 2017. "The Conflict in Yemen: A Primer." Lawfare. Lawfare. November 30, 2017. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/conflict-yemen-primer>.

[7] Tharoor, Ishaan. 2010. "A Brief History of Yemen: Rich Past, Impoverished Present." Time. Time Inc. November 1, 2010. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2028740,00.html>.

[8] "Yemen Profile - Timeline." 2018. BBC News. BBC. November 5, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704951>.

[9] Rowlands, Lyndal. 2016. "US, UK, France Violate Arms Trade Treaty to Sell Arms to Saudi Arabia Despite Yemen." The Citizen. The Citizen. December 29, 2016. <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/6/9557/US-UK-France-Violate-Arms-Trade-Treaty-to-Sell-Arms-to-Saudi-Arabia-Despite-Yemen>.

[10] Elbagir, Nima, Salma Abdelaziz, Ryan Browne, and Laura Smith-Spark. 2018. "Bomb That Killed 40 Children in Yemen Was Supplied by US." CNN. Cable News Network. August 17, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/17/middleeast/us-saudi-yemen-bus-strike-intl/index.html>.

[11] Delgado, Andrea. 2013. "Explainer: What Is the Arms Trade Treaty?" The Conversation. The Conversation. February 23, 2013. <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-the-arms-trade-treaty-37673>.

[12] Rowlands, Lyndal. 2016. "UN Arms Trade Treaty Failing in Yemen." The Wire. The Wire. December 29, 2016. <https://thewire.in/world/arms-trade-treaty-yemen>.

[13] "Violating the Arms Trade Treaty: Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia and the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen." 2018. Publication. *Violating the Arms Trade Treaty: Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia and the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen*. Peace Research Institute Frankfurt. [https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk\\_publicationen/Spotlight0118.pdf](https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/Spotlight0118.pdf).

[14] 2018. Yemen: United Nations Experts Point to Possible War Crimes by Parties to the Conflict. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights . August 28, 2018. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23479&LangID=E>.

[15] Bazzi, Mohamad. 2018. "The United States Could End the War in Yemen If It Wanted To." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company. September 30, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/iran-yemen-saudi-arabia/571465/>.

[16] "World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Yemen." 2018. Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch. January 18, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/yemen>.

[17] "Our Work in 2018." n.d. Control Arms. Control Arms. Accessed December 7, 2018. <https://controlarms.org/>.

[18] Press Association. 2017. "UK Exported 500 Cluster Bombs to Saudi Arabia in 1980s, Admits MoD." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media. January 10, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/10/britain-exported-500-cluster-bombs-to-saudi-arabia-in-1980s-admits-mod>.

[19] Elgot, Jessica. 2017. "UK Sales of Arms and Military Kit to Saudi Arabia Hit £1.1bn in 2017." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media. October 24, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/24/uk-sales-of-arms-and-military-equipment-to-saudi-arabia-2017>.

[20] Bazzi, Mohamad. 2018. "The War in Yemen Is Disastrous. America Is Only Making Things Worse." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media. June 11, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jun/11/trump-yemen-saudi-arabi-war-us-involvement-worsening-crisis>.

[21] U.S. Embassy in Sana'a. 2017. "White House Statement on Iranian-Supported Missile Attacks Against Saudi Arabia." U.S. Embassy in Yemen. U.S. Embassy in Yemen. November 8, 2017. <https://ye.usembassy.gov/white-house-statement-iranian-supported-missile-attacks-saudi-arabia/>.

[22] Taibbi, Matt. 2018. "Why We Know So Little About the U.S.-Backed War in Yemen." Rolling Stone. Rolling Stone. July 27, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/yemen-war-united-states-704187/>.

[23] Deutch, Gabby. 2018. "Full Transcript: Donald Trump at the United Nations General Assembly." The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company. September 25, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/trump-unga-transcript-2018/571264/>.

[24] Jalonick, Mary Clare, Lisa Mascaro, and Susannah George. 2018. "Pompeo Urges Senate Not to Punish Saudi Arabia Over Yemen." Time. Time. November 28, 2018. <http://time.com/5465826/pompeo-saudi-arabia-yemen-senate/>.

[25] Ward, Alex. 2018. "The US Can't End the Yemen War Right Now." Vox. Vox Media. November 13, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/11/13/18088004/yemen-war-saudi-uae-coalition-houthi-usa-mattis-un>.

[26] Aziza, Sarah. 2018. "Yemen's Human-Rights Defenders Are Fighting Increasingly Desperate Odds." The Nation. The Nation. November 28, 2018. <https://www.thenation.com/article/yemens-human-rights-defenders-are-fighting-increasingly-desperate-odds/>.

[27] "Country Assessment on Violence against Women: Yemen." 2010. Rep. *Country Assessment on Violence against Women: Yemen*. United Nations. [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/vaw/Country\\_Assessment\\_on\\_Violence\\_against\\_Women\\_August\\_2\\_2010.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/vaw/Country_Assessment_on_Violence_against_Women_August_2_2010.pdf).

[28] "Yemen: More than 3 Million Women and Girls Suffering the Brunt of the Ongoing Conflict, Warns CARE." 2018. CARE International. CARE International. March 7, 2018. [https://www.care-international.org/news/press-](https://www.care-international.org/news/press-releases/yemen-more-than-3-million-women-and-girls-suffering-the-brunt-of-the-ongoing-conflict-warns-care)

[releases/yemen-more-than-3-million-women-and-girls-suffering-the-brunt-of-the-ongoing-conflict-warns-care](https://www.care-international.org/news/press-releases/yemen-more-than-3-million-women-and-girls-suffering-the-brunt-of-the-ongoing-conflict-warns-care).

[29] "Timeline: UAE's Role in Southern Yemen's Secret Prisons." 2018. Amnesty International. Amnesty International. July 12, 2018. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/timeline-uaes-role-in-southern-yemens-secret-prisons/>.

[30] Mohareb, Amir M., and Louise C. Ivers. 2018. "Disease and Famine as Weapons of War in Yemen | NEJM." New England Journal of Medicine. New England Journal of Medicine. November 21, 2018. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1813831>.

[31] "Three Million Women and Girls at Risk of Violence in Yemen." 2016. UNFPA Yemen . United Nations . November 25, 2016. <https://yemen.unfpa.org/en/news/three-million-women-and-girls-risk-violence-yemen>.

[32] Mundy, Martha. 2018. "Strategies of the Coalition in the Yemen War: Aerial Bombardment and Food War." Rep. *Strategies of the Coalition in the Yemen War: Aerial Bombardment and Food War*. The World Peace Foundation. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Strategies of Coalition in Yemen War.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Strategies%20of%20Coalition%20in%20Yemen%20War.pdf).

[33] Agence France-Presse. 2018. "More than Five Million Children in Yemen Risk Starving to Death as Food and Fuel Prices Soar ." The Telegraph. Telegraph Media Group. September 19, 2018. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/>



[09/19/five-million-children-yemen-risk-starving-death-food-fuel-prices/](https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/19/opinions/yemen-crisis-demands-immediate-american-action-hartung/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2mmnXXlxcseogBGU2NRN7ywyDl4znrT7RgbFgxA7iO42wQd-fPB_b_3hg).

[34] Hartung, William D. 2018. "Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis Worsens Each Day. Here's How to Stop It." CNN. Cable News Network. November 19, 2018. [https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/19/opinions/yemen-crisis-demands-immediate-american-action-hartung/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2mmnXXlxcseogBGU2NRN7ywyDl4znrT7RgbFgxA7iO42wQd-fPB\\_b\\_3hg](https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/19/opinions/yemen-crisis-demands-immediate-american-action-hartung/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2mmnXXlxcseogBGU2NRN7ywyDl4znrT7RgbFgxA7iO42wQd-fPB_b_3hg).

[35] Ferguson, Jane. 2018. "Is Intentional Starvation the Future of War?" The New Yorker. The New Yorker. July 11, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/is-yemen-intentional-starvation-the-future-of-war>.

[36] Thomson Reuters. 2018. "Yemen's Houthis Arrive in Sweden for UN Peace Talks | CBC News." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada. December 4, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/yemen-war-un-talks-sweden-1.4931469>.