



Local Grievances and Civil War

The Houthis, rebel fighters who predominantly belong to the Zaidi Shia sect of Islam, have fought the government in Yemen for decades, fueled by legitimate grievances involving the distribution of political and economic resources. After massive cuts to fuel subsidies, the Houthis swept into Sana'a, capturing the capital on September 21, 2014 and ultimately forcing the government restore the subsidies and commit to a unity government. Unhappy with a constitutional proposal to divide Yemen into six federal regions, however, the Houthis once again seized the presidential compound in Sana'a on January 20, 2015, compelling President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to resign. After Hadi fled from the capital, however, he declared that he remained the president, sparking clashes between government forces and the Houthis who were also backed by forces loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was previously overthrown shortly after the Arab Spring began in Yemen. Fighting between the two factions has since raged for almost the past three years despite attempts at peace sponsored by the United Nations.

Foreign Intervention

Following a series of early victories by Houthi forces, Saudi Arabia and eight other Sunni Arab states launched a military intervention in support of President Hadi. Although this coalition has repeatedly justified its intervention by claiming the Houthis to be an Iranian proxy, this claim does not hold up under scrutiny. Although Iran has provided minor economic and military support to the Houthis, there is no evidence that this has led to any kind of influence over their actions. The United States and the United Kingdom have provided significant support to this campaign, selling weapons to Saudi Arabia that have been used in Yemen as well as providing intelligence and logistical support.

Humanitarian Crisis

Already among the poorest countries in the world, Yemen has suffered greatly as a result of the civil war. Although all sides have been accused of human rights abuses, the United Nations attributes the majority of civilian casualties to the coalition led by Saudi Arabia. More than 10,000 civilians have been killed, three million have been internally displaced, and approximately 18.8 million are dependent on international assistance. The destruction of health facilities and the lack of clean water has contributed to an outbreak of cholera that has killed at least 1,500 people. The Saudi coalition, however, continues to block aid from entering the country, thereby exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

Timeline

- 1992:** The Houthis begin as a moderate theological movement
- 2004:** Facing political and economic marginalization, the Houthis launch an insurgency
- 2005:** The Houthis and government forces agree to a ceasefire, but sporadic fighting continues for the next five years
- 2011:** Arab Spring protests begin in the streets of Sana'a, the capital of Yemen
- 2014:** After fuel subsidy cuts, Houthi fighters seize control of Sana'a and gain political influence after negotiating an agreement
- 2015:** Threatened by a proposal to split Yemen into six federal regions, the Houthis capture the presidential palace in Sana'a; just two months later, the civil war begins
- 2016:** Peace talks sponsored by the United Nations begin between the government and the Houthis and the General People's Congress of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh even as airstrikes by Saudi Arabia kills 140 mourners at a funeral procession in Sana'a
- 2017:** The United Nations reports that at least 3,700 civilians have been killed in the civil war in Yemen and the World Health Organization says that 1,500 people have died as a result of a cholera epidemic