



### **Peculiarities of the Yemeni Civil War**

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#### **Abstract**

The Middle East is one of the most complex regions in the world. It is characterized by many conflicts. There are frequent conflicts and confrontations between the countries of the region or even within the countries, which affect the security of the entire region.

The civil war in Yemen has been going on for years. As soon as the war started, the processes went far beyond the boundaries of this country. Both internal and external actors were actively involved in it. Therefore, the civil war in Yemen has become one of the most urgent problems in the Middle East region. In this war, not only the country's government and its opposition group, in the form of the Houthis, are facing each other, but it has also acquired a religious confrontation. The “defender of the Shiites” - the Islamic Republic of Iran and the

state of Saudi Arabia, which considers itself the banner of the Sunnis, got involved in the Yemeni civil war. Other external regional actors are also involved directly or indirectly.

Because of all this, the war took on a rather resonant character and was prolonged. The reason for the prolongation of the mentioned civil war is the disagreement between both internal and external political actors. We are talking about the bays of Aden and Babel Mandab, which are of great strategic importance. There is not even an assumption about the end of the war yet. The country is divided into two camps, there is a humanitarian crisis. Accordingly, the economic situation is also difficult.

**Keywords:** Yemen; region; active; war; conflict; religion; Gulf; country; security.

## **Introduction**

The current political conflict in Yemen has been brewing for a long time. The beginning of this process was given by the wave of revolutions that developed because of the Arab Spring in the Middle East region. The reason for the protests that took place in Yemen is very different from the protests in other countries of the region. In addition to the autocratic regime, the religious factor also became the reason for the protest. Due to this, the current political crisis in Yemen has been extended and it has gone far beyond the borders of this particular country.

## **Method**

The article is based on: comparative analysis, retrospective analysis, and structural-functional analysis research methods.

## **Result**

The current civil war in Yemen is characterized by a number of peculiarities. This war had a significant impact on the regional security of the Middle East. Actors operating inside and outside the country are involved in it. Based on the religious factor, the participants in the conflict are Iran and Saudi Arabia. Although the relations between

these two countries - Iran and Saudi Arabia - improved considerably in March of this year, it still did not contribute to the process of ending the Yemeni civil war, which indicates that despite some positive signs, both Iran and Saudi Arabia are changing their positions in the region to reveal their influence. They are not going to give up yet.

### **Discussion**

Yemen is one of the most ancient civilizations in the Middle East. From the 7th century, Yemen was greatly influenced by the Arab Caliphate. Islam began to spread here from 628/630, Sunni Islam spread to North Yemen. In 1839, South Yemen was occupied by Britain, and the north was dominated by the Ottomans, which lasted until 1924. From 1517 to 1924, the country was part of the Ottoman Empire (Gelovani, 2008:159-160).

On October 30, 1918, North Yemen was declared an independent state by Imam Yahya Muhammad of the Al-Qasim dynasty. In 1926, he declared North Yemen as Mutawakilite kingdom. The name Mutawakilit is derived from the full name of Imam Yahya Muhammad, the Imam who declared North Yemen a kingdom. He became both a temporary king and (Zayd) a spiritual leader and gained international recognition for his state. In 1926, the Italo-Yemen Treaty was concluded. This treaty is also known as Sana'a Treaty. At this time British influence was considerable in the region, with the British colony of Aden and the Aden Protectorate to the south of Yemen. Italy also had its own colonies in the region, in the form of Eritrea and Somaliland, which were characterized by low profitability. Italy's expectation was that in case of strengthening ties with Yemen, it would increase trade in the region, thus expanding Italy's sphere of influence. The Kingdom of Yemen wanted the annexation of Aden, because the Imam's desire was to become a "Greater Yemen". In this treaty, Italy recognized Imam Yahya as the king of Yemen and his claim to Aden. In the 1920s, Yahya expanded his power north into Tihama, but he ran into the growing influence of Abdul Aziz ibn Saud of Nejd and Hijaz (the future king of Saudi Arabia). Ibn Saud announced the merger of the Kingdoms of Nejd and Hijaz in 1932, establishing the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia. Most of the borders remained unmapped. Kuwait, Bahrain, Aden, etc.). By 1932, Ibn Saud controlled almost the entire Arabian Peninsula, except for Yemen and the small coastal states then under British protectorate (Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Aden, etc.) (عبدالله، +احمرى2022: 16).

Between the Hijaz and Yemen there were several warring tribal units that both Ibn Saud and the Imam of Yemen sought to control. Finally, today's border with Saudi Arabia was demarcated on May 20, 1934 by the Treaty of Taif, after the Saudi-Yemen war.

The Kingdom of Yemen became one of the founding member states of the League of Arab States in 1945. It joined the United Nations on September 30, 1947. Yemen also involved a small force in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

In 1948, Imam Yahya bin Muhammad Hamid was assassinated, as a result of a coup d'etat by the AL Wazirs, they took power for a while, but Yahya's son Imam Ahmad bin Yahya was soon able to regain power. His reign was marked by the growing development and openness of the country. Imam Ahmad was slightly more prudent and more open to foreign contacts than his father. His regime, like his father's, was autocratic and semi-medieval in nature. All decisions made required his personal approval (عبدالله احمرى، 2022; 27).

In March 1955, King Ahmed bin Mohammed was briefly forced to abdicate due to a coup organized by a group of officers and his two brothers, but the coup was quickly suppressed. King Ahmed was under increasing pressure from the Arab nationalists and pan-Arabists of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. In 1956, the Imam of Yemen signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt.

In March 1958, Yemen expressed its desire to join the United Arab Republic, but at the last moment refrained from taking this step. It disbanded soon after (December 1961) after Syria withdrew from the United Arab Republic. After that, Yemen's relations with Egypt worsen.

Imam Ahmed died in September 1962 and was succeeded by his son, Muhammad al-Badri, whose reign was short-lived, Egyptian-

trained Yemeni military officers inspired by Nasser led by the head of the royal guard, Abdullah al-Salal, deposed him in the same year that the crown stood up, took control of the capital Sana'a and created the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). This led to a civil war in North Yemen and created a new front in the "Arab Cold War" with Egypt helping the YAR with troops. The monarchs of Saudi Arabia and Jordan supported the forces of the deposed emirate against the newly created republic. The conflict continued intermittently until 1967, when Egypt withdrew its troops. By 1968, most of Sanaa's adversaries had reached reconciliation. Saudi Arabia recognized the Republic of Yemen in 1970.

Since 1962, the country has been in a civil war for ten years. In the north, an anti-monarchy revolution overthrew the Imam's rule and established the Yemen Arab Republic with Sana'a as its capital. The Republicans were supported by Egypt - its back was supported by the Soviet Union, and the monarchists were supported by Saudi Arabia, behind which the Western countries stood. It was a "war by other hand" between the communist bloc and the imperialist bloc, this fratricidal war killed about 200,000 Yemenis, which was 4 percent of the country's population at the time (Gachechiladze, 2019: 289).

At the same time, an anti-colonial war against the British began in South Yemen, in Aden, which escalated between different factions in the government of Aden. Britain left Aden in 1967. Three years later, in 1970, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was established.

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was a one-party Marxist-Leninist state. The Socialist Party of Yemen was the sole ruling party and had almost total power over both the legislative and executive branches.

For the next two decades, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was heavily dependent on foreign aid from the Soviet Union. The country was often the scene of short, bloody battles between separate factions for control of Aden. One of them took place in 1986, in which thousands of people died (Dresch, 2000; 69).

Similar civil conflicts took place in North Yemen. The first two presidents of the republic - Abdullah al-Salal and Abd al-Rahman al-Irian were overthrown as a result of a coup (in 1967 and 1973). The next two presidents, Ibrahim al-Hamdi and Ahmed al-Gham, were killed in the night - first Ibrahim, and 9 months later - Ahmed. All this allowed a relatively unknown military officer, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to become the president of North Yemen in 1978. Saleh quickly restructured the Yemeni military and security apparatus, strengthening his relatives and trusted clans from the Sanhan tribe. He gave them the posts of high military commissars and security forces (UN Panel, 2017: 304). Later, Saleh boasted that his presidency would last six months at most, and he was president for three decades (Hoagland, 1979:87).

In fact, two countries with different political systems were formed on the territory of "Happy Arabia". There were socialist fanatics in South Yemen who tried to establish socialism in that part of the country. In the north, a closed political system was established, the ideology of which was Islamic religious fundamentalism. A situation typical of the "Cold War" was created, when a country was divided along ideological lines.

Relations between the two Yemeni republics became strained in the early 1970s, when southern party functionaries vowed to unify the country by force. All this turned into a war that started in 1972 and lasted until 1979. This year, negotiations between the opposing sides began at the summit of the League of Arab States, which was held in Kuwait. At the summit, the parties expressed their readiness to end the conflict. They expressed their desire for the unity of Yemen, which was supported by the Arab countries as well as the West, because this, in turn, would create a kind of stability in the Middle East. However, this attempt was unsuccessful (عبدالله احمدى ، 2021: 18).

In 1988, serious discussions began regarding the unification of the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which would lead to the restoration of good relations between them. A set of principles was formed:

1. Disarmament of the existing border forces between the two sides;
2. Creation of a common area on the borders of both sides and joint work during oil exploration operations;
3. Unconditional permission to cross the border for Yemenis, and any Yemeni from the north could go to the south only with a national identity card;
4. Creation of a government whose members would be from both sides and would work for the interests of the Yemeni people on both sides, without discrimination;
5. Integration of ministries and logistical government agencies in a manner consistent with the interests of the Yemeni people.

Work has really started to implement the 'principles'. This was the beginning of the real unification of North and South Yemen. In May 1990. In fact, the two Yemeni ministries and government agencies have begun to merge. The border forces have been disarmed. The first postage stamp with the name of the United Republic of Yemen was issued in October 1990.

Unification of North and South Yemen and internal political difficulties in 1990, when the Soviet Union was collapsing and it was becoming clear that it could no longer guarantee the independence of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDR), its leadership proposed reunification to North-North Yemen itself. At the same time, oil and gas deposits were discovered in the disputed border zone of Yemen, which is also divided into two. A unified Republic of Yemen was created, the capital of which became North. The center of Yemen - Sana'a.

This marriage of the "two Alis," as it was sometimes called (Ali Abdullah Saleh in the north and Ali Salem al-Beydi in the south), did not go well. Both sides tried to degrade and weaken the other. Saleh has drawn back tribal families who lost their land during socialist redistribution in the 1960s and 70s, as well as former jihadists who fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, which Saleh said was also fighting communists (Gregory, 2012:45-76).

The process of creating a unified state was not easy for Yemen, the unity of the country was very weak. In South Yemen, the North was following religious (Islamic) laws, which the inhabitants of a secular country like South Yemen could not adapt to.

Relations between them were also strained by newly discovered oil fields, most of which were discovered in the southern part of Yemen. According to the decision of the government of South Yemen, the money received from the extracted oil should remain with them. It was this circumstance that contributed to the aggravation of the political crisis in the Republic of Yemen.

In May 1994, the tension between the north and south of the country turned into a civil war. The South tried to secede from the United Republic. Saudi Arabia supported the secession attempt, but Saleh, with the help of former jihadists and the Islamist party Islah, was able to crush the secession attempt within weeks. The conflict between them lasted until July 1994, and in the end North Yemen emerged as the winner. Saleh announced a political amnesty to all, except for 16 leaders who participated in the military conflict. Separatist leaders were confiscated all their property and forbidden to return to Yemen.

The unstable economic situation of your country has become a very serious problem. More than 200,000 Yemenis were forced to work in Saudi Arabia and other rich Gulf countries. President Saleh again managed to maintain his power through various political manoeuvres. He won the presidential elections in 1999 and 2006. However, they protested that representatives of small and medium-sized businesses did not have political freedom. They also demanded economic reforms and fight against corruption. At the same time, they wanted the resignation of President Saleh, who had been at the head of the country since 1978 with his clan.

Saleh named Abdorabu Mansour Hadi, a southern Abyan who did not support the separation of southern Yemen from the north, as his vice president. To ensure that his rule would not face any threat or challenge in the future, Saleh began to weaken groups such as Islah



that had helped him win the civil war. Saleh had a characteristic of pitting his domestic rivals against each other, which he often referred to as "dancing on the heads of snakes" (Clark, V,2010). Some scholars, including Sarah Phillips, have called this "the politics of permanent crisis" (Philips, 2022: 217-222).

After the 1997 parliamentary elections, concerned that Islah was becoming too powerful, Saleh began to support some of Islah's internal rivals, including the traditionalist Zaydi political party Hizb al-Haqqi (Party of Truth). This support included direct payments to Zaydi leaders such as Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, who was a member of parliament from the Hizb al-Haqq party in 1993-97. Also, in order to gain the loyalty of the Zaydis, they allowed the establishment of control over such ministries as the Ministry of Education. These "bribes" of President Saleh were known as charity. Hussein al-Houthi used the money received by Saleh to finance his master's studies in Sudan (1999-2000).

By 2000, the political situation had changed again, so Saleh stopped paying Hussein al-Houthi. Former member of parliament Husayn al-Houthi returned to Yemen and in his home of Saada, he formed an alliance with members of the Shabaab al-Mu'manin ("Faithful Youth"), students who wanted to revive Zaydism. This movement was formed in the 1980s, initially as summer camps to promote the teachings of traditional Zaydism. He believed that society was threatened by both Salafism and Sunnism in general. The Faithful Youth Movement was founded by Muhammad Izzan and Muhammad Badr al-Din al-Houthi, one of Hussein al-Houthi's half-brothers. They later formed the core of the Houthi movement known today as Ansar Allah.

Saleh first learned about the Houthi movement in 2002 during a trip to Saudi Arabia, when Houthi supporters staged a rally against him in front of the Saada Mosque. Two years later, in June 2004, Saleh ordered the arrest of the governor of Saada, Hussein al-Houthi (Glossemeyer,1994: 210). Hussein resisted them and this is where the conflicts between the supporters of al-Houthi in Yemen and the country's president begin.

In the first decade of the 21st century, conflicts between different ethnic, social, and religious groups in Yemen became more and more frequent. The Houthi movement is a participant in one of these conflicts. The Houthis are a Shia-Zaidi rebel group that originated in Yemen's north-western province of Saada. They are known as the Houthis or the Houthi group after their spiritual leader, Badr al-Din al-Houthi. This movement is also known as "Ansar Allah", or the believing youth.

The movement originates from Shabaab al-Mumanin (Believing Youth), a group active in the early 1990s. The devout youth worked to raise awareness of the Zaydi branch of Shiite Islam, which had dominated Yemen for centuries but was repressed by the Yemeni government after a civil war in the 1960s.

After the US-led coalition invaded Iraq in 2003, Hussein al-Houthi, a prominent Zaydi cleric and former member of parliament (1993-1997), as well as one of the leaders of religious youth, began organizing anti-American protests. He accused the government of close ties with the United States of America and Israel. Hussein al-Houthi called on his followers after Friday prayers to shout a slogan he created - "Allah is Greatest, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews and Victory to Islam (أبريل مارب، 2022:110).

Some sources claimed that the use of this slogan by the followers of Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi in the mosque was one of the most important reasons for the start of the conflict between the al-Houthi group and the Yemeni government.

The main motivation of Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, and later his followers, was greater autonomy for North Yemen, as well as the religious and cultural protection of the Zaydis. Al-Houthi and his followers began to openly fight the ruling regime. Al-Houthi, after establishing control over certain regions of Yemen's northern province, began to form armed groups. He also created his own flag, declared himself an imam, and took upon himself the collection of taxes. Because of his actions, the Yemeni government issued an arrest warrant for al-Houthi, so his followers began violent clashes with

security forces. Al Houthi was killed by security forces in 2004. After the death of Hussein al-Houthi, this group was called the Houthis. Since then, his relatives and supporters have staged multiple rebellions against the government, known as the Houthi Wars. In 2005, clashes between the Houthis and government forces escalated, resulting in hundreds of casualties (<https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/12/7/الحوثيون>).

Clashes continued. To settle the situation, in March 2006, President Saleh announced amnesty to 600 Houthi fighters. As a result, he won the elections in 2006. In early 2007, the Houthi rebels and Saleh's government were again at odds with each other. The fighting continued until Abdul-Malik al-Houthi reached an agreement with Saleh on a ceasefire with the help of Qatar. In April 2008, the battle resumed. In 2009, the Houthi movement also entered a border conflict with the Saudi military forces on the Saada border. In August of the same year, the Yemeni military launched Operation "Scorched Earth" to suppress the Houthi rebellion in Saada. Fighting continued until, after rounds of offers and counteroffers, Saleh's government agreed to a ceasefire with Abdul-Malik al-Houthi and the rebels in February 2010 ([https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/12/7/\(\(الحوث\)\)](https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/12/7/((الحوث)))).

President Saleh accused Iran of supporting the rebellion, funding the Houthis to destabilize the country. There have been several instances where the Yemeni authorities have announced that they have arrested individuals linked to Iran who were providing information to Iran about Yemen's domestic affairs.

After several stages of bloody fighting, in 2010, the Houthis signed a cease-fire agreement with the Yemeni government. However, not much has changed for the Houthis from the government side. A year later, they joined the Arab Spring protests against Saleh. This led to the rapid success of the Houthis in the fight against the government (Gregory, 2021:34-36).

President Ali Abdullah Saleh has ruled Yemen with an iron fist for more than 30 years, and despite being a Zaydi himself, has not been allied with the Houthis. In fact, they were their enemies. As a wave of

protests in the wake of the Arab Spring swept across much of the Middle East, the Houthis took advantage of the Yemeni people's growing discontent with Saleh's government and began to take control of the country's north.

Saleh agreed to the request to resign. He transferred power to his deputy, Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi. The new president's promises about government reforms remained promises. The living conditions of Yemenis, including the Houthis, were getting worse.

The "Arab Spring" includes a series of protests in the Middle East and parts of Africa that began in late 2010. The purpose of the protests (first in Tunisia, then in Egypt) was to overthrow the authoritarian regimes and hope to establish democracy in the countries. Protests were often violent. The overthrow of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt as a result of these actions inspired other countries to join the Arab Spring (Gachechiladze, 2019: 165-168). One of them was Yemen. Similar to Tunisia and Egypt, members of the opposition and those who want to strive for democracy joined the protests held in Yemen. The population of Yemen was dissatisfied with the long economic stagnation. Because of the protests, President Saleh changed his economic policy and promised the population tax cuts and wage increases. He also agreed to step down, which would allow other candidates to run for office in the next election. His concessions did not satisfy the protesters, who pointed out that President Saleh had made similar promises at other times but failed or failed to fulfil them.

There were clashes between the protesters and the police, which resulted in casualties. President Saleh was losing supporters as the protests became more and more violent. The turning point of the revolution is considered to be the moment when the military joined the pro-democracy protesters, which significantly weakened the power of President Saleh. Finally, in 2011, an internationally brokered agreement was signed, which stipulated that Saleh was to hand over the presidency to Vice President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. However, Hadi was unable to govern the country effectively, further deepening Yemen's instability and economic decline. Hadi's government suffered

a similar fate, and the rallies and riots continued (, 2022: 112).

The country's already dire situation has been exacerbated by jihadist attacks on Yemen from the south. Iran has taken control of the country's northern border, which has been supporting the Shiite Zaydi rebels. In this situation, Hadi decided to flee the country. He left Yemen in a civil war. Due to disorganization and lack of advance planning, we can say that after the revolution, Yemen was in a worse situation than before it started. The very opposite result calls into question the nature of political protest. Yemeni society is diverse, which is why there are conflicts between them. The country has been wracked by numerous insurgencies at different times since 1962, as well as since 2004, and finally a devastating civil war since 2015, which continues to this day. When Saleh gave his position to Hadi, in order to stabilize the socio-political situation in Yemen, the new government was unable to control the internal conflicts and finally in 2015, Hadi's government left the country's capital and moved to the south of Yemen. The capital of Yemen, Sana'a, was occupied by rebel Houthis.

### ***Conclusion***

The Yemeni civil war has been prolonged because both internal regional and external political actors are involved in it. Each of them has their own interests in this civil war. Therefore, the political crisis in Yemen has been prolonged.

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