

US Humanitarian Intervention in Yemen from A Risk Society Perspective

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Abstract. This study focuses on Yemen, a country with a long history of external intervention. Based on the principle of humanitarian intervention in the context of the risk society, it analyses the effects of the interventions received by Yemen from the United States of America, identifies the risks involved, and considers the scope of the risks. External intervention has led to the rise of multiple armed forces on the ground in Yemen, the worsening of the humanitarian crisis, dependence on international assistance, and the erosion of sovereignty. The international community is also threatened. The spread of terrorism, the obstruction of maritime transport, the flow of refugees, famine, and other problems cannot be ignored. This article takes the situation in Yemen as a visualization of the intervention risks. It explores the practical applications from four dimensions: humanity, neutrality, sustainability, and prevention. It makes sound recommendations for improving the international community's understanding of humanitarian intervention and developing sound humanitarian principles. It helps make humanitarian interventions more sustainable in addition to their emergency function.

Keywords: Humanitarian intervention; risk society; external intervention.

1. Introduction

With the development of the media and increased awareness of human rights globally, there has been an increased global public outcry for assistance to suffering people. Humanitarian intervention is increasingly crucial as a mode of action in response to the plight. Studying the issue of humanitarian intervention is of great significance in promoting the protection of human rights, balancing national sovereignty and international responsibility, guiding policy formulation, and maintaining global security and stability. The development of this area of research has contributed to the international community's growing interest in transnational humanitarian intervention. However, the highly high spillover of social risks now places new demands on the principle of humanitarian intervention. To control such an abstract issue as risk, it may be more feasible and precise to focus on concrete phenomena and seek commonalities of events. This article will address these issues by analyzing the U.S. intervention in the Yemeni Civil War.

2. The Origins of U.S. Humanitarian Intervention and Yemen

2.1. Yemen's Longstanding Status as an Intervening State

In 1934, when Yemen was just in the post-defeat period, the Taif Agreement was signed under British mediation. The borderline between Yemen and Saudi Arabia was established, and the division of Yemen into two camps, north and south, began to take shape at that time. The colonial and feudal dynasties have left a lot of historical residual problems, the feudal and colonial forces after the establishment of the independent state have not been eradicated in time, and external forces have invested a lot of workforce and money in proxy wars in this country. Especially in the bipolar confrontation after World War II, the game between North and South Yemen is no less tense than the tension between East and West Germany.

The assistance provided by external forces to the various factions in the Arab region has continued to deepen the contradictions and conflicts among the Arabs of the Yemeni region among their tribes, sheikhdoms, and even States. Historically, the Yemeni region was home to hundreds of tribes and

emirates. The Arab conception of "Yemen" is more geographic than political. The scarcity of arable land and water resources has led to tribal friction and conflict in Yemen. With the tense political situation in Yemen, current governance practices not only face limitations in terms of the subjects, objects, and agendas of governance at the individual level but also lack communication and coordination between the different levels [1]. The Arab nation's intense concentration on tribal society and blood relationships has led to many irreconcilable conflicts that have long existed within Yemen. Coupled with the catalytic role of external forces, Yemen has multiple conflicts fuelled by various actors. The Houthis controlled much of northern Yemen, including Sana'a, while the legitimate government established itself in the southern port city of Aden and declared it the temporary capital. The situation in Yemen further deteriorated in September 2014 when the Houthi rebel group launched an armed uprising, leading to more conflicts, violence, and the emergence of more out-of-control areas. These conflicts have severely damaged Yemen's infrastructure, making the humanitarian crisis even more profound. Unemployment has risen, food and medical supplies are scarce, and tens of thousands of people have been displaced and suffer ongoing hardship.

In the face of this crisis, the international community is compelled to seek solutions to mitigate the humanitarian catastrophe and prevent Yemen from sinking deeper into turmoil and instability. A united and prosperous Yemen, at peace with itself and its neighbors, is essential for the world's security.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted Resolution 2216, demanding that the Houthi rebel group withdraw from occupied territories and restore authority to the Yemeni government. The UN provides humanitarian aid support to the affected populations in Yemen through its humanitarian agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This included the provision of food, medical assistance, and educational support. On 26 March of the same year, a multinational coalition led by Saudi Arabia began to intervene in the Yemeni civil war with an armed intervention against the Houthi insurgency, with a degree of support from the U.S. [2]. In December 2018, under the mediation of the United Nations, the Yemeni government and the Houthis reached an agreement on a cease-fire, a prisoner exchange, and other topics. Still, they soon accused each other of breaking the cease-fire agreement [3]. In February 2021, the U.S. government appointed Tim Radwin as a special envoy for Yemen to promote international efforts to end the war and resolve the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

2.2. Summary of United States humanitarian interventions

This paper attempts to clarify the issue of why the United States has humanitarian intervention in Yemen.

Firstly, the geopolitical reasons: the long experience of the country's division and religious tribal strife have made Yemen, the poorest country in the world, highly susceptible to terrorism, with exchanges and cooperation between Somali pirates and Al-Qaeda in Yemen [4]. Fearing that this threat could spread to the US mainland, the US has taken action against potential terrorists and terrorist organizations to ensure national security.

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, located halfway between Yemen and Djibouti, connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and is a necessary passage from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal. The United States has vital geopolitical interests in the region, including protecting shipping lanes, maintaining regional stability, and preventing potential threats to US interests in the Middle East.

In addition, the United States has strong ties to Yemen's neighbor, Saudi Arabia, for oil trade, arms sales, and defense cooperation and supports the Saudi-led coalition operation. This operation aims to support the Yemeni government's fight against the Houthi rebel forces and consolidate Saudi Arabia's influence in the region. As an ally of Saudi Arabia, the United States is engaged in this proxy war to maintain political balance in the region and support its partners.

Finally, by providing aid and support to improve the living conditions of the people, it also aims to play an active role in resolving the political strife in the region.

Secondly, there are moral reasons, such as helping the general population most in need. The United States Department of Foreign Affairs, in its comprehensive national strategy for Yemen, approved for implementation on 23 May 2022, states that the United States will continue to focus on supporting United Nations efforts to promote compromise, urge a military de-escalation, and help develop targeted sanctions to pressure those who threaten the security and stability of peace.

2.3 Analysing the evolution of the situation in Yemen as a result of external intervention

Through assistance to local humanitarian relief agencies or U.S. agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. has provided Yemen with necessities such as emergency food, medical supplies, water, and sanitation. This assistance has helped to meet the basic needs of a population forced by war and conflict, reducing the threat of hunger and disease. However, millions in Yemen still need food, potable water, medical assistance, and better sanitation, and 50 percent of the country's nationals are underfed and do not know what to eat. Meanwhile, the U.S. provides psychosocial support and protects particularly vulnerable groups, such as children and women, from violence and abuse. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) projects have supported Yemen with curriculum materials, teacher training, school facilities and infrastructure improvement. These efforts have provided security and stability for the Yemeni population, but unfortunately, the situation remains challenging.

The United States is more biased in the Yemeni civil war. The United States has focused its intervention on fighting the Houthis more than the economic assistance provided to Yemen by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The U.S. has assisted the Saudi Arabia-led multinational coalition forces through intelligence, arms sales, technical support, training, and after-sales services. In addition, the United States has conducted operations against terrorist organizations in Yemen, including air strikes against al-Qaeda affiliates. The Yemeni Eye of the Humanitarian Centre for Rights and Development reported that in 2022, Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen killed 643 civilians and injured 2,440, most of whom were women and children. There have been several attacks on civilian targets in Yemen over the past 14 years, with hundreds of airstrikes between January 2021 and the end of February 2022 alone, killing at least 87 people and injuring 136, including 19 attacks on ambulances and medical facilities. Most episodes were carried out with weaponry supplied by the United States and other Western countries, including cluster bombs, strictly prohibited under international conventions and customary law. The escalation of the conflict has led to an increase in civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and restrictions on humanitarian space, causing further suffering and hardship for the population [5]. In December, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also announced that at least 11,000 children had been maimed in the war in Yemen and said that the accurate figure was likely to be much higher. Other factors have exacerbated the situation in Yemen, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, food shortages, fuel crisis, flooding, locust infestation, and internal divisions. There are tensions between the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which supports secession in the south and controls cities like Aden. Although the two signed a power-sharing agreement in 2020, implementation has been slow, leading to ongoing violence.

The civil war in Yemen has evolved from internal divisions and fighting to mutual bombardment by the Saudis and Houthis. Although it has attracted international attention, the parties have long been at a stalemate, with the Saudis burdened with a significant military commitment and facing international condemnation for their behavior, creating a humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The Houthis do not have the strength to occupy all of Yemen by military means, and it will be difficult for them to get what they want if they continue to exhaust themselves. The war situation cannot be easily changed. Peace is still a long way from the land.

3. Reflections on the Risks Inherent in the Evolution of the Situation in Yemen

3.1. Risks in Yemen

The US intervention in Yemen carries multiple risks. The intervention could escalate the civil war, exacerbate conflict and destruction, and worsen the humanitarian crisis [6]. The Yemeni population may resent the intervention by external forces, triggering more resistance and defiance and making the situation more complex and unstable. External intervention may exacerbate local and sectarian conflicts, complicating resolving the situation. External intervention could deepen the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, leaving more people needing assistance and protection. The United Nations has warned that 24 million people in Yemen need humanitarian aid, and 14 million are on the verge of extreme hunger. The Yemeni people are facing unbearable suffering due to the war and blockade, which has led to shortages of food, fuel, and medical supplies, skyrocketing prices, devaluation of the currency, destruction of infrastructure, and collapse of public services.

In addition, the intervention itself carries certain risks and limitations. First, the intervened country loses its ability to make autonomous decisions, undermining its sovereignty. Second, intervention may exacerbate internal conflict and social divisions, escalating tensions and breaking social cohesion. In addition, economic pressures may lead to recession and hardship for the population. At the same time, interventions generate resentment and dissatisfaction among the people, which may trigger boycotts and violent resistance.

Most importantly, external interventions often fail to address deep-rooted problems, leading to political deadlock and instability. While external interventions can sometimes have a positive impact, one must consider their adverse effects carefully and seek solutions that maintain ownership and stability. External interventions may also lead to dependence on foreign support for the Yemeni Government and military, undermining their autonomy and sustainability, leaving the Government without domestic legitimacy and popular support, and increasing the risk of political unrest and instability. Theoretically, Yemen should endeavor to develop its autonomous capacities and sustainable problem-solving mechanisms to reduce its dependence on external interventions and seek its internal problem-solving abilities and mechanisms.

3.2. International Risk

The risks are politically reflexive [7]. The intervention of external forces has not only provided significant support for the rise of the Yemeni armed forces. However, it has also fuelled the continued ferment of armed conflict in Yemen [1]. The spread of the conflict could lead to broader regional conflicts and increase regional instability. The civil war in Yemen has spread to neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have launched missiles and drone strikes into Saudi territory in Yemen, which has sparked regional tensions related to Iran; it could also lead to the transfer or backlash of terrorists, including branches of al-Qaeda and Islamic extremist organizations. As a result of the conflict and instability, these terrorist organizations have been given some sanctuary and space to develop, increasing the threat of terrorist attacks, which may pose a risk to the security and stability of other regions and countries and the vital shipping lanes near Yemen face the threat of piracy, which poses a danger to commercial shipping and international trade. This leads to supply chain disruptions, economic losses, and security risks, and rampant war is often accompanied by famine, disease, and population displacement. Thousands of Yemenis seek to flee and seek asylum or migrate to other countries. Neighboring countries like Djibouti, Somalia, and Oman have experienced many Yemeni refugees. The strain on host countries and regions could trigger social instability. Among many refugees, the fate of women and children is particularly tragic, as they often fall into the hands of traffickers, and the lack of law enforcement forces makes human smuggling and trafficking more and more lawless. Women and children being forced into prostitution and even sexual slavery is worsening. In addition, some children were joining armed groups. United Nations reports mentioned the crimes committed by the Saudis and the Houthis regarding children's rights, but the corresponding interventions had been weak and ineffective.

4. Four Dimensions of Humanitarian Intervention in the Context of Risk Societies

International interventions are often feasible in mitigating, ending, and preventing conflicts, but they are not always desirable, and even more so, they can trigger or exacerbate social disputes. Even well-intentioned interventions can lead to tragic consequences in the long run. Especially in the face of mass atrocities, the risks of carrying out acts of intervention are difficult to control, making the discussion of humanitarian intervention a dilemma [8]. Countries should be cautious about intervening in the affairs of other countries and focus on finding common interests and solutions.

4.1. Humanity

Taking a right to life and the right to development as the starting point for the defense of basic human rights is a true humanitarian concern [9]. Humanitarian intervention should have the protection and rescue of people's lives, dignity, and basic rights as its core objective. In the case of the United States and Yemen pair, humanity is manifested in providing basic needs such as emergency medical assistance, food, water, and shelter to alleviate the suffering caused by the humanitarian crisis. Such interventions demonstrate concern and respect for humanitarian values by meeting the basic survival needs of populations trapped in conflict zones. Obviously, economic aid does not make a difference to a long-standing intervening country in a situation similar to Yemen's, but clarifying the intervention's humane starting point determines the action's ethics and goals. It helps the intervening country to uphold justice and goodwill, to develop clear plans and strategies, and to gain general support and trust.

4.2. Neutrality

Humanitarian intervention should be neutral between the parties to a conflict, providing assistance and intervening without favoring political, religious, or military interests. There is no universally applicable strategy for cooperation in solving specific collective action problems; it requires balancing conflicting needs [10]. When humanitarian actors remain neutral, they can gain wider acceptance and support and build cooperative relationships with all parties, including affected countries, armed forces, and other relevant stakeholders. This helps to ensure the smooth delivery and effective implementation of assistance. For example, UN peacekeepers can reduce the risk of conflict escalation by facilitating dialogue between groups with different community identities on the ground, restoring inter-group coordination, and reducing negative prejudice against other groups [11]; neutrality also helps maintain the safety of humanitarian actors. In conflict areas or emergencies, neutrality reduces the risk of being attacked or drawn into the conflict. It ensures the independence of humanitarian actors, allowing them to provide assistance based on needs and priorities without external pressure or manipulation. While neutrality is an ideal goal, it can be challenging in practice. Various political, geopolitical, and economic factors can influence the reality of humanitarian intervention. In the Yemeni civil war, the United States supported the Saudi Arabian-led coalition and made the neutrality of humanitarian action challenging. Humanitarian actors must be vigilant and adhere to the principle of neutrality to ensure the impartiality and effectiveness of assistance.

4.3. Sustainability

Humanitarian interventions should be sustainable. While short-term assistance can alleviate acute humanitarian needs, broader and long-term solutions are needed to rebuild infrastructure, restore social services, and promote economic recovery in affected areas. Many crises and disasters require lasting support and solutions. Short-term assistance alone may not address the root causes of the problem but merely alleviate the current predicament. Durable and sustainable interventions can better meet the needs of affected countries and groups, promote self-determined development, and help them build more stable and resilient societies. Sustainability also involves the effective use and rational allocation of resources. Humanitarian interventions must ensure that aid resources are used

appropriately, avoiding waste and the development of dependency. This can be achieved by working with local communities and institutions, building sustainable infrastructure, and providing training. While sustainability should be pursued in humanitarian intervention, the urgency of a given situation and the need for temporary assistance should also be considered. In some cases, prompt action may be crucial, but ways to achieve sustainability should be considered in long-term plans to ensure assistance's effectiveness and long-term impact. Protracted fighting and a humanitarian crisis have made sustainability a huge challenge in the Yemen conflict. Prolonged conflict and destruction make it difficult to sustain the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, the international community needs to work together to provide long-term support and investment in Yemen, and more comprehensive and integrated solutions are needed to promote sustainable development in the region. to ensure the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

4.4. Prevention

Humanitarian interventions should be preventive, i.e., focusing on the root causes of conflicts, disasters, and crises rather than merely responding to their consequences. Conflicts and problems are reduced through early intervention, conflict early warning, and preventive measures. Power must be exercised responsibly, and influential countries must consider the consequences of their decisions for weaker countries [10]. Promoting structural change and sustainable development can create stable environments and reduce the likelihood of conflict and crisis; the dynamic between flexible ad hoc mechanisms and formal international organizations should be carefully examined [10]. By providing training, knowledge transfer, and resource support, intervened countries can be helped to build their resistance and capacity to better cope with potential risks and challenges. However, in the case of Yemen, the international community has been unable to effectively prevent the outbreak of conflict and has struggled to address the underlying issues that led to the competition. There are shortcomings in the preventive dimension, and more efforts are needed to promote political settlement paths and conflict prevention strategies. It is a revelation that the international community should be forward-looking to reduce humanitarian suffering, minimize losses, and create a better future for affected countries and groups.

5. Conclusions

The Yemeni problem has been shaped by multiple external forces fuelling the Yemeni brawl, as well as internal disputes over interests between tribes, emirates, and religious sects, and the country's crucial geographical location and harsh geological environment, which has led to continued tensions in Yemen. In the Yemeni conflict, the U.S. has provided some material assistance and help with infrastructure development. Still, the center of gravity of its intervention has been the fight against the Houthis, which has directly and indirectly led to many disasters. This has not only led to the rise of multiple armed forces on the ground in Yemen, the displacement of people, and even casualties, but has also sent a dangerous message to the international community. The chaotic situation has fed the training of terrorist groups, the flow of refugees has put social pressure on neighboring countries, and maritime transport has encountered severe security risks. Although the war situation in Yemen cannot be easily changed, and peace is far from certain, there are lessons to be learned from the case, which can shed light on the importance of considering the four dimensions of humanity: neutrality, sustainability, and preventive measures when the international community intervenes.

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