

The Role of Regional External Interventions in Complicating the Crisis in Yemen

KHIRENNAS Hamza

University of Algiers 3, hamza.khirennas13@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Many external interventions in Yemen have intensified the conflict, which, in turn, resulted in the addition of new obstacles, especially that the local reality in Yemen is still full of sharp divisions. Meanwhile, Yemenis are still enduring the growing human cost due to the practices of these parties.

These overall interventions vary between political, military and ideological ones that affect the general political equilibrium of Yemen. The vision of the intervening states- Iran and Saudi Arabia- is based on their vital interests. These countries try to dominate the region to compete and fight for the center of a pivotal country and strong regional power in the region, taking advantage of the chaos and political instability in Yemen through increasing their interventions and legitimization.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia; Iran; External Intervention; Geo-strategy; Regional Powers.

Corresponding author KHIRENNAS Hamza, *e-mail:* hamza.khirennas13@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional and international positions differ vis-a-vis every event or conflict anywhere in the world, based on their interests and national security. And this is what several regions in the world are witnessing today, from regional or international interventions that have different objectives, according to the nature of the conflict and the conflict region.

The distinguished strategic and geopolitical position of Yemen and its control of the most significant waterway has made it the focus of regional and international countries. Noting that Yemen has been living in a state of internal instability since the year 2011, after overthrowing president Abdullah Saleh and Yemen entered a state of chaos.

Besides, Transitional phases are often marked by uncertainty and confusion in the political spectrum. That is why regional countries and powers are struggling to impose their perceptions of shaping the future of a country going through similar circumstances. This is the case for Yemen, as the GCC countries, headed by Saudi Arabia, made an initiative for a political settlement to facilitate the transitional phase in Yemen. The latter led to the inauguration of a legitimate government under the leadership of President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi. However, the initiative couldn't be implemented in real life due to a range of internal variables, most notably the seizure of power by the Houthi movement Ansar Allah (Iran's ally) and the fall of the capital Sanaa on September 21st, 2014.

The regional conflict reached its peak in Yemen between the two major powers in the region for the sake of extending their authority, namely, Saudi Arabia, which supports the legitimate government, and Iran, the ally of the HouthiAnsar Allah. Hence the importance of this study lies in knowing the dangers of regional external interventions in perpetuating the state of division and insecurity that would certainly lead to the downfall of the Yemeni country if the war persists.

Aside from the human tragedy that the United Nations classified at the third level, the highest classification of humanitarian crises, which necessitates meeting the urgent needs of the humanitarian situation in Yemen and lifting the state of siege imposed on the country. Not to mention

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the increase in movements and terrorist groups that took advantage of the failed political transition process and the civil war which followed in Yemen to extend their sphere of operations.

The study mainly aims at identifying the role of regional powers in the Yemen crisis (Saudi-Iranian) and demonstrating the motives of this interventions and how it contributed to extending the Yemen crisis.

External interventions played a pivotal role in affecting the Yemeni political scene with all their negatives and conflicts, and the persistence of fragmentation and internal divisions. Interventions in Yemen can take the form of either direct intervention or indirect intervention, while the motives of these interventions vary between political, economic, security-related and ideological ones. Therefore, the problematic can be asked in the form of the following questions: What is the importance of Yemen for the regional countries? What are the intervention motives? To what extent do regional interventions affect the Yemeni crisis?

2. The Geopolitical Importance of Yemen

Yemen is located in the southwest region of the Arabian Peninsula, which includes lands adjacent to the Sultanate of Oman in the east and from Aden to Bab el-Mandeb in the west, along the coast of the Indian Ocean in the south and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the north and east. It is bordered by the Red Sea, along the southern edge of its eastern coast until Bab el-Mandeb.

Therein lies the strategic importance of Yemen, overlooking the eastern bank of Bab el-Mandeb, which controls the movement of transport and maritime trade, and connects Asia with Europe through the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal. Oil discoveries have also distinguished Bab el-Mandeb a lot and gave it importance as oil takers pass through it to the western states, and it is one of the Arab choke points, of strategic and economic importance.

Bab el-Mandeb strait is located between Yemen, Djibouti and Eritrea, linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. The strait is

a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, with a width that is 18 miles at its narrowest point, and a depth of the passage that ranges from 100-200 meters.

This distinguished passage has the appropriate width and depth for ships and oil tankers to pass in opposite directions smoothly. Mayon Island -or Perim- divides the strait into two channels, the first known as Bab Iskander, from the eastern side, with a width of 3 km, while the western side is precisely known as the Mayon, with a width of 26 km (Cutler, 2011). This allows all ships and oil tankers to cross easily through two opposite directions. Besides that, the strait derives its importance from being a significant outlet for all states with waterfronts on the Red Sea, because these states won't be able to reach the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean only by crossing the strait.

According to international statistics, the strait has great strategic importance in the light of the growing interest in Gulf oil. Based on the statistics of the US Energy Information Administration data (see Table 01), nearly 6.2 million barrels of crude oil and refined petroleum products pass through this waterway daily.

Table 01: Demonstrates the quantity of hydrocarbons transported through Bab el-Mandeb strait since 2013. Million/ barrel per day.

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Northward	2.1	2.2	2.5	2.8
Southward	1.7	2.1	2.2	2.0
Total flows	3.8	4.3	4.7	4.8

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration analysis based on Lloyd's List Intelligence, Suez Canal Authority, and GTT, using EIA conversion factors.

Bab el-Mandeb strait is considered the fourth most important waterway in the world, along with the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal. This is because the strait represents a strategic intersection that links between the security of the Gulf and the security of Africa through the confluence of the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and

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the Red Sea, and linking West and East Asia with the African continent, as well as linking Asia with Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. (See Table 02).

Table 02: Demonstrates the quantity of petroleum products transported through the most important global straits since 2013. Million/ barrel per day.

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Strait of Hormuz	16.6	16.9	17	18.5
Strait of Malacca	15.4	15.5	15.5	16
Suez Canal	4.6	5.2	5.4	5.5
Bab el-Mandeb Strait	3.8	4.3	4.7	4.8

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration analysis based on Lloyd's List Intelligence, Suez Canal Authority, and GTT, using EIA conversion factors.

2. The Role of Regional External Forces

International positions towards every event or conflict issue anywhere in the world vary according to their interests and national security. This is what many states in the region are witnessing from external interventions, whether international or regional. The conflict intensified between the main regional powers -Saudi Arabia and Iran- to dominate Yemen, given Yemen's distinguished geopolitical position and its control of the most significant vital waterway, overlooking the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Noting that dominating Bab el-Mandeb strait is considered a strategic need for the intervening states seeking to expand their regional authority to ensure both regional and strategic security.

2.1 The Role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In today's historical context, Yemen and Saudi Arabia emerged as two competing brothers, a republic against a kingdom. The Saudi role in Yemen dates back to many years and historical phases, starting from the border dispute in 1934 that led to Yemen losing its border areas Asir, Jizan

and Najran, until the post-2001 cooperation in the security area. Therefore, the relations between the most populous countries of the Arabian Peninsula were a milestone in the making of the new Yemeni regime.

At first, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia started interfering in the domestic policy of Yemen in the north and south by supporting Al-Malakiyyin (relative people and forces to the Yemeni Royal Family) in the north -1962 revolution-, while it did not recognize the Yemeni Arabic Kingdom until 1970.

However, the kingdom kept interfering by establishing close ties with local tribal leaders, who were directly linked to the royal palace and receiving monthly salaries from it. These leaders often played political roles in the country aimed at consolidating the Saudi authority (essalam, 2010). This dates back to the early seventies, when a settlement of the republican-monarchy conflict was imposed, which in turn led to deciding upon the nature of the Yemeni political regime since the seventies of the last century.

In addition to the benefit of many Yemeni tribes from financial grants and the spread of the Salafist movement in Yemen, supported by sheikhs close to the kingdom (tarik, 2016).

Although this movement was independent of the foreign policy, its religious rise nourished several tensions (Houthis and Salafis), especially the border areas in Saada, the stronghold of the Houthis. In the 1994 Yemen civil war, Saudi Arabia unofficially stood by the separatists in the socialist-led south, as it supported any action that leads to political centralization and opposing the unity of the two parts of Yemen. Such interventions and others made Saudi Arabia the most prominent player in determining the form and content of the regime in Sanaa despite the presence of opposing countries. What allows Saudi Arabia to play a vital role in the upcoming arrangements related to Yemen is the fact that the Yemeni economy is closely linked to the kingdom, in terms of immigrants and financial support to Sanaa (Oqab, 2010, p. 65).

The Saudi-Yemeni relations entered a new phase in 2000 after signing the International Boundary Treaty to demarcate the borders between the two

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countries and stop the Yemeni government from restoring some of the desert lands in the east of the country that Yemen dreamt to find some oil on. Then in 2001, despite the security challenges, the fight against terrorism allowed both countries to improve their cooperation through the organization of joint military exercises in 2005. Yet this Saudi-Yemeni rapprochement doesn't proceed without clashes. The investigations that followed the 2003 terrorist attacks carried out by suicide bombers who attacked residential complexes for foreign workers from Riyadh, showed that the weapons that were used, were brought by a smuggling ring from Yemen. The attacks persisted in 2004, when a suicide bomber killed 5, including 2 senior policemen. Thus, Saudi Arabia announced the violation of the 2000 Boundary Treaty of Jeddah and the establishment of a security barrier all along its southern borders (Bonney, 2017, p. 79)

In 2009, the militants announced from their Yemeni stronghold, the Saudi-Yemeni merger of Al-Qaeda and the establishment of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which in turn, led to the start of a new phase for the bilateral relations. The Vice-Minister of Interior, Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef, was targeted in the same year but the attempt failed (Oqab, 2010, p. 80). The kingdom then confirmed the necessity to support the central power instead of supporting the tribesmen and Islamists who had been major allies of the kingdom for a long time. In November 2009, the Saudi Ministry of Defense started engaging in battles against the Houthi supporters, who were accused of penetrating the Saudi lands starting from Saada Governorate and of receiving funds from Iran. Although the Saudi attack was not decisive, it still reflects the Saudi view of Yemen from a Shia threat perspective towards Yemen, represented by the Houthi supporter's movement and Sunni's through groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda (Bonney, 2017, p. 81).

Some of the Saudi coping mechanisms with some Yemeni tribes is tempting some of them that are located in its borders in an attempt to grant them Saudi citizenship. In addition to trying to induce some other tribes through Saudi money and weapons, and seeking to hamper oil exploration

and extraction in the Yemeni lands near Saudi Arabia. This is done in order to deprive the country of an essential economic resource and helping to smuggle Saudi goods to Yemen, with the aim of depriving the Kingdom of customs duties and taxes on goods(Dhaheri, 2016, p. 229).

Although Saudi Arabia maintained great influence and impact on Yemen, the outbreak of the February popular revolution in 2021 prompted Saudi Arabia to revise its intervention policies and tools. As it cut off financial support that was paid to some Sheikhs and political, military and security officials in Yemen through the special committee that was established specifically for that purpose(Dhaheri, 2016, p. 230)

The security determinant is also no longer the key driver of the kingdom in the region. This is because an interest in economic investments has emerged, as Saudi Arabia announced them among the Kingdom Vision 2030, such as the Neom project, which is located in the northwest of the kingdom on an area of 26,500 km² and overlooks from the north and west the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, with a length of 468 km. The vision also includes the Bin Salman Bridge project that links Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, with investments exceeding \$500 billion(Hadabi, 2019, p. 20)

All these projects that the Kingdom is betting on to reduce its dependence on oil and move towards local production to raise its economic potential, yet it seems that the concerns of Saudi Arabia have increased following the Houthis' control of power and control over many Yemeni governorates, as well as their impact on maritime navigation in the Red Sea, which will surely affect the other projects. The Kingdom is well aware that it will bear the economic and security consequences of any turmoil in Yemen. Thus, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, supporting Saudi Arabia, declared war against the Houthis and their loyal forces, and the forces of the General People's Congress led by Ali Abdullah Saleh. This operation, known as Decisive Storm, received the endorsement and logistic support of America, Britain, France and Turkey (Chowdhry, 2015). It followed the Houthis control of Yemen and the downfall of the capital on September 21st, 2014, with the pursuit of the legitimate president Abdrabbo Mansour to Aden and its siege for several weeks by the Houthis forces and

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Abdullah Saleh. In order to save Yemen from the control of the armed militia and prevent civil war, Abdrabbo Mansour requested a military intervention.

The operation was launched at dawn on March 26th, 2015, when the Saudi air forces released heavy aerial bombardment on the sites of the Houthis and the followers of the former president Abdullah Saleh, targeting military bases and airports, and controlling Yemeni airspace and making it a restricted area (Willis, 2015).

The Gulf countries, led by the Kingdom, issued a statement explaining that these operations came in response to the orders of the legitimate president Abdrabbo Hadi Mansour in order to protect Yemen and its people. The statement also stated that the attack of the Houthi militia, backed by regional powers, aimed at extending its hegemony over Yemen, and as constituting a threat to the region's security, and international security and peace (Tarawneh, 2015, p. 2)

Some of the most important reasons that prompted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to undertake this operation are: the growing Iranian influence in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, considering that Iran was and is still supporting the Houthis. Some Iranian leaders announced that Sanaa has become the fourth Arab capital under their control, and its mere presence in Yemen is considered an encirclement of the traditional enemy of Saudi Arabia from all sides. Iraq in the north, while Iran is striving to control the south through Yemen because of its strategic significance (Shabana, 2015, p. 3). This is done through impacting the strategic depth of the countries of the Gulf and Arab Cooperation Council, by working on the control of Bab el-Mandeb strait and the Gulf of Aden, and then threatening the freedom of navigation in that strategic region. Moreover, there is the rise in terrorist activity in the region, especially after the Houthis took over power in Sanaa, and the ongoing conflict between the Houthis and Al-Qaeda (Shiite - Sunni). In addition to that, derogating from the terms of the Gulf initiative, the Houthis' control of power and using weapons is considered a departure

from the terms of the initiative posed by the GCC countries in 2011. With the current outbreak of security that Yemen is experiencing, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is seeking to preserve Gulf interests in Yemen and protect Bab el-Mandeb from the Houthis' control, not only because it is the main route for oil movement but due to some other economic interests.

Military operations carried out by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its allies and the army of the legitimate government persisted, while the Houthis resisted. Then when it became difficult to contain the situation, the search for solutions to a political settlement became an absolute necessity imposed by the consequences and effects of war on Yemen specifically, and the region generally. Thus, multiple efforts were launched for a political settlement in Yemen and getting the political transition operation back on track. In addition to seeking to find a satisfying political solution for all Yemeni conflicting parties, beginning with the Geneva Conference (1), which was held on June 16th, 2015, under the auspices of the United Nations, then the Geneva Conference (2), which was held on December 15th, 2015, and ending with the Kuwait negotiations, which were held on April 21st, 2016. All of the previously mentioned attempts for a settlement failed because all parties adhered to their demands. The latter can be summed up in the adherence of President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi, who is hosted by Saudi Arabia, to implement Security Resolution 2216, which stipulated the exit of Houthis militants and their followers from the capital, Sanaa, and the surrender of weapons to the legitimate army. Whereas the Houthis and President Salah, adhered to the necessity of a comprehensive cessation of military operations for an alliance, as a platform to also continue the discussion. In addition to freezing Resolutions 2140, which was refused by both parties, and these meetings ended without reaching any agreement (Ahmed, 2015).

The alliance led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against the Houthis achieved some interim gains, most notably neutralizing the military capacity seized by the Houthis from the Yemeni military depots. It also succeeded in enabling the Arab alliance countries to control the airspace and regional waters, in order to prevent weapons from reaching the Houthis.

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In addition to not threatening the strait of Bab el-Mandeb, restoring the legitimate authority and securing it to exercise its functions, especially after restoring the city of Aden from the Houthis, and preventing Iran from building a new regional base in Yemen and forming a political base through a government that is totally loyal to Tehran (report, 2020).

In return, this war had a great impact on the economic, social and human sides of Yemen. The war caused social divisions and increased the sectarian and geographical tensions, as armed confrontations in the south of Yemen complicated the long-accumulated tensions between the north and south. The current situation of Yemen is forcing it to be closer more than ever to the path of fragmentation and partition. The Yemeni economy has also witnessed a near-cessation phase as a result of ceasing a large part of economic activities in the public and private sectors. The blockade imposed on imported goods has cramped the Yemeni economy and had a negative impact, due to the near-cessation of internal and external commercial transactions. The Yemeni economy needs years to recover, especially after the big damage to the infrastructure of a country that is considered the poorest in the world.

Subsequently, the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its great material and human contributions in its war against Yemen cannot be considered as directly aiming at supporting the legitimate authority, without reaching its own goals and interests. Therefore, the least we can say about this war is the Saudi attempt to take over the Yemeni ports, which is considered part of its projects in the Red Sea. In addition to the aim of strengthening its policies and strategies in the region, in conformity with the changes and developments happening in the region, which fluctuates between the military and security side on the one hand, and the economic investments, opening African markets to its products and securing energy sources, future projects and economic competition on the other hand.

2.2 The Iranian Role

Iran has followed a radical politics that has often been characterized

by extremism, since the fall of Reza Pahlavi Shah's regime and the Islamic revolution of 1979. This is how its conception of the region's security emerged, which came as a reflection of a political thought derived from the Shiite sect that the country is working hard to spread in the neighboring countries. In fact, Iran underlies its strategic location, whether in terms of area or population. Its strength lies in its being the fourth oil producer in the world, the fifth-biggest oil reserve in the world and the second country in terms of natural gas reserves. In addition to the effectiveness of its military power and its focus on developing military techniques, which can be apparent in its adherence to its regional positions and the persistence on its nuclear program(Albuntiji, 2011, p. 113). Iran uses all these factors to reinforce its presence and dominance in the region to regain its standing in the region and become a dominating power in the Gulf, as well as an influential element in the Middle East that would have a role in any possible future arrangements in the Middle East.

The Iranian interest in Yemen wasn't by coincidence, but rather exceeded the forty years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. However, its role has doubled from 2004 to 2010 through its support of the Houthis in their armed conflict with the Yemeni government. This role reached its peak in the phase that followed the outbreak of the revolution of February 2011, as Iran took advantage of the poor control of the central government and the state of chaos and instability resulting from the faltering of the political transition process. The Houthi movement (doctrinal rapprochement) to reinforce its dominance in Yemen in particular and the region also backed it up in general. Whereas doctrinal and ideological urges, strategic interests as well as regional and international variables are intertwined in the process of establishing and determining the path of the Iranian policy in Yemen.

The Iranian interest in Yemen actually came as part of its attempts to reach the waterways, especially in the light of the sanctions internationally imposed on it because of its nuclear program. Besides that, Iran is trying to use these waterways as a pressure card on the international community, after its control of the Strait of Hormuz, the second-largest strait in the world in terms of oil trade movements.

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In addition to its relentless pursuit to improve its strategic capability in responding to any possible military confrontation from the regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia, which Iran considers as the engine of the Gulf union and the beating heart of the Islamic World, as well as the principal opponent of Iranian plans in the region or with the West, especially the USA and the nuclear issue (researchers, 2001, p. 273). Yemen, with its countless problems, demographics and distinguished geographical location on the international shipping routes, offers Iran the right base not only for an open war with the West but also to wage irregular and inexpensive wars against its opposing regional countries such as Saudi Arabia.

Iran is also aware that taking over Yemen would enable it to become a dominating and influential power in the Gulf with a role in establishing any security infrastructure in the region, especially after its control of the capitals of the three countries, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Amin, 2012, p. 195)

It is the location of Yemen on the side of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that actually matters the most for the Iranian strategy. Iranians seek to encircle the Kingdom in the South, after succeeding in encircling it in the north, thus, harming the Arab Gulf countries and limiting the growth of their influence. Noting that any progress they make would limit the Iranians' field of movement and vice versa. Therefore, they are trying to take the lead, initiate and cease all the possible opportunities for that. Within the framework of the so-called Shiite Crescent, it is noted that Iran does not interfere in direct confrontations with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. However, it is working to make its regional surroundings "Syria, Iraq, Yemen" live in a state of permanent tension.

As for the Houthis expansion, it is essentially an Iranian expansion within the Persian-Iranian scheme, which explains Iran's keenness to politically support the Houthis in Yemen, as the Iranian official Ali Akbar Velayati said, "the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the just struggle of Ansar Allah in Yemen and considers this movement as part of the successful

movements of the Islamic awakening” (Research, 2014)

Based on the foregoing, some evidence has been revealed that confirms Yemen might be turned into a successor arena of Iranian intelligence to implement its plans in the region. As we review some evidence, we can find that Iran plays a role in supporting and financing the rebellion of the Houthi movement Ansar Allah, both in the Media and Militarily:

In the media: Iran prepared and provided all technical capabilities to launch two Houthi channels from Beirut. The first is Al-Masirah channel, the official speaker in the name of the Houthis, and the second is Al-Sahat channel. It also provides all sorts of media support through international channels, Al-Alam, Al-Mayadeen, Al-Manar and other affiliated channels by covering the Houthi issue in Yemen.

Militarily: The Yemeni authorities have confirmed several times that Iran supports the Houthis with weapons by entering them from some regions through smugglers with the complicity of influential figures in the country. Jihan 2, the Iranian ship that was captured by the Yemeni authorities and loaded with all sorts of weapons for the Houthis, is the proof of that support. Such operations and others explain Iran’s eagerness to support the Houthis in Yemen through arms smuggling operations across the Yemen coasts on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. In addition to its 2009 announcement of building a naval military base near the Eritrean port of Assab, the leasing of several islands in Eritrea as bases and starting points that would enable the Houthis to turn Yemen into one of its belonging territories. These policies represent a threat, not only to navigation in the strait but also to the balance of power, because if any power succeeded in controlling Bab el-Mandeb strait, that would mean a radical change in the balance of regional power.

Following the Houthis’ control of Sanaa in 2014, they managed to transport long-range ballistic missiles to a camp 10 km from the Bab el-Mandeb strait. The Houthis afterwards employed it to politically manipulate the countries of the region, as the Houthi militias have implemented many terrorist incidents against commercial ships and oil tankers transiting near

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the Yemeni coast, most notably in April 2018, when they targeted Saudi oil tankers in the port of Hodeida (Aljamra, 2019).

What also confirms the Iranian support of the Houthi militias is the declaration of Nasser Shabana, one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Guards that said we have told the Yemenis "...Hit two Saudi oil tankers and it actually happened in Bab-el-Mandeb strait". These declarations, and others, confirm Iran's support for the Houthis, not only militarily, but also as it relates to setting goals and areas for action. All of these indicators reflect the Iranian keenness to change the balance of power.

4. The Iranian-Saudi conflict over Yemen

Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have not been stable since the victory of the Iranian revolution in 1979 until today. Their conflicting ideological standards made their relations mostly unstable, while it could get calm sometimes, but then tensions would soon return. The Cold War caused disputes and contrasts between the two countries that still exist today, regarding the roles and control sites of each one of them. Furthermore, the dispute is running the conflict and bringing out the hot issues in the Arab region, the latest being the support of the Houthis by Iran, in return for Saudi Arabia's support of the Yemeni government, as well as the doctrinal differences between the two parties, which make their relations based on distrust and caution.

Iran is a major determinant of dealing with Shia in all Arab countries that have Shiite minorities. As for Saudi Arabia, it is more prominent for these two considerations (Majali, 2019, p. 16): The contest is mainly between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the ethnic factor represents an important dimension in the contest. Second, Saudi Arabia considers itself an icon of Sunna in the world, while Iran is an icon of Shia in the world, which is why the conflict between them is taking a sectarian dimension that has a clear impact inside Saudi Arabia between the Sunnis and Shiite, or between the Shiite and the ruling authority. Religion has become an effective factor in the geopolitical study as it is among the several factors that may cause

numerous political crises (Iran and Saudi Arabia), or even in one country (Iraq), and it has also been used by big countries as a powerful card in fueling conflicts for the sake of achieving their interests.

The Saudi policy does not differ a lot from the Iranian policy, as both of them rely on the sectarian card. Yet the difference between them is that the Iranian policy is characterized by its resistance and clear vision, as it acts away from temporary reactions, while Saudi Arabia failed in determining its priorities, this, in turn, gave Iran the chance to impose its presence. The Saudi policy in Yemen wasn't based on a project but visions imposed by the conflicts of the region. The traditional forces (tribes) remained the major actor in these relations. Therefore, their efforts were focused on dealing with the traditional forces at the expense of the country. Saudi Arabia was not aware that Yemen was its weakness, in the case it was left grappling with problems, and that for Saudi Arabia's enemies, it would represent a weapon aimed at weakening Saudi Arabia.

There is no doubt that Yemen is of great significance to Iran or Saudi Arabia because Iran sees Yemen as a vital area for the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, and its behavior is based on strategic visions, and the history of Iran has been linked to Shiism and the Houthi supporters' movement reflects this orientation in Yemen. Therefore, Iran has become a major player in Yemen. Correspondingly, Yemen is highly important to Iran because the latter is looking for a foothold on the Saudi borders and an outlet to the Red Sea, in addition to its control over the strait of Bab el-Mandeb(Ragab, 2010, p. 289)

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is more influential than any other external, regional or international party in its relations with Yemen. In the current situation, the Kingdom is aware that the Houthis' control over power actually means an Iranian control within its project to control the region with all its regional, sectarian and political dimensions, as the Kingdom claims. Hence, the Kingdom finds itself in front of a threatening vital conflict, which makes its policy towards Yemen take the essential determinants of vital space, strategic depth and regional security based on

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its own perspective(Al-Ghabri, 2015, p. 4) Considering the geopolitical significance of Yemen, which is considered a strategic depth for Saudi Arabia because it is located on the most important waterways that is the Bab el-Mandeb strait, the Kingdom is surrounded by the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal. If it happened and closed simultaneously, the Kingdom would suffocate, and therefore, will not be able to reach the Arab Gulf and the Indian Ocean only through Yemen. These factors impose on Saudi Arabia a special policy towards Yemen(Al-Din, 2010, p. 169).

5. CONCLUSION

The strategic geopolitical location of Yemen attracts regional and international powers to contest and strife with one another. Yemen witnessed an internationalization of internal conflicts in its modern history, starting with the Arab and international polarization that followed the outbreak of the Yemeni revolution in 1962. The same thing happened during the 1990 unity and the 1994 summer war. Consequently, the external intervention in the current conflict between the legitimate government and the Houthis wasn't considered odd. One of the dilemmas of political life in Yemen is the struggle for power and wealth between political (parties) and social (the tribe) components. At first, this conflict did not have a big impact on the stability and future of Yemen.

However, the entry of regional external actors in the internal factors to support one party or another contributed to intensifying the conflict. The implication of the Yemeni-Yemeni conflict in the Saudi-Iranian conflict prolonged the conflict and created negative rebounds. While the absence of a clear vision about Yemen makes it hard for the country to restore calm and stability. This can be attributed to the parties' reluctance to compromise. What further complicates the situation is how external parties support their agents inside Yemen, instead of pressuring them to stop the war and start negotiating for the sake of putting Yemen's interest above narrow personal interests. As for civilians in Yemen, they bear the brunt of the fighting and

become constant victims of what international human rights organizations describe as violations of international law by all parties.

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