

Yemen: Can Aid Alleviate Human Suffering?

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Apr 3, 2019

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Brief Analysis

Despite its relatively small size, Yemen is one of the most populous areas in the Arabian Peninsula, with a population of over 28 million. The number of people affected by the war in Yemen is correspondingly large: according to some estimates, more than 20 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection, half of whom are only steps away from **famine (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1033401>)**. This urgent situation prompted the United Nations and its partners to convene a conference in February in order to raise the **funds (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1033401>)** urgently needed to save millions of Yemenis from this terrible ordeal. The conference aimed to raise \$4.2 billion in order to meet current humanitarian needs—not even touching upon the amount that will be needed to restore what has been destroyed by the war.

While the United Nations failed to reach its fundraising target, it did raise \$2.6 billion from the conference, a large amount of which came from the parties either fighting in Yemen or supporting these efforts. **Major pledges (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/feb/26/more-than-half-of-26bn-aid-to-yemen-pledged-by-countries-involved-in-war>)** included: \$500 million in donations each from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, £200 million from the United Kingdom, and approximately \$24 million from the United States. These donations come at a time of increasing pressure to stop the war, end U.S. and British arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and calls for more effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms within Yemen itself. Many believe that stopping arms sales could end the war and alleviate human suffering; others argue that abandoning the U.S. partnership with Saudi Arabia or other Gulf allies would be a grave mistake and fail to prevent the war, forcing these partners to seek weapons and other forms of support elsewhere instead and adding increased incentives for other foreign powers to deepen their engagement in the region. Regardless of these viewpoints, it is clear that Yemen needs a significant influx of aid. Yet there are a number of challenges in terms of having this aid effectively reach its intended recipients.

The United Nations' most important priorities are to provide better access to food and increase household income, as well as to stimulate a measure of economic stability. The United Nations has allocated \$2.2 billion for this purpose alone, which means that there will be little left from the donations raised to contribute to helping to eliminate cholera and other infectious diseases that have spread as a result of the conflict. These challenges place the United Nations and its partners in a bind due to their need to balance resources between the many pressing needs of

civilians. The other major challenge with aid is international organizations' inability to reach the several million Yemenis stranded in conflict zones, as well as those living in refugee communities. These groups also need water, sanitation, education, shelter, and protection; the United Nations will certainly need more funds to intervene efficiently in this long list of needs.

There's no doubt that the ideal option is stopping the war and imposing security and stability to begin the process of alleviating human suffering in Yemen and to introduce a new focus on reconstruction. A model for this ambitious option can already be seen in southern Yemen, where most of the liberated areas of the country and much of the infrastructure, including police stations, courts, schools, hospitals and roads, is being restored and built. A large part of these reforms were funded directly by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, allowing the United Nations to remain focused on humanitarian interventions in areas of conflict and areas controlled by Houthi forces. Similarly, reconstruction costs are expected to be borne by Yemen's historic partners in the GCC countries in the post-war period.

Achievements in the South have allowed southern Yemen to even restore the role of the judiciary to some extent, which had been lost in the Houthi control areas, and to restore the regularity of schooling—to which approximately **two million (<https://www.voanews.com/a/education-a-major-casualty-of-yemen-s-war/4573629.html>)** children in conflict zones were denied. Support for the establishment of military and security forces has also led to the defeat of some extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

However, replicating southern Yemen's successful model in the north of the country will be complex and take time. This is particularly the case due to the repeated violations by Houthi forces of prior agreements, including the violation of the Swedish agreement and the continued laying of anti-personnel mines. The involvement of Iranian allies also complicates issues, since they provide support through the provision of weapons, fuel and training. This, although not as much as the Arab alliance, still remains a harmful presence and undermines support for peace efforts.

Moreover, while the south has relied on funding from Gulf states as well as the UN for its reconstruction, Houthi-controlled areas appear to have little access to outside funds for reconstruction. Although Iran has publicly announced its support for ending the conflict in Yemen and has urged greater humanitarian assistance, some analysts feel that Iran sees the conflict in Yemen as an inexpensive and relatively low-risk process to maintain pressure on the Saudis. On the other hand, Iran's total expenditure for Yemen, historically, may amount to only **millions of dollars a year (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-role-yemen-and-prospects-peace>)**, an amount which cannot be compared to the billions of dollars that Yemen's wealthy neighbors have offered to their poorer neighbor.

Ultimately, it is most likely that the financial aid collected by the UN can most effectively contribute to a reasonable level of food security for Yemenis. Yet other issues, such as water, sanitation, education, shelter, and protection are likely to receive less attention due to the scarcity of financial resources and the difficulty of reaching the places and people targeted. People may not be able to do much when trapped in such a situation, but their lives would be greatly benefited if they were spared the conflict and empowered economically by support for sectors such as agriculture and fishing. The United Nations must find innovative approaches to support these sectors while working to remove impediments to doing so, including minefields that prevent thousands from working and pressure the parties to conflict in an effort to spare civilians. Ensuring a better quality of life for civilians should be the most urgent matter in the Yemen war, and it should push all parties to make concessions in order to achieve a political breakthrough. ❖

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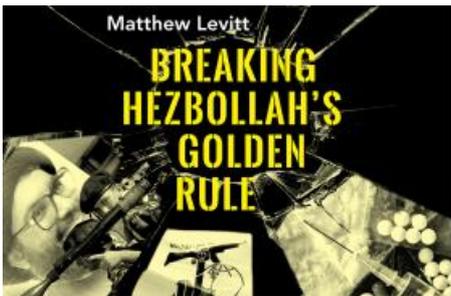
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