

News

From Destruction to Cholera, Yemen War Brings Disasters

Fighting continues at a stalemate, while civilians face disease and massive food insecurity

By **MAGGIE MICHAEL**
Associated Press

CAIRO — More than two years of civil war have led to continually compounding disasters in Yemen. Fighting rages on in a deadly stalemate. The economy has been bombed into ruins. Hunger is widespread, and a new misery has been added: the world's biggest current outbreak of cholera, with more than 200,000 cases.

The south, meanwhile, has seen the growing power of the United Arab Emirates, which is part of a coalition meant to protect the internationally recognized government in the war with Shiite rebels while also fighting al-Qaida. But at the same time, the UAE has set up its own security forces, running virtually a state-within-a-state and fueling the south's independence movement.

An AP investigation last week documented 18 secret prisons run by the UAE or its allies, where former prisoners said torture was widespread. The UAE denied the al-

legations and says all security forces are under Hadi's authority.

The Emirati role reflects how the Yemen conflict has been regionalized from the start.

With U.S. backing, Saudi Arabia launched its coalition, contending that Iran was behind the rebels, known as Houthis, who overran the north and the capital, Sanaa. The coalition's air bombardment averted the complete fall of the government of President Abed Rabbo Hadi Mansour and prevented the Houthis from taking over the south.

But now both sides are locked in. The north remains in the hands of the Houthis backed by army units loyal to Hadi's predecessor, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was removed by a 2011 uprising. The south is ostensibly under the authority of Hadi, but he spends most of his time in exile in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

Here is a look at the multiple levels on which the war has devastated

the country of 26 million, which even before the conflict was the Arab world's poorest nation.

HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

In May, a senior U.N. humanitarian official declared that Yemen was site of "the world's largest food security crisis." More than 17 million desperately need food, and nearly 7 million of those are "one step away from famine."

Last week came the newest horrible superlative. The World Health Organization said Yemen faced "the worst cholera outbreak in the world." More than 1,400 people, a quarter of them children, have died of cholera the past two months.

Those nightmares come on top of other intertwined effects of the war.

More than 3 million people have been driven from their homes. More than 10,000 people have killed. There are major fuel shortages caused by a coalition blockade. Health services have collapsed. Some 1 million



AP PHOTO/HANI MOHAMMED, FILE

In this April, 13, 2017 file photo, Yemenis present documents in order to receive food rations provided by a local charity, in Sanaa, Yemen. More than two years of civil war have led to continually compounding disasters in Yemen. Fighting rages on in a deadly stalemate, the economy has been bombed into ruins, hunger is widespread, and a new misery has been added: Cholera, the world's biggest current outbreak with more than 200,000 cases.

civil servants have not been paid for months, including 30,000 health workers.

The cholera outbreak spread with startling speed after two months of heavy rains in the north, exacerbated by the pile-up of garbage in streets — trash collectors are among those who have gone unpaid — and the lack of access to clean water for millions of people.

Around 5,000 new cholera cases are reported daily. Aid officials fear it could pass a quarter million people by September. The U.N. is sending one million doses of vaccines, the largest since Haiti's outbreak in 2010.

Dealing with cholera is pulling away resources and food meant to go to battling famine, warned the U.N. humanitarian chief in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick.

Yemen long struggled with malnutrition. But the coalition embargo

and the fighting have wrecked distribution systems and tipped the country into near famine.

A child under the age of five dies every 10 minutes of preventable causes, and 2.2 million babies, boys and girls, are acutely malnourished with almost half a million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, a 63 percent increase since late 2015, according to Stephen O'Brien of the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance.

DEVASTATED NORTH

Coalition warplanes have pounded the north relentlessly, hitting military camps, weapons storehouses and armed compounds.

But they have also hit hospitals, schools, outdoor markets and residential areas to a degree that rights groups have said may amount to a war crime. One of the deadliest strikes, in October, hit a Sanaa funeral hall,

killing and wounding hundreds. The U.S. has backed the coalition with intelligence, satellite imagery and billions of dollars in weapons sales. This year, American drone strikes targeting al-Qaida have mounted dramatically.

The main battle zones are along the western coastline, on the mountainous outskirts of Sanaa and around the city of Taiz. But front lines have not moved significantly in months. Multiple peace initiatives have fallen apart.

Meanwhile, the Houthis have clamped down against dissent. The opposition says they hold thousands of political prisoners in secret prisons, including in private houses. Detainees are often accused or supporting the coalition or belonging to Sunni extremist groups. Journalists have been arrested, tortured, and forced to flee to the south or abroad.

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