



### CRISIS IN YEMEN: AN ASSESSMENT

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



**After four years of war in Yemen, the belligerent parties; Yemen government and Houthi Militias have agreed to a new ceasefire deal in February 2019.**

Previously, there was a ceasefire agreement signed between the two parties (Yemen government and Houthi Militias) in December 2018 under the Stockholm Agreement.<sup>1</sup> According to the Stockholm Agreement, both parties had agreed to the following:

- An agreement to pullout the forces from the city of Hodeidah and the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Issa.
- An executive mechanism on activating the prisoner exchange agreement.
- A statement of understanding on the de-escalation in Taiz.

Both parties had also committed:

- To fully implement this agreement and to work towards the removal of any obstructions or impediments to its implementation.
- To refrain from any action, escalation or decisions that would undermine the prospects for full implementation of this Agreement.

<sup>1</sup> "Full Text of the Stockholm Agreement." OSESGY. December 16, 2018. Accessed March 06, 2019. <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/full-text-stockholm-agreement>.

- To continue the consultations unconditionally in January 2019 in a location to be agreed upon by the parties.<sup>2</sup>

The Stockholm Agreement was an important milestone to pull out the armed forces from the country since the conflict had broken out in 2014. It was decided that forces will pull out from the smaller ports initially such as the ports of Salif and Ras Issa, which will be followed by a pullout from the major port of Hodeidah and other major parts of the city which leads to the Red Sea Mills, (a major UN storage facility holding enough grain to feed 3.7 million people for a month). However, this agreement has failed to achieve any concrete result as Houthi Militias have failed to abide by the agreement and have not been ready to return the city and the port to the UN authorities. It is pertinent to note that this port is the lifeline for Yemen as it is one of the major import hubs and food depository for Yemen. Hence, pullout from the port is also being called as the litmus test for the Stockholm deal.

Strategic significance of Hodeidah port cannot be denied as it provides access to the Bab al-Mandeb Strait - the fourth busiest waterway in the world. Economy of Yemen also depends heavily on this port.<sup>3</sup> During the last six months of 2018, the major issue in the conflict has been a potential battle for Hodeidah. This port and city provide about 70 per cent of all goods shipped into Yemen, which is dependent on imports for basic food stuff like wheat and rice. A battle for the city would have been really catastrophic and would have pushed the country into a really big famine.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, if the deal is not implemented it will further worsen the humanitarian crisis and civil war situation in the country. There is speculation that if the deal is not implemented in the next few days it will exacerbate the crisis in Yemen for indefinite period of time.

### **The Humanitarian Crises in Yemen: A UN Perspective**

According to the United Nations, Yemen tops the list of most desperate nations. The humanitarian crisis which has been a direct consequence of the fighting has borne a heavy brunt on the population in Yemen. The humanitarian crises remain the worst in the world and years of conflict have pushed the country to the precipice. All sectors remain in jeopardy and the greatest of catastrophes - famine - looms large. A startling 22.2 million people in Yemen need some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, an estimated 17.8 million are food insecure, 8.4 million people are severely food insecure

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Bethan McKernan Beirut. "Why Is Fighting over Yemeni City Hodeidah so Important?" *The Independent*. June 14, 2018. Accessed March 06, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-hodeidah-battle-why-important-saudi-arabia-uae-iran-houthi-a8397391.html>.

<sup>4</sup> "A Troop Drawdown Could Happen in Hodeidah. What Does This Mean for Yemen?" Public Radio International. Accessed March 06, 2019. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-02-20/troop-drawdown-could-happen-hodeidah-what-does-mean-yemen>.

and at risk of starvation, 16 million lack access to safe water and sanitation, and 16.4 million lack access to adequate healthcare. Needs across the country have increased steadily, with 11.3 million who are in acute need of all kinds of assistance.<sup>5</sup> Due to failing public institutions, people's access to essential services such as water, sanitation, health care and education has been further constrained.

The key humanitarian issues facing the population in Yemen are mainly survival needs, protection of civilians and the provision of essential services. A new UN report titled *Humanitarian Needs Overview, December 2018* produced by the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs highlights the humanitarian crises in detail. The report also sheds light on the impact of the crisis as well. According to this report, conflict is the principal reason for many challenges being faced by Yemen presently. Similarly, economic factors have also come into play as there are several impediments which affect the supply and distribution of goods. Moreover, just as the conflict has intensified, there have been several violations of International Humanitarian Law and the number of casualties has arisen with each passing day, along with displacement in large numbers.<sup>6</sup> The conflict has also resulted in destroying infrastructure, agricultural sites, schools, hospitals and other civilian facilities. One of the most alarming aspects of this conflict is the failing economy, with prices of consumer items increasing exorbitantly, unemployment soaring to high levels, while the low levels of oil imports are also affecting other sectors. Likewise, the disintegration of basic services and institutions has also been instrumental in creating different types of deficits for the public.

The humanitarian crises in Yemen has exacerbated the needs of the people and food security, health, provision of water are the main needs which have added to the vulnerabilities of the population in Yemen with malnutrition making life a living nightmare. Lack of access to the food depot on the outskirts of the port city of Hodeidah posed a grave challenge for the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, as well as its World Food Programme. However, in a recent development, in early February, the UN has been able to regain access to a very important food warehouse on Yemen's frontlines called the Red Sea Mills in eastern part of Hodeidah with a storage capacity of 51000 metric tones of wheat, which is the quarter of the World Food Programme's four milling capacity. Mortar fire at the Red Sea Mills destroyed two silos in January 2019. The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres stated that the UN has now access to the Red Sea mills

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, <https://www.unocha.org/yemen/about-ocha-yemen>

<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian Needs Overview, December 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-2019-humanitarian-needs-overview>

area and this development was announced at the pledging conference for Yemen, which raised 4.2 billion dollars in assistance for the war torn country.<sup>7</sup>

The situation in Yemen remains precarious which could lead towards a serious economic, humanitarian and social catastrophe. It is important that a solution is found for ending the conflict before Yemen becomes the next Syria.

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<sup>7</sup> UN reaches aid warehouses on Yemen frontlines, seeks \$4.2 bn, February 27, 2018, <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/un-reaches-aid-warehouses-on-yemen-frontlines-seeks-4-2-bn-24525?fbclid=IwAR2X4HXrMDHkCm4AMkNI7e1EGnwzGshKdLraDw8WjhFeMBNXEex0UuzOW5A>