

CHAPTER III

YEMENI CONFLICT

This chapter will discuss about Yemeni Conflict and the contribution of Iran in it. Yemen Conflict was caused by two factors, the emergence of rebellion movement (internal factor) and the contribution of Iran (external factor).

A. The Emergence of Rebellion Movement

The Republic of Yemen is a country in the Arabian Peninsula, Southwest Asia, and a part of the Middle East. Yemen bordered with the Arabian Sea to the south, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea to the west, Oman to the east, and Saudi Arabia to the north. The population of Yemen is estimated to number around 23 million people. The country's total area is approximately 530,000 km² and its territory covers over 200 islands. Although classified as poor, Yemen has a strategic position because it controls Bab el Mandeb, one of the world's busiest oil shipping lanes considered as one of the world's most important oil lanes. About 3.3 million barrels of oil from the Persian Gulf pass through the straits every day on the way to Europe and North America (Michael Makovsky, 2011).



Figure 3. 1 Maps of Yemen

Source: <<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/yemen.html>>

Yemen has a civilization and culture that is quite old, its existence has been recorded since thousands years ago. However, Yemen as a modern state belongs to a relatively young country. The country was declared its independence in 1990 after the unification of the Yemeni Arab Republic (Northern Yemen) and the People’s Democratic of Yemen (Southern Yemen). Both North Yemen and South Yemen have various ethnic groups. This condition causes a lot of friction between ethnic groups and existing groups, even long before the unification (Michael Makovsky, 2011, p. 23).

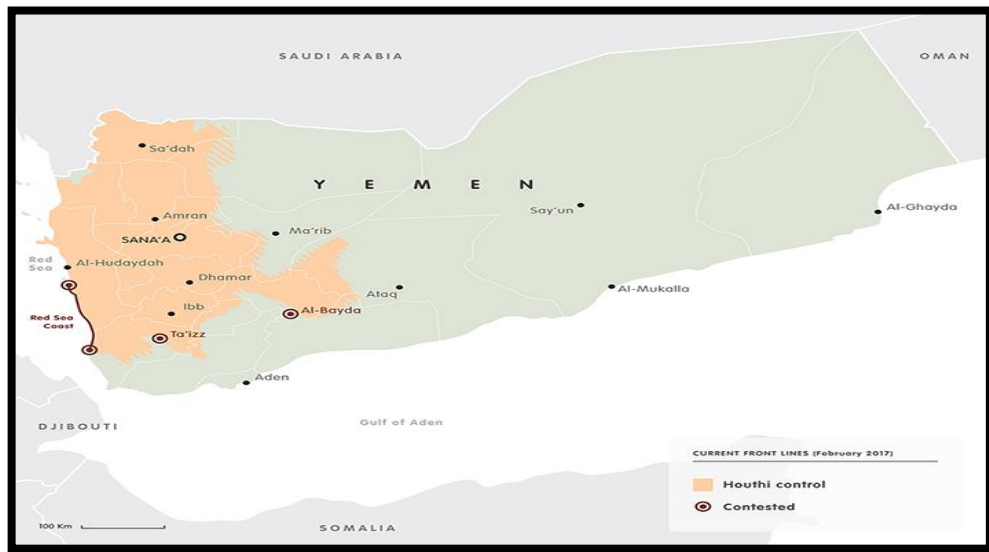


Figure 3. 2 Maps of Yemeni Civil War
 Source: <<http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>>

Yemen's revolution as part of Arab Spring took place after the Tunisian Revolution and coincided with the Egyptian Revolution and several other mass protests in the Middle East and Africa in 2011 (Britannica, n.d.). In the early phase, protests in Yemen were linked to the absence of jobs, economic conditions, corruption and the government's proposal to modify the Yemeni constitution. The demands of the demonstrators then developed by calling for Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign. The mass crossing of the military as well as Saleh's government effectively led many of the country's territories beyond the control of the government, and the demonstrators were determined to oppose its authority (Rozsa, 2012).

Over the years, Yemen has been plagued by militant groups fighting each other, among the Shia Al-Houthis who control the province to the Northern Yemen, separatist movements in the South, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, factions in

the military and coupled with sympathizers of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who stepped down from his post in the revolution of Yemen in 2011. Corruption, social inequality, weak government control, poverty, and lack of infrastructure were the main causes of separatist movements thriving in Yemen (Rozsa, 2012).

The 2011 revolution allowed Ansar Allah (the Houthis) to influence the renegotiation of the country's future political regime, a process from which they had until then been excluded. The clash between the traditional political elite's interests and the new aspirations of the growing disenfranchised sectors of Yemeni society has given rise to the circumstances necessary for the movement to become the leading force in the national political process. The dramatic events since the resignation of President Hadi and the technocratic government on January 22, have heightened the fears of a reversal of the democratic gains of the past two years.

The radicalisation of the Houthi movement's discourse and its more aggressive stance towards whoever it considered an opponent has run parallel to its progressive international isolation. Negotiations now underway seem to be a long way from achieving any agreement and the prospect of a broad political consensus seems increasingly unlikely, while the United Nations Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, has warned that the country stands on the brink of Civil War (Blecua).

President Hadi's recent flight to Aden has increased the political tensions, having claimed that all decisions taken since September should be considered null and void as they were taken under duress. The country's de facto division between the Houthi-controlled areas and the territory recognizing President Hadi's authority

could advance the cause of the Southern secessionists more effectively than their political mobilization has so far achieved.

The polarisation of both sides has been underlined by the recent appointment by President Hadi of Brigadier Thabit Jawas as commander of the Special Security Forces, an officer considered responsible for killing Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. Both sides seem to be preparing for a military showdown that would define the new balance of power, a development that could provoke the country's Libyanisation. Recent clashes in Aden for control of the airport between pro Saleh forces and Houthi militias, on one side, and forces loyal to President Hadi, on the other, are a sign of the ongoing escalation. The Houthi Supreme Revolutionary Committee has declared a general mobilization and the advance on Taiz makes an imminent move on Aden all the more likely.

B. The Contribution of Iran

The contribution of Iran is an external factor of Yemeni Conflict. In the past, Yemen had fallen within Saudi Arabia's sphere of influence, but the rise of Iran as a regional power changed this, and Yemen became a battleground for regional sectarian conflict. Sectarian differences between the Houthis (a Zaidi Shiite group) and Iran (a Twelver Shiite regime) did not prevent them from forming an alliance. Iran has been a source of support for the Houthis during political negotiations. As a result, a peace and partnership agreement was signed between Iran and the Houthis just before Sana'a fell on 21 September 2014.

Iran considered the fall of Sana'a to be victory for them, and began conducting airlifts to Sana'a at the rate of two flights per day, even though commercial ties did not require this number of flights. Iran's growing role in Yemen led to strained relations between Yemen and the neighboring Gulf countries, and rendered the political situation more challenging. It also deepened the sectarian dimension of the conflict, which strengthens the role of regional powers in Yemen and weakens domestic actors. Intra-regional intervention conducted by Iran is affected the political condition in Yemen.

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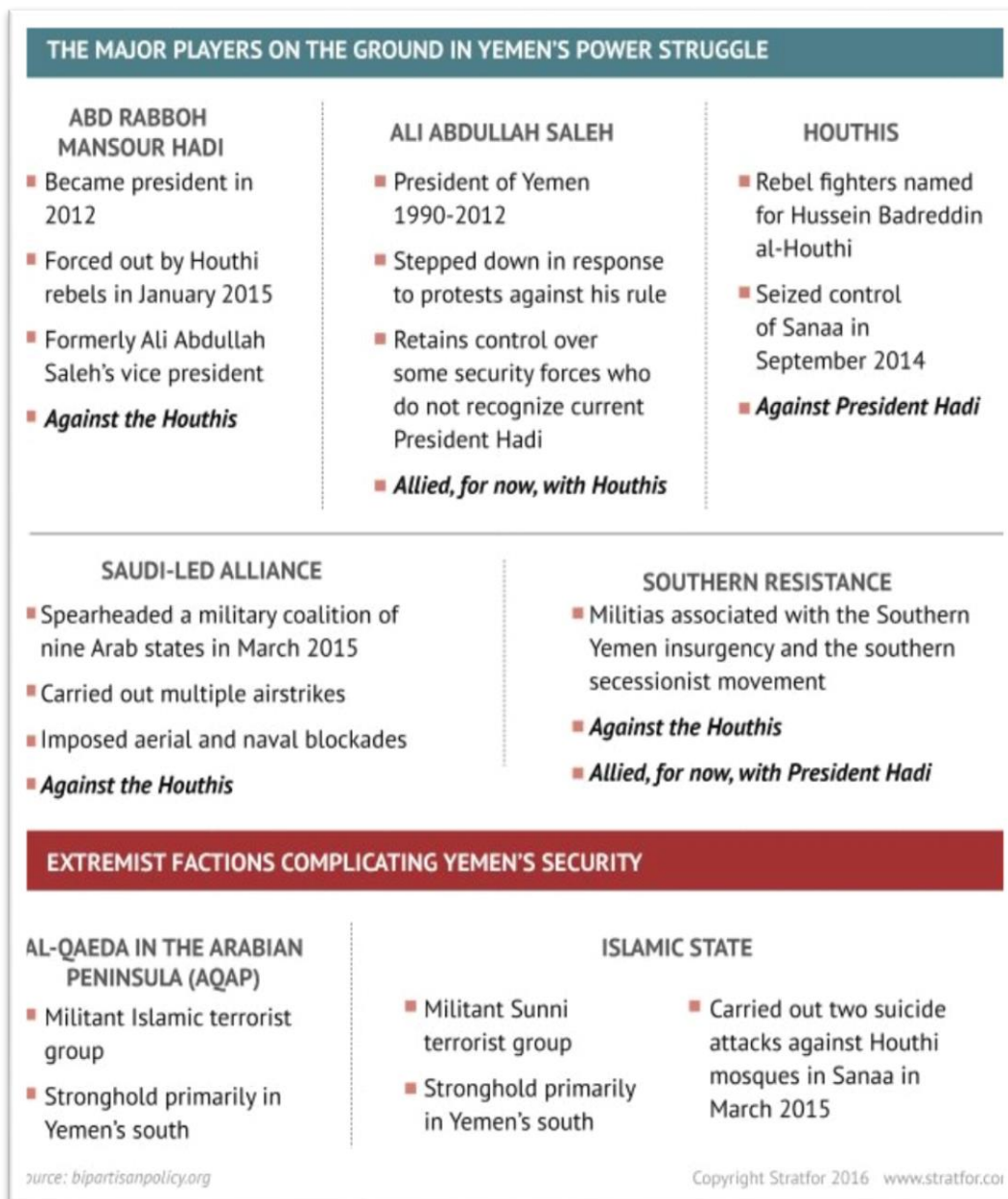


Figure 3. 3 Stakeholder in Yemen

Source: <<https://www.acaps.org/country/yemen/crisis-analysis>>