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Beyond the War

Understanding Saudi Arabia's Humanitarian efforts in Yemen, KSRelief Operations and More

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Yemen's civil war is among the many conflicts unfolding in the Middle East. However, due to its geographic proximity – along the porous southern deserts of Saudi Arabia – it is certainly the conflict which threatens Riyadh's strategic interests most potently. Much has been written on motivations, condemnations and/or support for the intervention of the Arab coalition in Yemen. But to be clear, this is not a Saudi or an Emirati war. Under their (Saudi-Emirati) umbrella to limit and push-back the Iranian-linked Houthi militias, which had internally exiled the UN-legitimised government, is a wide number of regional actors such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. So, the conflict is more varied than most narrative would suppose. The purpose of this work is to provide a more comprehensive picture regarding Saudi Arabia's Yemen policy beyond its military engagement. A stable Yemen is crucial to the security and prosperity of Saudi Arabia, even more so for the Kingdom's southern provinces of Najran and Jizan. The war in Yemen has forced a tidal wave of civilians to cross the border and seek shelter

in Saudi Arabia. As the war continues and the levels of poverty in Yemen rises, Saudi Arabia will face an increasing number of refugees. A war-torn and impoverished Yemen is also ideal for radicalisation and the recruitment of ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—powerful terrorist organisations which target, when possible, Saudi Arabia as a matter of ideology.

SAUDI ARABIA IN YEMEN

The well-documented and widespread use of air power by Saudi Arabia's military, in support of Yemen government forces and targeting Houthi positions, has inadvertently taken a toll on Yemen's civilian population, especially in areas occupied by the insurgents. Air strikes during war, particularly in mountainous regions and populated urban centres, carry the risk of collateral damage. In Yemen, this goes hand in hand with the lack of familiarity of the situation on the ground, that the Kingdom's air force has to cope with. What is less well known and certainly under-documented, are Saudi Arabia's efforts to contain such im-

pacts through humanitarian relief campaigns, which began less than two months after the military campaign commenced. In particular, in May 2015, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, ordered the creation of the King Salman Centre for Relief and Humanitarian Aid (KSRelief), directed by Senior Advisor to the Royal Court Dr Abdullah Al-Rabeeah. Since its creation, the centre has focused its activities almost entirely on Yemen.

TOP HUMANITARIAN PRIORITIES

In Yemen, KSRelief cooperates with a wide range of NGO's and UN agencies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), to ensure that aid reaches civilians including in areas controlled by Houthi militias. In particular, KSRelief pioneered two major initiatives. First, the establishment of anti-cholera centres. Cholera, erupted in Houthi-controlled areas, has killed nearly 2,000 people and infected more than 500,000 people in one of the world's worst outbreaks of the disease in the past 50 years. The second, is related to the rehabilitation of child soldiers. To contrast the military efforts of the coalition, Houthi fighters have gang-pressed children to fight in their ranks. KSRelief is leading efforts to ensure child soldiers can recover from the severe traumas they suffered so that they can successfully be reintegrated in Yemen's society.

EFFORTS ON THE RISE

Already in 2015, KSRelief ranked first, globally, in terms of the total volume of aid provided to Yemen. The expenditure for that year reached some \$413 million (USD). The escalating conflict against the Houthis in 2017-2018, has been coupled with the increase in the number of projects implemented by KSRelief. The vast majority of such have targeted food security and famine (which affected roughly 50% of Yemen's population) with 164 project costing \$534 million (USD) in total. The cholera outbreak, accelerated by the lack of supplies caused by the ongoing fighting, forced a renewed focus on propping up Yemen's health sector. This was done through 135 specific projects costing, in total, \$454 million (USD). Emergency relief coordination in areas devastated by the war, in the Taiz area in particular, has been the third most expensive set of projects. In this sector KSRelief, has implemented 24 projects accounting for \$233 million (USD). The air campaign and the fighting on the ground have severely damaged much of Yemen's infrastructure including water distribution systems and sewage treatment facilities. This has restricted an increasing number of Yemenis from accessing clean water. KSRelief has responded by setting up 25 different projects in the fields of clean water, sanitation and hygiene investing as much as \$127 million (USD).

LOGISTICAL CONCERNS

In addition to the aforementioned projects implemented on the ground, the Director of the Centre, Dr Abdullah Al-Rabeah, has often spoke about Saudi Arabia's proposal to make the Saudi port of Jizan available to international aid organisations working in Yemen. The Jizan port is a more dynamic, more reliable and more efficient facility than the Al- udayda port, which is controlled by the Houthis. In addition, delivering aid from Jizan would prevent Houthi fighters and criminals from diverting aid supplies for other purposes. Resolving logistical issues is considered a key priority for KSRelief so that aid can reach the largest possible amount of people even in the remote areas of the country. To that end, KSRelief is currently counting on the support of Saudi Arabia's Air Force to transport food and medicine to the Al-Ghaida airport in Yemen's Al-Mahra province.

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) continues to monitor Saudi Arabia's Yemen priorities in the context of both the regional proxy war with Iran and the humanitarian situation. Faced with the increasing presence of the Iran-backed Houthis – along their southern border – Saudi Arabia deployed military force which has proven costly. However, this should not eclipse the substantial effort of KSRelief on the ground. Thanks to the considerable

financial resources allocated by Saudi Arabia's government, and its partnership with some 120 relief institutions, the Centre continues to improve the daily livelihood of people in the war-torn country.

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