



THE CHALLENGE OF
BEAUTY
~ STRIVING FOR ~
PERFECTION
~ IN AN ~
IMPERFECT
— World —

Topic II
Contemporary
Conflicts

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Myanmar - Rohingya Crisis

Background Information

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority population living mainly in the state of Arakan, in Myanmar, Burma. Although approximately 800,000 Rohingya live in Myanmar and their ancestors have lived in the country for centuries, the government does not recognize Rohingya people as Burmese citizens. As people without a state, the Rohingya face harsh persecution in Myanmar, and in refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh and Thailand.

In recent years, Rohingya have faced increasing persecution and attacks, even from Buddhist monks. Those who escape to sea, as thousands have done, face an uncertain fate as the governments of Muslim nations around Southeast Asia including Malaysia and Indonesia have refused to accept them as refugees. Some of those who turn up in Thailand have been victimized by human traffickers, or even set adrift again to sea by Thai military forces. Australia has refused to accept any Rohingya on its shores as well.

In May of 2015, the Philippines pledged to create camps to house 3,000 of the Rohingya boat-people. Working with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), the Philippines' government will temporarily shelter refugees and provide for their basic needs while a more permanent solution is sought. It is a start, but with perhaps as many as 6,000 to 9,000 people adrift at sea right now, much more needs to be done.

History

The first Muslims to settle in Arakan were in the area by 1400 CE. Many served in the court of the Buddhist King Naramekhla (Min Saw Mun), who ruled Arakan in the 1430s, and who welcomed Muslim advisers and courtiers into his capital. Arakan is on the western border of Burma, near what is now Bangladesh, and the later Arakanese kings modeled themselves after the Mughal emperors, even using Muslim titles for their military and court officials.

In 1785, the Buddhist Burmese from the south of the country conquered Arakan. They drove out or executed all of the Muslim Rohingya men they could find. Some 35,000 of Arakan's people likely fled into Bengal, then to part of the British Raj in India. As of 1826, the British took control of Arakan after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). They encouraged farmers from Bengal to move to the depopulated area of Arakan. These migrants were both Rohingyas originally from the area and native Bengalis. The sudden influx of immigrants from British India sparked a strong reaction from the mostly-Buddhist Rakhine people living in Arakan at the time, sowing the seeds of ethnic tension that remain to this day.

When World War II broke out, Britain abandoned Arakan in the face of Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia. In the chaos of Britain's withdrawal, both Muslim and Buddhist forces took the opportunity to inflict massacres on one another. Many Rohingyas still looked to Britain for protection, and served as spies behind Japanese lines for the Allied Powers. When the Japanese discovered this connection, they embarked on a hideous program of torture, rape and murder against the Rohingyas in Arakan. Tens of thousands of Arakanese Rohingyas once again fled into Bengal.

Between the end of World War II and General Ne Win's coup d'état in 1962, the Rohingyas advocated for a separate Rohingya nation in Arakan. However, when the military junta took power in Yangon, it cracked down hard on Rohingyas, separatists and non-political people alike. It also denied Burmese citizenship to the Rohingya people, defining them instead as stateless Bengalis.

Current Situation

Conditions in the official refugee camps are better than those of the estimated 300,000 to 500,000 Rohingya living in the Kutupalong makeshift camp, Leda site, Shamlapur village and the surrounding areas. In 2014, the government of Bangladesh recognized the humanitarian needs of people living in these sites by launching a National Strategy for Undocumented Myanmar Nationals - a broad roadmap outlining the authorities' general approach to the crisis. Sections of this strategy are being rolled out by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which has been mandated by the government to coordinate implementation. While the strategic services to undocumented refugees have somewhat improved, serious concerns over safety and security remain as the process so far has failed to provide the unregistered refugees with any kind of legal status, nor have they been informed about the strategy, its process and potential implications. Many households are female-led, which increases exposure to exploitation and gender based violence. The situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is defined as a "forgotten crisis" by ECHO.

In the last few years, Thailand became a major transit point for refugees and migrants, many trying to reach Malaysia. Since 2013, Thai authorities have arrested and detained over 2000 Rohingya in Immigration Detention Centres, police stations or social welfare facilities. However, a crackdown on human smugglers and traffickers in 2015 has reduced the flow of refugees transiting through the country. As of November 2016, 316 Rohingyas remained in detention throughout Thailand, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The European Commission, through its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), has been funding relief programmes in the Rakhine State of Myanmar/Burma and in the Cox Bazar District, Bangladesh since 1994. Additional support has also been provided in Thailand since 2013. ECHO established an office in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2002 and another in Yangon, Burma in 2005 to facilitate the delivery of EU humanitarian assistance.

Since 2012, ECHO provided some €93 million in humanitarian aid to vulnerable people in the Rakhine state, including in the more isolated northern areas. In 2016, ECHO is funding projects throughout Myanmar's Rakhine State to address some of the most urgent needs, including food and nutrition (especially for severely malnourished children under five and pregnant and lactating mothers), basic health services, water, sanitation and shelter for affected communities displaced by the violence in 2012. EU funds were also made available in 2015 to address humanitarian needs following massive floods, which were particularly destructive in Rakhine State. Together with its humanitarian partner organisations, ECHO is committed to continue to contribute to the provision of basic services. In order to deliver this vital assistance, the security of aid workers and appropriate access to the beneficiaries must be ensured.

ECHO has also been providing significant funding for life-saving assistance to the unregistered Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh through international NGOs and the UN. Since 2007, over €30 million has been allocated for basic healthcare, water, sanitation, shelter, nutrition, protection and psychological support. Apart from this life-saving aid, ECHO will also continue to advocate for better communication with the displaced populations and a more protection-oriented support system.

Since 2013, ECHO has allocated €925 000 to IOM, including €300 000 in 2016, to provide food, basic household items, health care and protection to some 2000 Rohingya men, women and children detained in Thailand after allegedly entering the country illegally to travel further afield. This total includes a regional humanitarian response to the mass maritime migration in 2015, dubbed the 'boat-people crisis' of the Andaman Sea, which saw a large number of Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants fleeing their home countries in search for a safe haven in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Notable Figures

In March 1946, the **Muslim Liberation Organization (MLO)** was formed with **Zaffar Kawal**, a native of Chittagong District as the leader. A conference was held in May 1948 in Garabyin Village north to Maungdaw, and the name of the organization was changed to "**Mujahid Party.**" Some Chittagonian Bengalis from nearby villages brought the weapons they had collected during the wartime to the mosques in Fakir Bazaar Village and Shahbi Bazaar Village (Department of Defense Service Archives, Rangoon, DR 491 (56). Zaffar Kawal became the commander in chief and his lieutenant was **Abdul Husein**, formerly a corporal from the Akyab District police force (Department of Defense Service Archives, Rangoon, DR 1016). The Mujahid Party sent a letter written in Urdu in June of 1948 to the government of Burma through the sub-divisional officer of Maungdaw Township.

Their demands are as follows (Department of Defence Service Archives, Rangoon: CD 1016/10/11):

- (1) The area between the west bank of Kaladan River and the east bank of Naaf River must be recognized as the National Home of the Muslims in Burma.
- (2) The Muslims in Arakan must be accepted as the nationalities of Burma.
- (3) The Mujahid Party must be granted a legal status as a political organization.
- (4) The Urdu Language must be acknowledged as the national language of the Muslims in Arakan and be taught in the schools in the Muslim areas.
- (5) The refugees from the Kyauktaw and Myohaung (MraukU) Townships must be resettled in their villages at the expense of the state.
- (6) The Muslims under detention by the Emergency Security Act must be unconditionally released.
- (7) A general amnesty must be granted for the members of the Mujahid Party.

Calling themselves "the Muslims of Arakan" and "the Urdu" as their national language indicated, they inclined towards the sense of collective identity that the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent showed before the partition of India into two independent states.

On October 9th, 2016, hundreds of unidentified insurgents attacked three Burmese border posts along Myanmar's border with Bangladesh. According to government officials in the mainly Rohingya border town of Maungdaw, the attackers brandished knives, machetes and homemade slingshots that fired metal bolts. Several dozen firearms and boxes of ammunition were looted by the attackers from the border posts. The attack resulted in the deaths of nine border officers. On 11 October 2016, four Tatmadaw soldiers were killed on the third day of fighting. Government officials in Rakhine State blamed the **Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO)**, an Islamist insurgent group mainly active in the 1980s and 1990s, for the attacks.



On October 17, 2016, a group that called itself the **Faith Movement Arakan (FMA)** released a video on several social media sites claiming responsibility for the attacks. In the following days, six other groups released statements, citing their leader as **Abu Ammar Junooni**. Following the attacks, reports emerged of several human rights violations allegedly perpetrated by Burmese security forces in their crackdown on suspected Rohingya insurgents.

On November 2, 2016, the Rakhine police chief announced that his force had begun recruiting non-Rohingya locals for a new branch of “regional police”, which would be trained in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, then be sent back to their villages to defend them.

On November 15, 2016, the Tatmadaw announced that 69 Rohingya insurgents and 17 security forces (10 policemen, 7 soldiers) had been killed in recent clashes in northern Rakhine State, bringing the death toll to 134 (102 insurgents and 32 security forces). It was also announced that 234 people suspected of being connected to the attack were arrested.

On December 30, 2016, nearly two dozen prominent human rights activists, including **Malala Yousafzai**, **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** and **Richard Branson**, called on the United Nations Security Council to intervene and end the “ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” being perpetrated in northern Rakhine State.

Additional sources for the Myanmar - Rohingya crisis:

1. “Who are the Rohingya”
http://asianhistory.about.com/od/Asian_History_Terms_N_Q/g/Who-Are-The-Rohingya.htm#
2. “The Rohingya Crisis”
http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/rohingya_en.pdf
3. “The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)”
<https://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>

Nationals Testable Material

“ROHINGYA in Arakan, Burma! Al Jazeera Investigates - The Hidden Genocide ”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KG2kdcmZG0>



Yemen

Background Information

Yemen faces its biggest crisis in decades with the overthrow of its government by the Houthis, a Zaydi Shia movement, which prompted a Saudi-led counteroffensive. The fighting has had devastating humanitarian consequences, and while the Saudi-led coalition and pro-government forces have rolled back the Houthis, they are no closer to reinstating the internationally recognized government in the capital of Sana'a.

Amid factional fighting, al-Qaeda's Arabian Peninsula franchise has captured expanses of coastal territory. Meanwhile, the United Nations has designated the humanitarian emergency in Yemen as being as severe and complex as those in Iraq, South Sudan, and Syria. The fighting, and a Saudi-imposed blockade meant to enforce an arms embargo, has brought the country to the brink of famine.

The Saudi intervention was spurred by the perceived Iranian backing of the Houthis, and analysts worry that escalating foreign involvement could introduce sectarian conflict, resembling the fighting in Syria and Iraq. Numerous armed factions may be able to spoil any potential settlement, challenging UN-led efforts to broker a halt to the fighting. Even more difficult will be resolving the fundamental disputes over how power should be distributed in the Yemeni state, which had been the region's poorest country even prior to the fighting.

Causes for this conflict:

1. Fuel subsidy backlash: Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, Hadi's government lifted fuel subsidies in July 2014. The Houthi movement, which had attracted support beyond its base with its criticisms of the UN transition process, organized mass protests demanding lower fuel prices and a new government. Hadi's supporters and the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated party, al-Islah, held counter rallies.
2. Houthis seize power: The Houthis captured much of Sana'a by mid-September, 2014. Reneging on a UN peace deal brokered that month, they consolidated control of the capital and continued their southward advance. Hadi's government resigned under pressure the following January, and the Houthis declared a constitutional fiat.
3. Armed forces split: Military units loyal to Saleh aligned themselves with the Houthis, contributing to their battlefield success. Other militias mobilized against the Houthi-Saleh forces, aligning with elements of the military that remained loyal to the government. Southern separatists ramped up their calls for secession.
4. Saudis launch military intervention: After the Houthi reached Aden, Hadi went into exile in Saudi Arabia, which launched a military campaign, primarily fought from the air, to roll back the Houthis and restore the Hadi administration to Sana'a.

History

The modern Yemeni state was formed in 1990 with the unification of the U.S. and Saudi-backed Yemeni Arab Republic in the north, and the USSR-backed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, to the south. The military officer Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled North Yemen since 1978, assumed leadership of the new country. Somewhat larger than the state of California, Yemen has a population of about twenty-five million.

Despite unification, the central government's writ beyond the capital of Sana'a was never absolute, and Saleh secured his power through patronage and by playing various factions off one another. Still, Yemen faced numerous challenges to its unity. Al-Hirak, a movement of southern Yemenis who felt marginalized under the post-unification government, rebelled in 1994. It has since pressed for greater autonomy within Yemen, if not secession. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the related Ansar al-Sharia insurgent group have captured territory in the south. The Houthi movement, whose base is among the Zaydi Shias of northern Yemen, rose up against Saleh's government six times between 2004 and 2010.

Washington lent its support to Saleh beginning in the early 2000s, when counterterrorism cooperation became Washington's overriding regional concern. The United States gave Yemen \$1.2 billion in military and police aid between 2000, when the USS Cole bombing in the Yemeni port of Aden made al-Qaeda a U.S. priority in 2011, according to the online database Security Assistance Monitor. Human Rights groups long charged that Saleh ran a corrupt and autocratic government. As the popular protests of the 2011 Arab uprisings spread to Yemen, the president's political and military rivals jockeyed to oust him. While Yemeni security forces focused on putting down protests in urban areas, al-Qaeda made gains in outlying regions.

Under escalating domestic and international pressure (PDF), Saleh stepped aside after receiving assurances of immunity from prosecution. His vice president, Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, assumed office as interim president in a transition brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and backed by the United States. As part of the GCC's timetable for a transition, in 2013 the UN-sponsored National Dialogue Conference (NDC) convened 565 delegates to formulate a new constitution agreeable to Yemen's many factions. But the NDC ended after delegates couldn't resolve disputes over the distribution of power.

Current Situation

With a poverty rate of more than 50 percent, Yemen was the Arab world's poorest country prior to the Houthi offensive and Saudi-led air campaign. The conflict has pushed the country to the verge of famine. The UN estimated in January 2016 that 2,800 civilians had been killed since the escalation in March—60 percent of them in air strikes (only the Saudi-led coalition has these capabilities). Civilians have been targeted by both sides, in violation of international humanitarian law, a UN panel of experts found. Among the violations the panel cited was Saudi Arabia's declaration of the entire city of Saada as a "military target". The city has seen some of the war's worst devastation, including the destruction of a hospital run by the international relief organization Doctors Without Borders. Elsewhere, coalition and resistance fighters have targeted hospitals and schools, the panel found. It noted that Houthi forces have committed war crimes as well, including in their siege of the city of Taiz.

The Mounting Civilian Costs of Yemen's War

2,800
CIVILIANS KILLED
AS OF JANUARY 2016

6
CHILDREN HAVE BEEN KILLED
OR MAIMED DAILY

60%
OF CASUALTIES CAUSED BY
SAUDI-LED AIR STRIKES

21.2 million
OR 4 OUT OF 5, ARE IN NEED
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

5.3 million
MORE THAN BEFORE THE START OF
THE SAUDI-LED INTERVENTION

7.6 million
AT RISK OF STARVATION

14.1 million
LACK ACCESS TO
ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE

600
HEALTH FACILITIES HAVE CLOSED

63
HEALTH FACILITIES ATTACKED

Sources: UNOCHA, UNICEF, UN Panel of Experts, IOM Credit: David Foster, Zachary Laub

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The International Organization for Migration reports that 2.4 million Yemenis are internally displaced, and far smaller number have emigrated. In all, the UN says, 21.2 million people—four out of five Yemenis—need some form of humanitarian assistance; among them, 7.4 million have severe food insecurity.

Yemen relies on imports for the vast majority of its food and fuel. International organizations and nongovernmental organizations have been hindered from delivering food and medicine by on-going fighting as well as an air and sea blockade that Saudi Arabia established to enforce a UN arms embargo. Airstrikes and ground fighting have also destroyed critical infrastructure, further hampering the distribution of aid.

Conditions appear daunting for a negotiated settlement. The Houthis' assertion of power and the Saudi-led air campaign have militarized the divisions between the parties. The Houthis long felt marginalized from Yemeni politics, while southerners believed that the Houthis posed a reciprocal threat to them. Saudi Arabia and Iran are likely to escalate their commitments to their local allies as they compete for influence in Yemen and the broader region. That could introduce a sectarian dimension to Yemen's civil conflict, making the conflict even more toxic. Meanwhile, the Houthis have indiscriminately shelled Saudi border towns, raising pressure on Riyadh.

The Saudi-led intervention passed its one-year anniversary with its main objective, returning the Hadi-led administration to Sana'a, as elusive as ever, and with the financial and humanitarian costs of the conflict mounting, the parties have signaled some flexibility. UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed announced in late March 2016 that the parties had agreed to a cessation of hostilities, following confidence-building prisoner swaps, to facilitate the start of negotiations in Kuwait. A pause in fighting could allow Yemeni forces to focus on pushing back al-Qaeda.

The underlying causes of this conflict, however, will prove difficult to resolve: Political factions are unlikely to find a mutually acceptable compromise on the distribution of power, and militias will be reluctant to give up their arms. Reconstruction will depend not just on peace but on regional donors at a time when Gulf oil revenues are shrinking.

Notable Figures

The **Houthis** began in the late 1980s as a religious and cultural revivalist movement among practitioners of Zaydi Shi'ism in northern Yemen. The Zaydis are a minority in the majority-Sunni Muslim country, but predominant in the northern highlands along the Saudi border, and until 1962, Zaydi imams ruled much of the region. The Houthis became politically active after 2003, opposing Saleh for backing the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The Houthis repeatedly fought the Saleh regime—and in 2009, an intervening Saudi force. In post-Saleh Yemen, the movement gained support from far beyond its northern base for its criticisms of the UN-backed transition. However, in its push to monopolize power, it has alienated one-time supporters, writes the International Crisis Group.

Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, though deposed in 2011 amid popular protests and elite jockeying, has gained popularity among some Yemenis who have grown disillusioned with the transition. He and his son Ahmed Abdullah Saleh command the loyalty of some elements of Yemen's security forces, tribal networks, and the **General Peoples' Congress (GPC)** political party. Their alliance with the Houthis is a tactical one: Saleh's loyalists oppose Hadi's government, feeling like they were marginalized in the transition process, and seeking to regain a leading role in Yemen.



Iran is the Houthis' primary international backer and has reportedly provided the Houthis with military support, including arms. Yemen's government has also accused Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese ally, of aiding the Houthis. Saudi Arabia's perception that the Houthis are primarily an Iranian proxy rather than an indigenous movement has driven Riyadh's military intervention. But many regional specialists caution against overstating Tehran's influence over the movement. (Iranians and Houthis adhere to different schools of Shia Islam.) The Houthis and Iran share similar geopolitical interests: Iran seeks to challenge Saudi and U.S. dominance of the region, and the Houthis are the primary opposition to Hadi's Saudi- and U.S.-backed government in Sana'a.

President Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, the internationally recognized president, returned to Yemen after eight months of exile in Saudi Arabia in November 2015, but he remains confined to the presidential palace in Aden and it is unclear whether he commands much authority beyond there.

Saudi Arabia has led the coalition air campaign to roll back the Houthis and reinstate Hadi's government. Riyadh perceives that Houthi control of Yemen would mean a hostile neighbor that threatens its southern border. It also considers Yemen a front in its contest with Iran for regional dominance, and losing Sana'a would only add to what it perceives as an ascendant Iran that has allies in power in Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus. Riyadh's concerns have been compounded by its perception that the United States is retrenching from the region and that its nuclear accord with Iran will embolden Tehran. Journalist Peter Salisbury writes that Saudi Arabia may be trying to restore its long-standing strategy of "containment and maintenance" vis-à-vis its southern neighbor: Keep Yemen weak, and therefore beholden to Riyadh, but not so weak that state collapse could threaten it with an influx of migrants. The conflict is the first major one undertaken by the new king Salman, and a test for his son, Defense Minister Mohammad bin Salman, who is pursuing a more adventurist foreign policy than his predecessors.

Saudi Arabia has cobbled together a coalition of **Sunni-majority Arab states**: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and the UAE. (That includes all the Gulf Cooperation Council states except for Oman.) The operation seems to consolidate Saudi Arabia's leadership over the bloc, which has split over other regional issues, and signals consensus against allowing Iran to gain influence in Yemen. But in practice, only the UAE has played a significant military role, including contributing ground troops that enabled Hadi's return to Aden.

The **United States** has backed the Saudi-led coalition, albeit reluctantly, along with the **United Kingdom** and **France**. U.S. interests include maintaining stability in Yemen and security for Saudi borders; free passage in the Bab al-Mandeb, the chokepoint between the Arabian and Red Seas through which 4.7 million barrels of oil per day transit, and a government in Sana'a that will cooperate with U.S. counterterrorism programs (PDF). In the current conflict, Washington has provided the Saudi-led coalition with logistical and intelligence support. It is also the largest provider of arms to Saudi Arabia and approved a \$1.3 billion sale to restock depleted munitions in November of 2015. But while the United States continues to support coalition operations, U.S. officials have pressed the Saudis for restraint, warning that the intensity of the bombing campaign was undercutting shared political goals.



What is the role of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula?

AQAP, described by the U.S. government as the most dangerous al-Qaeda affiliate (PDF), has benefitted from the current chaos, establishing what Reuters calls a “mini-state” that spans more than 350 miles of coastline and draws profits from the national oil company and port trade. The Houthis’ rapid advances have led some Sunni tribes to align with al-Qaeda against a perceived common threat. A distracted Yemeni army has eased pressure against the militants, who have rapidly expanded, and in some cases, reportedly fought alongside al-Qaeda fighters.

In April 2015, AQAP captured the city of Mukalla and released three hundred inmates, many of which were believed to be AQAP members. Since then, the militant group has expanded its control westward to Aden and seized parts of the city. Even though U.S. drone strikes continue, in March 2015 Washington withdrew special operations forces that were training and assisting Yemeni troops, and the Saudi air campaign has reportedly destroyed military installations belonging to U.S.-trained Yemeni counterterrorism units.

Al-Qaeda, which has been in Yemen since the early 1990s, competes with the upstart self-proclaimed Islamic State for recruits. The Islamic State marked its entrance in Yemen in March 2015 with suicide attacks on two Zaydi mosques in Sana’a, killing about 140 worshippers. Its militants have portrayed their campaign in Yemen in distinctly sectarian terms, decrying the Houthi campaign as a Safawi invasion—referencing Iran. Though they have since claimed other high-profile attacks, including the assassination of Aden’s governor, the group has not gained as large a following in Yemen as al-Qaeda has. The Wall Street Journal reports: al-Qaeda is enmeshed in tribal networks, whereas the Islamic State is perceived as foreign. The Journal estimates that the Islamic State’s ranks in Yemen in the hundreds, and al-Qaeda’s in the thousands.

Additional sources for the Yemen civil war:

1. “Yemen in Crisis”
<http://www.cfr.org/yemen/yemen-crisis/p36488>
2. “Yemen Crisis Explained”
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/yemen-crisis-201512010294461878.html>
Please also watch these videos to go along with the sources provided:
3. “Yemen: A failed state”- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ggen-595Ng&t=32s>
4. “Yemen: Sannaa under attack”- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoV9Z6NXH5I>

Nationals Testable Material

“Yemen: Pulling the strings”

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraworld/2016/04/yemen-pulling-strings-160420111557078.html>



Syria

Background Information

Syria's conflict has devolved from peaceful protests against the government in 2011 to a violent insurgency that has drawn in numerous other countries. It's partly a civil war of government against people, and partly a religious war pitting Assad's minority Alawite sect, aligned with Shi-ite fighters from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, against Sunni rebel groups. It is also increasingly a proxy war featuring Russia and Iran against the United States and its allies. Whatever it is, it has killed 220,000 people so far, displaced half of the country's population, and facilitated the rise of ISIS.

While a de-facto international coalition—one that makes informal allies of Assad, the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Kurds, and others—is focused on defeating ISIS in Syria, the battlefield features numerous other overlapping conflicts. The Syrian war looks different depending on which protagonist you focus on.



The armed rebellion has evolved significantly since its inception. Secular moderates are now outnumbered by Islamists and jihadists, whose brutal tactics have caused widespread concern and triggered rebel infighting.

Capitalising on the chaos in the region, the Islamic State - an extremist group that grew out of al-Qaeda in Iraq - has taken control of huge swathes of territory across northern and eastern Syria, as well as neighbouring Iraq. Its many foreign fighters in Syria are now involved in a “war within a war”, battling rebels and jihadists from the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front, who object to their tactics, as well as Kurdish and government forces.

In September of 2014, a US-led coalition launched air strikes inside Syria in an effort to “degrade and ultimately destroy” the Islamic State, helping the Kurds repel a major assault on the northern town of Kobane. But the coalition has avoided attacks that might benefit Mr Assad’s forces or intervening in battles between them and the rebels.

In the political arena, opposition groups are also deeply divided, with rival alliances battling for supremacy. The most prominent is the moderate National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, backed by several Western and Gulf Arab states. However, the coalition has little influence on the ground in Syria and its primacy is rejected by other groups, leaving the country without a convincing alternative to the Assad government.

Humanitarian Crisis

As the Syrian crisis is in its sixth year, more than 6.9 million people have been displaced according to UNHCR. Over half of these refugees are children. As the refugee numbers hit over 4 million, the Syrian refugee crisis is now the biggest of our era. Of the 4.5 billion dollars needed to provide adequate care for these refugees, only about 1.3 million has been received by the international community, leaving an overwhelming gap of 3.1 billion dollars needed.

According to the UN:

- Women and children make up 3/4 of the refugee population
- Over 50% of the Syrian population is in need of aid
- Refugees have little more than the clothes on their backs when arriving at refugee camps
- 6.5 million internally displaced within Syria as of 2015
- An estimated 9 million total persons have fled their homes as of 2015
- Over 1 million people have registered from 2012 to 2013

A report published by the UN in March 2015 estimated the total economic loss since the start of the conflict was \$202 billion. It is estimated that four in every five Syrians live in poverty, with 30% of them in abject poverty. Currently, the country is in a state of collapse, whether it be through education, health or social welfare systems.



History

Uprising beginnings

The wave of Arab unrest that began with the Tunisian revolution reached Syria on March 15, 2011, when residents of a small southern city took to the streets to protest the torture of students who had put up anti-government graffiti. The government responded with heavy-handed force, and demonstrations quickly spread across much of the country.

President Bashar al-Assad, a British-trained doctor who inherited Syria's presidency from his father, Hafez al-Assad, wavered at first between force and hints of reform. But in April 2011, just days after lifting the country's decades-old state of emergency, he set off the first of what became a series of withering crackdowns, sending tanks into restive cities as security forces opened fire on demonstrators. In retrospect, the attacks appeared calculated to turn peaceful protests violent, to justify an escalation of force.

In the summer of 2011, as the crackdown dragged on, thousands of soldiers defected and began launching attacks against the government, bringing the country to what the United Nations in December called the verge of civil war. An opposition government in exile was formed, the Syrian National Council, but the council's internal divisions have kept Western and Arab governments from recognizing it as such. The opposition remains a fractious collection of political groups, longtime exiles, grass-roots organizers and armed militants, divided along ideological, ethnic or sectarian lines.

The conflict is complicated by Syria's ethnic divisions. The Assads and much of the nation's elite, especially the military, belong to the Alawite sect, a minority in a mostly Sunni country. While the Assad government has the advantage of crushing firepower and units of loyal, elite troops, the insurgents should not be underestimated. They are highly motivated and over time, demographics should tip in their favor. Alawites constitute about 12 percent of the 23 million Syrians. Sunni Muslims, the opposition's backbone, make up about 75 percent of the population.

The United States and countries around the world condemned President Assad, who many had hoped would soften his father's iron-handed regime. Criticism has also come from unlikely quarters, like Syria's neighbors, Jordan and Turkey, and the Arab League. Syria was expelled from the Arab League after it agreed to a peace plan only to step up attacks on protesters. In late 2011 and early 2012, Syria agreed to allow league observers into the country, but their presence did nothing to slow the violence.

In February 2012, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to approve a resolution condemning President Assad's unbridled crackdown on the uprising, but China and Russia, Syria's traditional patrons, blocked all efforts for stronger Security Council action.

Tensions have also spilled over borders into Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan, and fears have increased with evidence that Al Qaeda was behind a rise in suicide bombings in 2012.

By the summer of 2012, the conflict had greatly increased in tempo and violence on all sides, as advocacy groups estimated that about 400 died in June 2011 and more than 3,000 people in June 2012. The Syrian government has waged an unrelenting campaign of arrests that has snared tens of thousands of people.



In cities throughout Syria, including the capital Damascus, and the largest city, Aleppo, the opposition had coalesced around armed groups identifying themselves as elements of the Free Syrian Army. From bases in refugee camps on the Turkish side of the border, the flow of weapons, medical supplies and money increased.

As the conflict has continued without resolution, Syrians involved in the struggle say it is becoming more radicalized. Homegrown Muslim jihadists, as well as small groups of fighters from Al Qaeda have been taking a more prominent role and demanding a say in running the resistance.

Civil War

The country has spiralled into a Civil war as violence runs rampant through the country. Rebel brigades are formed and the fight to control the cities are started between rebel forces and governmental forces. Damascus and Aleppo see the most fighting and highest civilian death tolls.

By June 2013, the UN and other sources report that 90,000 people had been killed thus far during the Syrian Civil War. The Syrian conflict is now multifaceted with many moving parts. These moving parts are more than just tensions between rebel and governmental forces. The country faces ethnic tensions, the introduction of world powers, jihadist groups, the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations.

A UN commission of inquiry, investigating alleged human rights violations since March 2011, has alleged evidence to show that both sides of the conflict have committed war crimes since the start of the conflict. These war crimes include murder, torture, rape and enforced disappearances. Other crimes include have blocking access for food, water and health services for civilians.

The UN Security Council released a resolution in 2014, demanding that all parties end the “indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas.” Since the release of the resolution, sources suggest more than 6,000 civilians have been killed by barrel bombs dropped by government aircrafts on rebel-held areas. The UN has suggested that civilians have been directly targeted. In addition to those war crimes committed by rebel and governmental forces, the Islamic State has been accused of waging terror on northern and eastern Syria and committing war crimes relentlessly against the civilians in the territories they occupy.

US military intervention became a threat after the death of hundreds in August 2013 from the nerve agent “sarin”. The threat forced President Assad to agree to remove and destroy all of Syria’s chemical weapons. The removal was a joint mission led by the UN and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The destruction was completed a year later. Even with the efforts of the international community, chemical attacks are still being reported by both the government and the Islamic State.



Current Situation

As the Syria crisis enters its sixth year, civilians continue to bear the brunt of a conflict marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life. 13.5 million people require humanitarian assistance, including 4.9 million people in need, trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, where they are exposed to grave protection threats.

Over half of the population have been forced from their homes, and many people have been displaced multiple times. Children and youth comprise more than half of the displaced, as well as half of those in need of humanitarian assistance. Parties to the conflict act with impunity, committing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

On average, 6,150 people were displaced per day between January and August 2016. Over one million displaced people live in collective shelters, camps or makeshift settlements as the option of last resort. Among conflict-affected communities, life-threatening needs continue to grow. Neighboring countries have restricted the admission of people fleeing Syria, leaving hundreds of thousands of people stranded in deplorable conditions on their borders. In some cases, these populations are beyond the reach of humanitarian actors.

Out of civilians living in 16 besieged locations, 974,080 people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 411,000 children, and are denied their basic rights, including freedom of movement and access to adequate food, water, and health care. Frequent denial of entry of humanitarian assistance into these areas and blockage of urgent medical evacuations results in civilian deaths and suffering. 3.9 million people in need live in hard-to-reach areas that humanitarian actors are unable to reach in a sustained manner through available modalities.

Countless numbers of Syrians are pouring in all over the world, wherever they can, as refugees seeking immediate shelter and aid. Many countries are allowing Syrians entrance but it is still not even close to accommodating all who are being displaced.

In the absence of a political solution to the conflict, intense and widespread hostilities, particularly in Aleppo and ISIL-controlled areas, are likely to persist in 2017.

Notable Figures

President Bashar al-Assad

Assad's father, who came from a poor Alawite family, seized power in a 1970 coup. Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria with a firm hand and was accused of numerous human rights abuses over the years. Bashar Assad presented himself as a reformer when he succeeded his father in 2000. But critics have called any changes largely superficial, and Assad's crackdown on protests in March 2011 sparked the current civil war. Support for Bashar Assad has held firm among the Alawite minority, who make up about 12 per cent of the country's population. Much of the Christian minority have also backed Assad in the past, preferring his secular rule to an Islamist alternative.



Syrian opposition

After days of intense talks in Qatar and under mounting international pressure, Syria's scattered anti-government groups struck a deal to form a unified opposition in November 2012. The Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces was designed to bring together members of various religious sects opposed to Assad. The U.S. and dozens of other countries have officially recognized the coalition as the sole representative of the Syrian people. (Canada has not yet followed suit). Veteran dissident Ahmad Jarba became the group's new president in July 2013. A member of a prominent eastern Syrian tribe, Jarba is also reported to have close ties to Saudi Arabia.

Free Syrian Army

As anti-regime demonstrations heated up in summer 2011, members of Assad's army began to defect to the protesters' side. These officers and soldiers eventually formed the nucleus of the Free Syrian Army, the main armed group opposed to Assad. Thousands of further defections and volunteer signups propelled the FSA's growth over the next year. The group faces a challenge as Assad's army is attempting to stem the tide and prevent others from leaving. Many Western nations cannot shake their concerns that by supplying weapons to the FSA, they could aggravate the war and munitions could fall into the wrong hands — namely religious extremists.

Jihadist groups

Al-Qaeda-linked groups have claimed responsibility for suicide bombings on Syrian government targets during the civil war. In December 2012, the U.S. declared the jihadist Jabhat al-Nusra to be a terrorist group in an effort to blunt the influence of extremists in the Syrian opposition. Al-Nusra's leader formally declared his loyalty to al-Qaeda in spring 2013. It has resisted a merger with another al-Qaeda group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has expanded its operations into Syria. (Al-Qaeda cut ties with ISIS in February 2014.) These groups have fought each other as well as with the Free Syrian Army — signs of deepening cracks in the opposition movement.

Hezbollah

The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah has vowed that his Shiite militant group will not stand idly by while its chief ally in Damascus is under attack. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said Hezbollah members are fighting in Syria against Islamic extremists who pose a danger to Lebanon, and pledged that his group will not allow Syrian militants to control areas that border Lebanon. Syria, along with Iran, has been the main backer of Hezbollah and much of the group's arsenal consisting of tens of thousands of rockets.

UN weapons inspectors

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon authorized a fact-finding tour to investigate allegations of chemical weapon use in Syria. After four months of behind-the-scenes talks, the Assad regime approved the terms for the mission in July 2013. Syrian activists and opposition leaders say chemical weapons were used in an August 21st attack that killed hundreds in the eastern Damascus suburbs. Assad has been quoted as saying that the claims are "nonsense." In their initial findings presented on Sept. 16, the inspectors said that chemical weapons had been used on a "large scale" but the report did not say who launched the attack. The team, led by Swedish professor Ake Sellstrom, said in a December 2013 report that chemical weapons were likely used in four other locations.

The United States of America

In August 2012, President Barack Obama said the U.S. would reconsider its opposition to military involvement in the Syrian civil war if Assad's regime deployed or used chemical or biological weapons. He called such action a "red line" for the United States. In June 2013, U.S. officials said that line had been crossed. They reported that Syria has used sarin gas on multiple occasions, killing up to 150 people. Shortly after, Obama authorized sending weapons to the Syrian rebels for the first time. A purported chemical attack in August 2013 pushed the U.S. even closer to action. Obama labelled the alleged attack an "assault on human dignity" and called for direct military action in Syria. However, he agreed to pursue a diplomatic solution backed by Russia before launching any strikes.

Russia

Russia is one of Syria's most important international allies. Syria has been among Russia's top customers for international arms exports, with contracts in the billions, according to reports. The trade, while legal, raised concerns over whether Russia was arming Assad's regime with weapons to use against the rebels. An official said in July 2012, however, that Russia would not deliver weapons to Syria while the situation remains unresolved. And by December, as Assad's grip weakened, Moscow sought to distance itself from the regime. In June 2013, President Vladimir Putin told Obama that Russian and U.S. positions on Syria do not "coincide". Even so, the two leaders said during that month's G8 summit that they shared an interest in stopping the violence. Russia firmly opposed the American plan for military action after the August 2013 chemical weapons accusations. It backed a diplomatic solution that saw the Assad regime turn over its chemical arsenal. In present times, Russia is now aiding in bombing strikes on the Syrian rebels along with the Assad Regime.

Riad Hijab

Hijab, Assad's prime minister, has been the most prominent political member of the regime to defect. "The regime is on the verge of collapse morally and economically," Hijab told a news conference after fleeing to Jordan with his family in August 2012. Other notable defectors include a commander with the elite Republican Guard and the country's ambassador to Iraq. Other key Assad allies have been killed, including the president's brother-in-law and national security chief.

