United States' Strategy Supporting Saudi-led Coalition

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In 2011, the Arab Spring set the Arab world on fire with anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions demanding social and political changes. For some countries, the revolutions resulted in much-desired regime changes and promises that previous injustices would cease to exist; however, for other countries like Yemen, the Arab Spring only exacerbated the sociopolitical problems and increased oppression and instability (*Arab Spring,* 2018). Thousands of Yemenis protested in Sana'a, demanding that President Ali Abdullah Saleh step down. When Saleh refused to meet their demands, the protests quickly transformed into a civil war. In 2015, after four long years of internal fighting, the civil war evolved into a regional proxy war when the Houthis forced the Yemen president to resign and flee to Saudi Arabia.

With Saudi Arabia at the helm of a coalition determined to reinstate Yemen's legitimate government, the country is now a war-torn wasteland facing a humanitarian crisis considered by the UN as "the worst in the world" (*Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen*, 2019, title section). As a close ally of Saudi Arabia, the United States (US) finds itself pulled in two very different directions. On one side of the conflict, the US has supported the Saudi-led Coalition (SLC) by selling them weapons, sharing intelligence, providing military advice, and providing logistical support. Meanwhile, on the other side of the conflict, the US has provided Yemen approximately $3 billion in humanitarian assistance over the last six years (Sharp, 2020). This problem highlights that the US lacks a clearly defined strategy as a sponsor of the SLC in Yemen.

Background

Turmoil in Yemen

Before analyzing the US' strategy in Yemen, it is essential first to explain how Yemen became the battleground for the SLC. It was not until 1990 that North Yemen and South Yemen united and became the Republic of Yemen under President Saleh's leadership, former North Yemen President. (Laub & Robinson, 2020). Although the two countries united, they remained internally divided on multiple fronts. Some of those divisions include religious sects and political culture. The northern part of the country consists of a Shia majority ruled for centuries by the Zaydi branch of Shia as a religious monarchy. The southern part of the country is comprised of a Sunni majority divided into smaller political entities and tribal territories under a more decentralized form of governance (Sharp, 2020).

Because of the internal divisions, southern Yemenis felt systemically discriminated against and treated as second-class citizens under what was supposed to be a united Yemen (Sharp, 2020). Just four years after the unification, the south unsuccessfully tried to secede from the north during a civil war. In 2007 the country experienced another bout of civil unrest when southerners protested low wages and unfulfilled pension promises. Shortly after, the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) secessionist movement formed with the initial demand for equal rights and equal

citizenship with north Yemenis. However, their request quickly transformed into a desire for a separate independent south Yemeni state (Horton, 2011).

With a history of civil unrest in Yemen, the Arab Spring in January of 2011 only exacerbated the north and south division. It proved to be a real concern for President Saleh. For Yemen, the Arab Spring meant organized and relatively peaceful protests in the capital city of Sana'a. Saleh responded with some concessions to include lower taxes, increased government salaries, a new constitution that would strengthen the parliament and judiciary, and even a promise to omit himself and his son from the election in 2013 (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Despite these concessions, protesters refused to accept the terms because of his history of unfulfilled promises and demanded his resignation.

Growing impatient with the demonstrations, Saleh loyalists and security forces grew increasingly violent, ultimately weakening his hold on power. After a group of Saleh loyalists killed approximately fifty demonstrators by opening fire on the crowd, many of Saleh's government officials, included his most powerful military officer Major General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, resigned in protest (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). The ongoing resignation of the government and the army officials, coupled with Saleh refusing to leave, forced the county into a state of an emergency, causing Saleh to withdraw military forces from outlying governorates to focus their efforts on the protection of Sana'a. The lack of government forces in the outlying governorates created a breeding ground for anti-Saleh groups allowing them to gain footholds throughout the country, further diminishing Saleh's control of the country (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020).

Founded in the north in the early 1990s, the Houthi movement is known as Ansar Allah or "Supporters of God," a political insurgent crusade originating in the Sa'dah governate of northern Yemen. The Houthi movement followers are Zaydi Shiites. As Shiites, they are the minority sect of Islam, and as Zaydi Shiites, they are the minority faction within the Shiite sect (Riedel, 2017). Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi was the founder. As a Zaydi religious leader and a former Yemeni politician, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi insisted on ending Yemen's corruption. He died in 2004 at the hands of President Saleh's military forces.

Although the exact relationship is unclear, the Saudi-led coalition accused Iran of supporting the Houthis. However, the Iranians have denied all claims of sponsoring the Houthis. Some of those claims include providing the Houthis with weapons, financial support, fighters, unmanned aerial vehicles, and training. Despite the denials, some entity is giving the Houthis external aid, and the available evidence alludes to Iran (Werner, 2020). In February 2020, the US Navy stopped a small trading vessel in the Arabian Sea and recovered an Iranian weapons cache bound for Yemen (Werner, 2020). Some of the seized weapons were anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, thermal imaging weapon scopes, and parts for aerial and surface vessels (Werner, 2020). This level of Iranian support suggests the Houthis are an Iranian proxy.

While he was not a follower of the Houthi movement, President Saleh was a Zaydi Shiite who became president in 1978 after a series of coups. Unfortunately, the Houthis believed Saleh to be corrupt and believed he wanted to steal Yemen's wealth for his own family. The Houthis also detested Saleh's relationships with Saudi Arabia and the US, which enabled the Houthi movement to emerge as a Zaydi anti-Saleh resistance group (Riedel, 2017).

In the south, the Islamist militant group al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) gained footholds in multiple governorates in the south and east Yemen. Although AQAP in Yemen was a legitimate threat before 2009, they grew in size, strength, and capabilities when the Saudi branch of al-Qaeda moved from Saudi Arabia to Yemen to merge with Yemen's al-Qaeda branch (Terrill, 2011). This merger led to a reinvigorated AQAP conducting operations from Yemen against the Saudi monarch. Terrill noted, "an AQAP internet publication stated, 'We concentrate on Saudi Arabia because the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh is on the verge of collapse"' (p. 42). Not only was the newly regrouped AQAP more extensive, but they were also better funded due to the addition of Saudi radicals with remarkable fundraising skills and wealthy contacts. Therefore, AQAP was able to bribe some local Yemeni tribal leaders with money to provide services such as sheltering terrorists (Terrill, 2011).

In the south and under the nominal leadership of General Nasser al-Nuba, the SMM grew in strength and size as Saleh's power across Yemen weakened. As an overarching umbrella organization of many separatist groups, the SMM was formally founded in 2007 as a decentralized body to rectify southern Yemeni grievances towards the north (Horton, 2011). The group tends to use peaceful methods to convey their concerns and demands to the north. Because of the organization's unique makeup, each separatist group within the SMM may have very different goals with a common goal of using the organization to ensure they have a voice and an avenue to relay their interests (Horton, 2011).

Despite Saleh losing control of most of the country by April of 2011, he remained determined to finish his term. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional political and economic union of six Arab states in the Persian Gulf, attempted to mediate a proposal to remove him from power and implement a new government (Stark, 2020). The initial proposal provided Saleh and his associates with immunity for any wrongdoings they had committed in exchange for Saleh's cooperation in formally requesting a national unity government and resigning thirty days after the request to create a national unity government (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Thirty days after Saleh's resignation a presidential election would be held. Although the Yemeni opposition groups were unhappy that Saleh would get immunity, they approved of the GCC proposal to provide Saleh and his associates with immunity if Saleh formally requested a national unity government and resigned. After agreeing to the terms, Saleh reneged on the agreement and refused to sign the proposal citing his concerns with the actual implementation of the proposal and ensuring a smooth and peaceful transition of power (*Report claims Saleh 'positive' on GCC plan*, 2011). After he made edits to the proposal, Saleh agreed to the terms; however when the time came to sign the deal,

Saleh again backed out, causing the GCC to abandon efforts to mediate an agreement between the Yemeni government and the opposition groups (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020).

The unsuccessful efforts to convince Saleh to resign agitated and worsened the situation in Yemen. About a month after the GCC pulled out of the mediator rule, in June of 2011 Saleh was injured when a bomb exploded in his presidential palace (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Although he released an audio message reiterating that he was in good health, he was forced to seek medical attention in Saudi Arabia and did not return until September of 2011, three months later (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Upon his medical leave of absence, Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi assumed the position as the President of Yemen (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). It was not until November of 2011 that Saleh finally signed a the GCC proposal when the US and European Union threatened to freeze or seize his illegally attained assets if he did not agree to step down and transfer all powers to Vice President Hadi in return for protection from prosecution (Zyck, 2014). This agreement allowed Saleh to keep his title as president until February of 2012 when Hadi would assume the presidency after a presidential election where Hadi would be the only candidate running. As planned, on February 25, 2012, Hadi was sworn in as president (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020).

Although the country had a new president, they remained extremely divided under the new reign. The new government continued to face challenges from the Houthis and AQAP. Economic conditions throughout Yemen hit an all-time low. Some of those issues included soaring unemployment rates, shortages of food, water, necessities, and a low gross domestic product (GDP) (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Public discontent grew and worsened when the government cut fuel subsidies to help close the budget deficit and attract foreign funding (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Mobilized by the Houthis, protesters started demonstrations in Sana'a, accusing the government of corruption and overlooking the people's needs. In September 2014, the situation escalated when government security forces opened fire on protestors in Sana'a, killing innocent civilians. Shortly after, Houthi rebels overran Sana'a and took over government buildings forcing Hadi to replace a cabinet member with a Houthi rebel and appoint a new prime minister (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). In January 2015, the Houthis overran the presidential palace causing President Hadi and his prime minister to resign (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). The Houthis placed Hadi under house arrest, but he escaped and reemerged in Aden, claiming to be the legitimate president and declaring Aden's city as Yemen's interim capital. While in Aden, Houthi rebels started to close in on the city of Aden. After realizing his position's precarious nature, Hadi requested international military intervention against the Houthis before fleeing to Oman and subsequently to Saudi Arabia (Burrowes & Wenner, 2020). Shortly after Hadi fled, the Houthi rebels took the city of Aden.

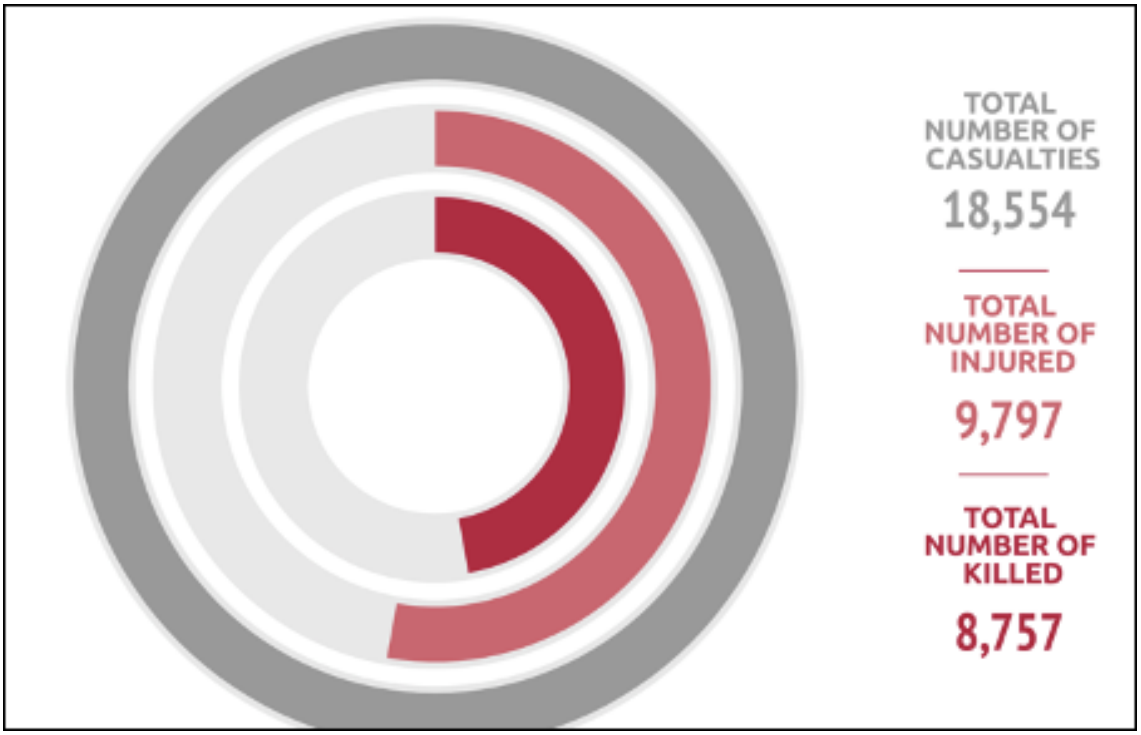
Saudi Arabia Intervenes

Although Saudi Arabia has always worried about its shared southern border with Yemen, the civil unrest and lack of governance made Saudi Arabia very concerned. Therefore, when Hadi requested international military support to combat the Houthi

rebels, Saudi Arabia was more than willing to assist. On March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of nine countries and launched Operation Decisive Storm to defend Hadi's official government (al-Shibeed, 2015). The countries that made up the coalition included Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, and Senegal. Although not official partners in the coalition, the US, Eretria, Somalia, and Djibouti have all provided military support to the operation (al-Shibeed, 2015). There have been approximately 22,000 air raids in Yemen, resulting in 18,554 civilian casualties, as shown in Figure 1 (Craig, n.d.).

Figure 1

Civilian Casualties Caused by Operations Decisive Storm and Restoring Hope



Note: This radial bar chart displays the total number of civilian casualties and differentiates between those injured versus those killed. The timeframe covered in this data is March 26, 2015, until November 4, 2020. The Yemen Data Project is the source of the data.

Operation Decisive Storm was a bombing campaign focused on destroying heavy weapons that could threaten the coalition. Some of those threats included surface-to-air missiles (SAM) systems and aircraft. Although the campaign may seem successful, it received international disapproval because of the significant number of civilian casualties and collateral damage. During the first month of the conflict, over 300 civilian casualties were reported (Sulz, 2019), and of these, 115 children died, and 172 children were injured during the first month of the operation (*Hundreds of Children Killed,* 2015). After nearly a month, on April 21, 2015, a Saudi state news agency

reported, “Operation Decisive Storm has achieved its goals...[including] removing the threat to Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries especially in terms of heavy weapons” (Browning & Hashem, 2015, para. 2). Therefore, Operation Decisive Storm ended and officially transitioned into Operation Restoring Hope. The stated objectives for Operation Restoring Hope are “continuing to protect civilians, continuing to fight terrorism, continuing to facilitate the evacuation of foreign nationals, to intensify relief and [provide] medical assistance to the Yemeni people” (Browning & Hashem, 2015, para. 3).

US Support to the Saudi-led Coalition

Information

Although the US is not a member of the SLC, the Obama Administration announced that the US would provide logistical and intelligence support but would not be directly involved in military operations. In 2015, the US established a joint U.S.-Saudi planning cell in Riyadh to facilitate US assistance to the SLC (Stewart, 2016). The joint planning cell initially consisted of approximately 45 US military members but was reduced to about five military members in August 2016 following a period of decreased air strikes in Yemen (Stewart, 2016). Despite the reduced manning at the joint planning cell, the US remained committed to supporting the SLC with informational and logistical support.

The informational support given to the coalition consists of sharing intelligence and providing advice on military operations and the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). While the specific intelligence shared is unknown, a large portion of the information focuses on targeting intelligence. Some examples of targeting intelligence include determining targets' validity, ensuring targets are not on no-strike lists or restricted target lists, determining how many bombs to drop, deriving precise coordinates, and estimating collateral damage (Dalton & Robbins, 2018). It is essential to state that the US does not claim to provide the coalition with targeting solutions or approve of those solutions. Instead, they only act in an advising role to help ensure the coalition is trained and aware of targeting methods and methodology proven to be effective at minimizing collateral damage (Dalton & Robbins, 2018). Aside from intelligence sharing, the US also provides military operations advice to "help improve command and control and formalize targeting processes," according to General Joseph Votel, US Central Command (USCENTCOM) Commander (2018, p. 30). Some of that advice includes best practices and lessons learned. The overall goal of providing intelligence and operations support is to help the coalition distinguish between civilian targets and valid military targets while mitigating collateral damage and preventing LOAC violations.

Logistics

Unlike informational support, logistical support consists of providing a service or product to a customer. From the beginning of Operation Decisive Storm, the US provided Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates jets with aerial refueling services. This service increases the amount of time the aircraft can stay airborne and allows them to travel further without landing to refuel on the ground. Ultimately, aerial refueling operations enabled the coalition to be more efficient during their operations and

provided them with the ability to penetrate deep into Houthi territory. The aerial refueling support continued until November 2018 when former US Secretary of Defense James Mattis announced that the SLC would conduct aerial refueling operations with their coalition aircraft (Sharp et al., 2020).

Another form of logistics support provided to the SLC falls under the US government's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) programs. According to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, FMS "is the US government's program for transferring defense articles, services, and training to our international partners and international organizations" (*Foreign Military,* n.d., para. 1). In contrast, the DCS program transfers defense articles and services from a US industry directly to a foreign buyer after receiving a Department of State (DOS)-issued license (*Direct Commercial*, n.d.). These programs' overall purpose is to build partners' military capabilities and increase interoperability with the US military. The total authorized defense articles and services to Saudi Arabia under the DCS program from fiscal years (FY) 2015 through 2019 are worth $17 billion (Department of State [DOS], n.d.). However, the US only shipped $2 billion in articles and services to Saudi Arabia during the same time frame (DOS, n.d.).

Unintended Effects

The US's decision to support the SLC has received international criticism because of the amount of collateral damage caused by the coalition, the accusation that the coalition armed Yemeni rebels with US military weapons and equipment, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. These actions not only go against US values and principles, but they also cost the US more money and resources. While the US may benefit in terms of economic earnings and strengthened alliances but that involvement, even if indirect, has serious consequences that could implicate the US in war crimes.

Reallocated Resources

Since early 2019, the DOS and DOD have been under pressure from the US Congress to ensure military weapons and equipment sold initially to members of the SLC have not been reallocated to Yemeni militias as such would violate end-user provisions of FMS and DCS (Elbagir et al., 2019). In February 2019, CNN reported that the SLC transferred American-made weapons to Yemen militias, including a militia linked to AQAP (Elbagir et al., 2019). AQAP was and still is a terrorist group actively being targeted by US forces in Yemen. Types of equipment and weapons allegedly transferred include assault rifles, armored vehicles, and anti-tank guided missiles. According to CNN, local militia commanders on the ground in Yemen reported the equipment transfers. They claimed the SLC used the equipment to buy the militias' loyalties and provide them with resources capable of defeating the pro-Saleh and Houthi forces (Elbagir et al., 2019). If the accusation is true, it would violate the original sale's end-user provisions, bare sensitive US military technology to Iran, and threaten US military forces operating in Yemen and other combat zones.

The allegations immediately sparked attention from members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. When asked about the accusation, USCENTCOM Commander, General Joseph Votel said, "…I think we have to look more closely at the allegations in this particular situation to find out what happened. As we have seen in Iraq in the past, where we saw our partners overrun, we have seen American equipment provided to them, lost in the course of a fight, [and] end up in the hands of our adversaries out there" (2019, para. 87).

All US defense articles sold through the FMS and DCS programs are subject to end-use monitoring (EUM) restrictions (*Direct Commercial,* n.d.). Those restrictions prevent the consumer from transferring the equipment, using it for anything other than its intended purpose, and ensure the proper safeguarding of the equipment. The DOD's EUM program to ensure compliance of articles sold through the FMS program is the Golden Sentry EUM program. Whereas the DOS's EUM program performs an analogous function for items sold through the DCS program is the Blue Lantern program (*Foreign Military,* n.d.*; Direct Commercial,* n.d.). Due to the allegations that the SLC reallocated defense articles acquired through both FMS and DCS, the DOD and DOS conducted a joint investigation into the accusation's legitimacy regarding the transfer of armored vehicles. According to a DOS letter sent to a US senator, the teams would visit both Saudi Arabia and the UAE to "establish a vehicle accountability baseline" (Elbagir & Davey-Attlee, 2019, para. 2).

Despite the US investigations, the UAE and Saudi Arabia continue to deny the claims. According to a senior UAE official in October 2019, "There were no instances when US-made equipment was used without direct UAE oversight except for four vehicles that were captured by the enemy" (Elbagir & Davey-Attlee, 2019, para. 14). Less than one month later, Colonel Turki Al-Maliki, a spokesman for the SLC, told CNN that Saudi forces use all military equipment in accordance with terms and conditions of FMS (Elbagir & Davey-Attlee, 2019).

Collateral Damage

From the onset of the conflict, the SLC's targeting methodology was in question when reports of civilians killed from bombing operations caught the international community's attention. Reports that the coalition intentionally targeted civilians and civilian facilities filled the news streams. To date, the international community accused the coalition of airstrikes on hospitals, schools, residential areas, civilian infrastructure, mosques, markets, and wedding halls. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), coalition airstrikes "reportedly killed 8,120 Yemeni civilians from March 2015 to March 2020, out of 12,690 civilians reported killed overall, and among more than 100,000 Yemenis that have died in the conflict" (Sharp et al., 2020, p. 1). While the US continues to affirm that they do not have a role in the coalition's targeting decisions, the rubble repeatedly reveals shrapnel from US munitions (Price, 2015).

Though some lawmakers such as former Senator Bob Corker, defend US arms sales and military support to the coalition claiming both help mitigate civilian casualties

and collateral damage, others fear the support may implicate the US in war crimes violating international law (*Congress.gov,* 2016). The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council mandated the Group of Independent Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen to conduct a comprehensive human rights investigation. In a 41-page report, the experts determined "individuals in the Government of Yemen and the coalition, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and in the [*sic*] de facto authorities have committed acts that may, subject to determination by an independent and competent court, amount to international crimes" (Jendoubi et al., 2018, para. 4).

Humanitarian Crisis

Yemen was considered one of the least developed countries by the UN in 2011 (*Secondary Data*, 2011). Therefore, when the Arab Spring sparked civil unrest throughout the country, the situation only worsened, creating a humanitarian crisis. A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2011 report stated: "the capacity of government service providers, civil society, and the humanitarian community to cope with current levels of displacement and conflict are being pushed to their limits" (as cited in *Secondary Data*, 2011, p. 1). While the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) assessed "further fighting and displacement, especially across the south, can transform the current crisis into a full-blown humanitarian disaster" (*Secondary Data*, 2011, p. 1). The United Nations World Food Programme reports that there are currently 3.65 million internally displaced people (IDP), 20.1 million people facing hunger, and 24.3 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance throughout Yemen (*Yemen Country Brief*, n.d.). As could be expected, the last five years of conflict has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and left Yemen in ruins.

At the onset of Operation Decisive Storm, the SLC implemented an air and naval blockade on Yemen to prevent weapons from reaching Houthi forces. Therefore, all cargo brought into the country were required to be inspected by coalition forces. The inspection process caused delayed goods, leading to an increase in insurance and associated shipping costs (Sharp, 2020). Since Yemen imports approximately 90 percent of its food supply from foreign sources, the newly imposed inspection's and associated delays further amplified Yemen's catastrophe (Sharp, 2020).

The UN established the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) in February 2016 to mitigate the inspection process's effects on the humanitarian crisis and augment coalition inspectors. The UNVIM consists of the European Union, Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the US (Sharp, 2020). Humanitarian cargo did not have to undergo UNVIM inspection procedures. Instead, they were required to get authorization from a coalition-run humanitarian deconfliction cell in Riyadh to expedite the inspection processes for humanitarian cargo (Coppi, 2018). However, there were still reported delays in humanitarian aid.

From the time that the coalition intervened in Yemen until now, the civilian infrastructure effectiveness went from insufficient to unusable. With the SLC targeting hospitals, airports, schools, docks, electricity stations, bridges, roadways, fuel stations, and food supplies, all aspects of Yemenis' lives were affected. Additionally, due to the

interruption of logistics supply routes caused by the SLC bombings, humanitarian aid organizations find it difficult to even get the aid into the country. Airports that were once relied upon to receive the assistance are not just piles of rubble. Ports once used to offload supplies from ships are now only craters on the Earth. Hospitals used to care for patients safely are now piles of rebar and concrete. The coalition's indiscriminate targeting of civilian infrastructure drastically hinders the desperately needed humanitarian relief.

Although the US remains a supporter of the SLC and its overall objectives, they acknowledge the disastrous effects the war has caused on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. While also continuing to exert its influence over the coalition, the US remains dedicated to providing humanitarian aid to Yemen. Table 1 depicts the amount of US emergency assistance provided to Yemen from FY 2015 through FY 2020, with the total amounting to over 3 billion US dollars (*Yemen Fact Sheets*, 2020).

Table 1

Total US Government Humanitarian Funding FY 2015 – FY 2020

Account	***FY2015***	***FY2016***	***FY2017***	***FY2018***	***FY2019***	***FY2020***
USAID/OFDA[a]	$13,706,594	$81,576,334	$115,313,225	$229,783,475	$102,058,924	$116,352,664
USAID/FFP[b]	$39,900,000	$196,988,400	$313,803,384	$499,626,445	$594,548,790	$442,513,883
State/PRM[c]	$20,900,000	$48,950,000	$38,125,000	$38,125,000	$49,800,000	$71,580,000
TOTAL	**$74,506,594**	**$327,514,734**	**$467,240,609**	**$767,534,920**	**$746,407,714**	**$630,446,547**

Note: The source for the data provided in this table is USAID.

[a] *USAID's Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance funds cover activities such as logistics support, agriculture and food security, and shelter and settlements.* [b] *USAID's Food for Peace funds provides for food vouchers, food aid, and procurement.* [c] *US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration funds offer humanitarian assistance, camp coordination and management, and refugee response activities.*

Current US Policies in Yemen

According to the DOS' Integrated Country Strategy for Yemen, US policy efforts are focused on supporting a UN-mediated resolution to the conflict in Yemen (2018). Additionally, the US will support the UN Special Envoy to Yemen in restarting

negotiations and the agreements decided upon through those discussions (Department of State, 2018). The US will remain committed to mitigating the humanitarian crisis and helping the Yemeni systems recover from the conflict. To reduce fighting over scarce resources, the US will focus on providing access to social and economic services (Department of State, 2018). The US will help the legitimate government of Yemen security forces enhance their counterterrorism and trafficking interdiction capabilities (Department of State, 2018).

Operating Without a Strategy

While some justify the US' role in Yemen's conflict because of the perceived proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, others claim the only reason the US is supporting the conflict is to remain loyal to Saudi Arabia and preserve their relationship despite the destructive outcome. Those who believe the latter and disapprove of US support cite the U.S.' damaged reputation for upholding responsibilities to human rights and international law and the perceived lack of US influence over the coalition amid deteriorating humanitarian crisis. On the other hand, those who support US involvement argue that withdrawing support would weaken Saudi Arabia and cost the US a key strategic ally (Sharp et al., 2020).

Regardless of why the US decided to support the coalition, one thing is true: the US did not have a clearly defined strategy as a sponsor of the SLC in Yemen. In 2014, when the Houthis attempted to take over Sana'a, the US joined Saudi Arabia to publicly demand that the Houthis forsake their planned operation to capture Sana'a. However, "...the rapid onset of hostilities in March 2015 forced the Obama Administration to react quickly" (Sharp et al., 2020, p. 1). The devastating and unintended consequences paired with unwavering support from the US President despite domestic and international pressure to withdraw support for the SLC who have made little to no sustainable progress in Yemen confirms the US did not have a clearly defined or united strategy to sponsor the coalition.

Strained Relationships

When policies and strategies are in disarray or do not exist, relationships between all parties involved in the process suffer. Because IC members and policymakers rely on a well-defined and focused strategy, anything short of that can be problematic when developing policies and directing intelligence priorities. Those problems appear in multiple ways including wasted resources, loss of faith in the system, and blaming others. Despite how the problems appear, they typically end the same way--with strained relationships.

The challenge with providing evidence on strained relationships within the government is that they are not typically widely publicized. There are so many more important issues to address that internal discontent between individuals does not usually get reported. Additionally, most agencies prefer to keep internal issues private to avoid unnecessary exposure.

Policymakers and the Intelligence Community

The relationship between policymakers and IC members is vital to ensuring foreign policy decisions are supported by current intelligence. Therefore, external stressors placed on these relationships cause internal issues that could lead to systemic issues. One frequent stressor placed on the IC by policymakers when policies are under scrutiny and do not achieve their intended effects is blame. A contrite saying among intelligence officers is, "[t]here are only policy successes and intelligence failures. There are no policy failures and intelligence successes" (Lowenthal, 2020, p. 257).

All too often, policymakers expect the IC to make accurate predictions and have all of the answers. However, the reality is that there are things the IC will not know or predict. According to Paul Pillar, "it would be far less comforting to conclude that mistaken images underlying failed policies had sources less susceptible to repair, that relevant misperceptions resided more in our own heads or the heads of political leaders we elected than in unelected bureaucracies, or that some of the most important things we did not know were unknowable to anyone on our side, even if we had the most exemplary intelligence service" (2014, p. 3). These unrealistic expectations can cause resentment between policymakers and intelligence analysts. Those negative feelings, if left alone could cause individuals to avoid each other and potentially lead to larger systemic issues.

President of the United States and Congress

Like the relationship between policymakers and the IC, the relationship between the President of the United States (POTUS) and Congress is pivotal to shaping foreign policy and achieving national security objectives. The ability to pass legislation is shared between the POTUS and Congress. Once proposed legislation passes through Congress it goes to the POTUS for consideration (*The Legislative Branch*, n.d.). The POTUS has the power to veto a bill but Congress has the authority to override the veto. Congress holds the "power of the purse" which means that it establishes the annual budget for the government and determines where the funds will come from (*The Legislative Branch*, n.d.). Additionally, Congress is responsible for oversight of the executive branch to monitor the POTUS' power (*The Legislative Branch*, n.d.). Lastly, Congress has the sole power to declare war.

Although there appear to be clear delineations between the POTUS' powers and Congress' powers, there are some grey areas that can strain the relationship between the POTUS and Congress. One of those grey areas surfaced when President Barack Obama made the decision to pledge US support to the SLC without the authorization from Congress. As the situation in Yemen worsened, Congress has made multiple attempts to pass legislation that would withdraw US forces from unauthorized conflict in Yemen citing the violation of the War Powers Resolution. According to the War Powers Resolution passed in 1973, "[t]he President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situation where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances, and after every such introduction shall consult regularly with the Congress until United States Armed Forces are no longer engaged in hostilities or have been removed from such situations" (*War Powers Resolution,* 1973). However, former Acting General

Counsel of the DOD, William Castle, asserted that the War Powers Resolution was not applicable to US actions in support of the SLC because US forces were not introduced to hostilities in Yemen (2018, as cited in Hathaway & Haviland, 2018).

In April 2019, Congress successfully passed a bipartisan bill to end US military assistance to the SLC by invoking War Powers Resolution but President Donald Trump vetoed it. In a statement to the Senate, President Trump said, “this resolution is an unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities, endangering the lives of American citizens and brave service members, both today and in the future” (*Presidential Veto Message to the Senate*, 2019). Congress did not override his veto and the US is currently still providing support to the SLC in Yemen.

When the POTUS and Congress disagree on an issue, especially with a bipartisan vote by Congress the outcome can cause strained relationships. In this instance, Congress wanted to retain the right to commit US forces to activities outside of the US and the POTUS wanted to retain his right to deploy US forces anywhere throughout the world as a precautionary measure. Both views can be seen as acceptable but if the outcome does not involve a compromise between the two entities relationships will likely be damaged.

Inherent Enemies

According to Richard Betts, intelligence has three sets of enemies: outside enemies, innocent enemies, and inherent enemies (2007). Each set qualifies as an intelligence enemy because they all, whether intentional or not, cause problems for intelligence and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of intelligence. The first set of enemies is the most obvious and is the easiest to define: the “outside enemies” (Betts, 2007, p. 9). Outside enemies are a nation’s foreign adversaries, whether known or unknown, who want to distort or obscure their intentions, vulnerabilities, and capabilities (Betts, 2007). Some outside enemies are North Korea, Iran, Russia, AQAP, and the Houthis. Outside enemies intentionally threaten intelligence.

The second set of enemies is not as apparent as outside enemies. In fact, they themselves, may not even know that they are enemies of intelligence because they threaten intelligence inadvertently (Betts, 2007). Therefore, they are called “innocent enemies” (Betts, 2007, p. 10). An example of an innocent enemy is an intelligence professional who allows inefficient processes to impede intelligence in any phase: collection, processing, analysis, or dissemination (Betts, 2007). Another example of an innocent enemy is someone who tries to intentionally obstruct intelligence collection methods because they infringe on other areas like the constitutional rights of citizens or the LOAC. Although some may see these enemies as noble and blameless, despite their motives, they still threaten intelligence (Betts, 2007).

The third and last set of enemies is the hardest to perceive and comprehend, especially for those not in the intelligence system (Betts, 2007). In fact, this third set of enemies is not even a person or a group of people. Instead, it is a group of dysfunctions that arise from human conditions and the intelligence process (Betts, 2007). They are “inherent enemies” because they come from intrinsic qualities and processes (Betts,

2007, p. 12). According to Betts, inherent enemies are cognitive limitations, problems without adequate solutions, contradictory demands, inconsistent interactions, and compromises in the intelligence process that prevent proper judgment and assessment (2007). Inherent enemies are strengthened by outside enemies whose intentional actions aim to deceive and take advantage of misjudgments.

Among the group of dysfunctions that arise from human conditions are the limitations of cognitive processes (Betts, 2007). While the human brain can retain an insurmountable amount of information, it is not infallible. At its best, the brain's ability to retain and interpret information is amorphous and biased. Things such as age, attention span, emotions, amount of information, and exposure methods all contribute to limited cognitive processes (Pappas, 2016). Another dysfunction with inherent enemies is the intricate entanglement of intelligence requirements. Because some requirements overlap with one another, fulfilling one could cause problems for the other. These problems exist because of the intricacies and uncertainties associated with providing intelligence and assessments in a complex environment.

When strategies are not well-defined, policies will not be focused or useful, and intelligence will be nearly useless, leaving strategists, policymakers, and intelligence analysts frustrated and trying to fix the issues. In doing so, confusion and frustration can and will breed inherent enemies. Thereby causing analysts, policymakers, and strategists to experience limited cognitive processes to an even greater degree than when they are not baffled and irritated. Additionally, it is highly likely that there will be an overabundance of contradicting requirements and demands levied upon individuals at all levels. Of which, there will be many trade-offs among objectives in the intelligence process.

Outdated Priorities

Because the US intelligence community (IC) serves in a support role and without a policy agenda of its own, strategists and policymakers must communicate intelligence requirements and priorities (Fingar, 2012). Those priorities are currently relayed to the IC through the National Intelligence Priorities Framework, more commonly referred to as the NIPF. According to the Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 204, "the NIPF is the primary mechanism to establish, disestablish, manage, and communicate national intelligence priorities" (2015, p. 1). The NIPF, published annually and reassessed quarterly, aims to ensure the IC knows where to focus its efforts on national security issues. The US President and National Security Advisor determine the overall priorities on top-level issues.

Additionally, secretaries and cabinet-level department and agency heads that request national intelligence support can provide input during the creation of the NIPF (*Intelligence Community*, 2015, p. 2). However, long-standing issues regarding senior officials' responsibility to integrate intelligence and policy through guidance. Frequently, they lack sufficient understanding of intelligence, are task saturated, and therefore forced to send subordinates to meetings that progressively occur less frequently (*Preparing for*, 1996, as cited in Betts, 2007).

As early as the 1970s, intelligence agency managers attempted to fill the void by "providing policy-relevant guidance themselves" (Betts, 2007, p. 72). An excellent example of this creation of key intelligence questions (KIQ). William Colby, "the director of central intelligence [*sic*] established the key intelligence questions (KIQs) to 'identify problems of particular interest to national policymakers'" ("Church Committee," 1977, as cited in Betts, 2007). He wanted KIQs to provide guidance for all IC agencies to ensure synergistic efforts focused on the same national security issues. However, he lacked the necessary authority to enforce the KIQs across all agencies (Betts, 2007). In addition to departmental independence, the KIQs were not effective because they lacked focused priorities and inundated the system.

By the late 1990s, intelligence agency managers were still struggling to prioritize intelligence needs. With short-lived success, they prioritized current intelligence requirements over long-term analysis needs (Betts, 2007). Because current intelligence equipped decisionmakers with the information needed to address immediate fires, there was little debate over the process (Betts, 2007). It was not until the mistaken assessment of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program that decisionmakers realized the need for more in-depth research and long-term analysis focused on difficult questions.

Today's NIPF is no different from the processes of the past. It is of little use without an overarching strategy. Without a strategy, policymakers and intelligence analysts lack the necessary guidance, objectives, and priorities required to update the NIPF. Thereby forcing intelligence agency managers to develop their own internal priorities to ensure they collect and report information that they feel may be most valuable to policymakers. If that information is not valuable, policymakers will make less informed decisions and potentially feel less comfortable about those decisions. Moreover, the IC will likely not provide pertinent feedback on implemented policies to determine if updates are required. If well-thought-out strategies and policies exist, the only action left would be to ensure the NIPF is updated to reflect the high priority issues so the IC can inform and advise policymakers. However, because the NIPF is a classified document that reflects national security priorities it is not publicly available to determine the priorities prior to March 2015 and those after hostilities commenced.

Recommendations

Long-term Analysis

The purpose of intelligence is to reduce and manage the unknowns and uncertainties while providing insight into today's complex and multipolar issues (Fingar, 2012). In the past, policymakers only had to consider a small group's capabilities and intentions known as major powers. Those groups consisted of conventional forces who wore uniforms and were easy to find. During those conflicts, policymakers never had to second-guess their opponent's identity. Unlike previous engagements, there are far more adversaries in the major powers category today, and those considered lesser powers have a significant amount of influence (Fingar, 2012). Today's adversaries are unconventional forces who do not wear uniforms or distinguish themselves from the

civilian population. Due to their globalization, they do not have boundaries that would make locating them easy. In fact, the real adversary may not even participate in the fighting. Instead, they may choose to be an external actor sponsoring proxy forces to achieve their objectives. Therefore, intelligence is instrumental in formulating and implementing policies (Fingar, 2012).

While formulating policies, the IC can conduct in-depth intelligence preparation of the operational environment (IPOE) to help policymakers determine future policies. The IC can provide background information on adversaries and identify key relationships that could complicate US policies. That information would allow policymakers to enact more targeted policies that consider possible third-party interventions and effects. The IC can also provide useful historical and trend analysis to determine possible adversary COAs. Although policymakers may already have some historical information, it is improbable that they would have access to comprehensive records and conduct trend analysis without the help of the IC. With this data, IC members can provide predictive assessments and attach confidence levels to possible adversary COAs and US policies' reactions.

There has always been a competition between current intelligence and long-term intelligence reports (Lowenthal, 2020). Current intelligence reports seem more applicable in the short-term because they provide information on confirmed adversaries and issues applicable in the near-term. Current intelligence reports are also more succinct and quicker to read and digest. In comparison, long-term intelligence reports provide information on potential threats that may pose a problem in the future. Additionally, long-term intelligence reports are typically very lengthy and intricate, requiring policymakers to allocate time in their already task-saturated day to read about a possible upcoming threat (Lowenthal, 2020). Another factor that affects policymakers' desires to focus on long-term intelligence analysis is that they think and plan for a four-year block of time that spans the length of the presidential administration (Lowenthal, 2020). Once their tenure is over, their ability to influence policy is significantly lower. Additionally, so many things could change over the course of four to eight years that their efforts are probably best spent on the short-term issues that require immediate or near-term solutions. Therefore, policymakers typically prioritize the current intelligence reports over the long-term analysis reports.

Yemen's current situation is a dire example of the US neglecting long-term intelligence analysis and the grim and very costly consequences of that carelessness. From the moment the US recognized the civil unrest in Yemen, they should have tasked the IC to work on an in-depth and long-term analysis of the situation. Although long-term analysis is a continual process, analysts would have been able to conduct IPOE and monitor the situation on the ground for potential escalation indicators. Although policymakers would likely not have had much time to get an in-depth briefing on everything, intelligence analysts could inform them of the significant issues, players, and factors involved in the situation. Once policymakers started brainstorming and developing policies, more-informed intelligence analysts could have assisted by providing suggestions, additional information, and combatting policy proposals that

could lead to further issues. This interactive relationship between policymakers and intelligence analysts would have ensured the US was much more prepared to support the SLC at the onset of the operation.

Sponsor-led Intelligence Assessments

After the policymakers implement the policies, intelligence is essential to monitoring the policies to determine if changes are required. Because all policies aim to achieve a specific effect, intelligence analysts' feedback will provide intended and unintended effects. Additionally, feedback will allow intelligence analysts to identify variables that can affect the likelihood of assessed Course of Action (Pillar, 2014). After determining their original policies' effectiveness, they can use the updated Course of Action from the IC to make course corrections as necessary to achieve the overall objective. Without feedback, determining the effectiveness of policies would be a challenge.

Regardless of whether the US acted in a sponsor role or as a key partner, the IC should monitor US policies' effects in support of the coalition. When President Obama agreed to support the SLC in their efforts to re-establish the legitimate Yemeni government, he should have tasked the IC with monitoring the effects of US policies and the situation in Yemen. That feedback is essential to know what is going on, monitor the impact on the preexisting humanitarian crisis, and influence current and future policies and support. It would have also allowed the US to intervene at the onset of collateral damage issues, the reallocation of military equipment and weapons, and possibly preventing the humanitarian crisis from deteriorating to the nearly irreversible extent.

Conclusion

The events that have transpired since March 2015 highlight the fact that the US lacks a clearly defined strategy as a sponsor of the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen. From the onset of the campaign, the POTUS pledged US support to Saudi Arabia without the authorization from Congress. That detail, although a point of contention, speaks to the lack of unity within the US government. Without unity, it is impossible to argue that there was a clearly defined strategy from the beginning of the conflict. Since then, the US has provided aerial refueling, intelligence, targeting support, and logistical support in the form of military equipment and weapons. With little to no control or oversight, the US is suffering the insurmountable consequences of ill-guided support to the coalition. Now that there are 3.65 million Yemenis homeless, 24.3 million people in severe need of humanitarian aid, and the US may potentially face war crimes, it is evident that the US still does not have a strategy to support their role as a sponsor (Yemen Country Brief, n.d.).

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