

YEMEN'S TRAGEDY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India- West Asia

The Saudi-led coalition, in which the UAE was a part, started bombing Yemen in 2015, hoping to swiftly dislodge the Houthi rebels from Sana'a and reinstate the government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in the capital. Almost seven years later, the Iran-backed Houthis, who were holed up in northern Yemen and began counter-attacks with missiles and drones into Saudi Arabia, have expanded the war all the way to the Gulf coast of the UAE. Monday's [drone attacks on Abu Dhabi by the Houthis](#), in which [two Indians](#) and a Pakistani were killed, were a message to the Emiratis on what they are capable of. It may not be a coincidence that the attacks were carried out at a time when the UAE-backed forces have been making slow gains in Yemen's conflict against the Houthis. But the UAE's involvement in Yemen has had many turns. It quit the Saudi-led coalition in 2020 as the war had hit a stalemate. Since then, the Emiratis have provided tactical support to the Southern Transitional Council, a separatist body in southern Yemen that drove the Saudi-backed forces loyal to President Hadi out of Aden. The dynamics changed again when the Houthis began pushing into territories outside their stronghold, especially Marib; if they take Marib, they would be a step ahead to push into the south. Faced with the prospects of further Houthi territorial gains, UAE-backed forces such as Giants Brigades (a militia from the south) have joined hands with the government. Then came the Abu Dhabi attacks.

These could escalate the conflict. The immediate response from the Saudi-led coalition has been to carry out a massive air strike on the partly destroyed Sana'a. The UAE has also vowed retaliation. A Houthi strike to scare away the Emiratis from Yemen could trigger the opposite reaction from Abu Dhabi, which now has powerful proxies in the south. The cycle of violence spells tragic news for Yemen's 30 million people for whom the country has been turned into what UNICEF has called "a living hell". Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Arab world, is facing a three-way crisis — thousands have been killed in the conflict, many more abandoned or suffering by the collapse of the government and social services; and mass hunger. The first step to address this tragedy is to end the fighting. But, unfortunately, the parties in the conflict and their regional backers are keen on escalating the conflict further rather than finding a solution. If the fighting over the last seven years holds any lesson, it is that there can be no military solution to Yemen's problems. To dial down tensions, there have to be talks, not only between the rebels, separatists and the government but also between their backers — Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. If these regional powers agree to rein in their proxies and work towards rebuilding Yemen, that would also help them restore stability and security in the Arabian peninsula.

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