

YEMEN'S WOES

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

The [withdrawal of Houthi rebels from three of Yemen's ports](#) as part of the December 2018 ceasefire agreement should have been the basis for further talks to expand the truce to other parts of the country. But while the withdrawal was under way last week, Houthis, who are reportedly getting support from Iran, carried out a drone attack on a Saudi pipeline, and in retaliation Riyadh launched airstrikes on Sanaa, the capital city controlled by the rebels, killing at least six civilians, including children. Yemen now risks falling back to the pre-ceasefire days of conflict with fighting having broken out in parts of the government-controlled south. What makes the resumption of hostilities more dangerous is the regional angle. Tensions are on the rise in West Asia over the U.S.-Iran standoff. The U.S. had earlier warned against possible attacks by either Iran or Iran-backed militias against American interests or its allies in the region, and has deployed an aircraft carrier and a bomber squad to the Gulf. Immediately after the pipeline was attacked, the Saudis blamed Iran for ordering it, an allegation which both Tehran and the Houthis have refuted. Whether Iran was actually behind the attack or not, the incident and the subsequent Saudi airstrikes show how the Yemeni conflict is entangled with the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Explainer: All you need to know about the new peace agreement on Yemen

Saudi Arabia started its Yemen military campaign in March 2015 with the goal of driving Houthis out of territories they captured. Four years of war have devastated the country. According to the UN, at least 7,000 civilians have been killed. Thousands of others have died due to disease, poor health care and malnutrition. The blockade Saudi Arabia imposed on Yemen steadily worsened the country's hunger problem and health-care crisis. The country is on the brink of a famine. It's a shame that even when the ceasefire was holding, the Saudis did not halt bombing Yemen. Saudi Arabia appears to be frustrated that it is not able to defeat the Houthis even after years of heavy bombing. The Houthis, on their part, continue to provoke the Saudis through cross-border rocket and drone attacks. The Yemenis are stuck in between. The way forward is the Hodeida model. The December ceasefire took effect in the Red Sea port city and both the rebels and government forces stuck to it till the rebels pulled out last week. They should continue talks under international mediation and replicate the Hodeida model elsewhere in Yemen. For this to be achieved, the Houthis should decouple themselves from the regional politics, and stay focussed on resolving differences with the government and rebuilding the war-torn country, while Saudi Arabia should get out of Yemen.

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