Five years ago, Saudi Arabia, under the pretext of coming to the aid of a legitimate Yemen government led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi at the time, spearheaded a coalition consisting of 10 Arabic nations that began Operation Decisive Storm against the majority-Zaidi Shia Houthi movement (or Ansar Allah, the Arabic for “Helpers/Supporters of God”) in Yemen.

In the author’s opinion, at the time, such an armed response to increasing unrest in September 2014 caused by the opposition, comprised of Zaydis from the north of the country fighting against Riyadh’s puppets and the alliance between the Yemen government and the United States, supposedly, to re-establish a Shi'i theocracy (which had ruled in the north of Yemen prior to the military coup in 1962), seemed like a walk in the park to Saudi Arabia. The United Arab Emirates (the UAE) was Riyadh’s key ally in the anti-Houthi coalition.

However, from the onset, this “Blitzkrieg” was stopped in its tracks by the firm opposition from the Houthis, supported by Iran behind the scenes. The war quickly became a drawn-out conflict with numerous casualties and, most importantly, a high price tag for Riyadh as more of its servicemen were killed, equipment destroyed and costs of replacements rising substantially. Aside from the initial miscalculations, more issues arose as Saudi Arabia’s key allies in the Yemeni Civil War, the Emirs, from 2016 to 2017 lost their zeal. And at the end of 2019, Sudan, a country that provided many troops, withdrew from the coalition. In addition, the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South
of which were in fact Iranian versions of man-portable anti-tank guided missile Kornet. However, it is impossible to
Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that from a single batch, the United States confiscated 358 missiles, half
intercepted vessels transporting modern anti-tank and air-to-surface missiles. In the middle of February, US
The US Navy has been trying to block supplies of military aid for Houthi rebels, and has, on a regular basis,
unwillingness to continue with the military intervention in Yemen and their desire to withdraw their troops from this
of this war, and by minimizing their involvement in it, in this tough economic climate, they are demonstrating their
There is seemingly growing fatigue as a result of the conflict among the members of the Saudi-led coalition as they
It should seem obvious to everyone now that assisting President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had fled Sana'a in
January 2015, was not the actual reason behind Saudi Arabia’s armed intervention in Yemen - instead the nation’s
strategy and its fossil fuel resources were. While the United Arab Emirates prioritized their commercial and
economic ambitions to extend their influence along the entire coast of Horn of Africa and to Yemen, Saudi Arabia
was primarily interested in controlling Yemen’s crude oil riches. Further evidence to this hypothesis is added by the
fact that, since the UAE announced the withdrawal of its troops from Yemen, Saudi forces have focused on territories
with fossil fuel deposits, such as Shabwah and Ma’rib, in addition to Hadhramaut. One of Saudi Arabia’s aims is to
gain control over Al Mahrah Governorate in order to then lay oil pipelines in this region, which will pass through
Yemeni territories to the Arabian Sea, thus providing an alternative route for exporting oil from the Persian Gulf and
mitigating constant threats made by Tehran to close the Strait of Hormuz.
Starting in autumn of last year, the Houthis started to make visible progress against forces loyal to President
Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The rebels began its military push at the end of February. By attacking from various
directions, they broke through the defenses of the government forces near the town of Al Hazm and captured it. It is
a fairly small but key town of Al Jawf Governorate and is also the gateway from the mountainous regions of the
country to the flatter Ma’rib Governorate where key oil and gas production facilities are located. Hence, after the
Houthis seized the town of Al Hazm and, therefore, gained access to the nation’s key oil and gas fields in Ma’rib
Governorate, Saudi Arabia’s entire military intervention was suddenly in danger of failing with any potential
financial benefits from it becoming unlikely.
Yet another loss for the Saudi-led coalition has demonstrated that the conflict in Yemen has truly bogged Riyadh
down. Saudi Arabia has spent a lot of money on this intervention but it is still on the losing side, as it continues to
lose not only its troops and military equipment but also its face. According to various sources, since 2015, the Royal
Saudi Air Forces alone have lost from 1,000 to 3,000 soldiers and officers not only in Yemen but also in the kingdom
itself, as a result of missile strikes and cross-border ground operations carried out by Houthi rebels. In recent years,
the opposition troops fighting the Saudi-led coalition have launched more than 1,000 ballistic and cruise missiles
against targets in Saudi Arabia and towards the UAE, and against the “occupation forces” in Yemen itself. Important
military and oil production facilities in the kingdom have come under fire. One of the biggest attacks, which was
widely publicized globally, was the air strike targeting Saudi Aramco’s oil processing facilities in the east of the
country in September of last year. The incident caused the oil production capacity in one of the largest kingdoms in
the Arab world to almost halve. The attack affected not only the country’s oil outputs but crude oil exports too.
In the current global economic climate, as oil prices are falling, continuing with the military intervention may result
in economic hardship in Saudi Arabia itself. And, of course, more attacks by Houthi rebels against Saudi facilities for
extracting, processing and transporting its “black gold” are possible.
There is seemingly growing fatigue as a result of the conflict among the members of the Saudi-led coalition as they
use up more and more of their resources. Many allies within the coalition have already understood the pointlessness
of this war, and by minimizing their involvement in it, in this tough economic climate, they are demonstrating their
unwillingness to continue with the military intervention in Yemen and their desire to withdraw their troops from this
nation.
The US Navy has been trying to block supplies of military aid for Houthi rebels, and has, on a regular basis,
intercepted vessels transporting modern anti-tank and air-to-surface missiles. In the middle of February, US
Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that from a single batch, the United States confiscated 358 missiles, half
of which were in fact Iranian versions of man-portable anti-tank guided missile Kornet. However, it is impossible to
stop the supply of weapons to Houthi rebels completely.

Considering all of this, Saudi Arabia, with the assistance of the United Nations, is conducting behind-the-scenes negotiations with the opposition on establishing peace and on the cessation of attacks targeting its territories.

The armed conflict, which began in 2015, has resulted in the biggest humanitarian crisis in the region at present. According to UN data, 70% of Yemen’s population or approximately 20 million people are starving. More than 2.5 million Yemeni citizens have suffered from cholera. The 5-year conflict and the accompanying domestic crisis have led to the death of hundreds of thousands of Yemeni citizens, one tenth of these individuals have died as a result of air strikes conducted by the coalition.

At the United Nations, the ongoing civil war in Yemen is referred to as one of the biggest humanitarian disasters in modern times. International organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a report in time for the 5-year anniversary of the Yemeni civil war. The document holds Saudi Arabia and the kingdom-led coalition responsible for perpetuating the conflict in Yemen and for committing crimes against humanity during this war.

*Valery Kulikov, political analyst, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.*