As of March 25th 2021 Yemen will have been at war for six full years, caught in the grip of a conflict which has proven as cruel as it has been relentless in its disappearing of Yemen’s socio-political fabric and its once burgeoning democratic tradition.

If Yemen’s conflict screams of covert colonialism and a desire to control one of Arabia’s most prominent petro-geopolitical chokepoints, its downfall was essentially precipitated by a lack of strong governance. If Yemen’s institutions had proven stronger and more in line with its particular socio-political idiosyncrasies, it is unlikely the nation’s sovereignty would have been breached by the fires of war, its skies darkened by the fury of several military superpowers.

Yemen, history will almost certainly remember, was a victim of its untapped potential - its failure to launch so to speak. Let us remember that if Yemen has not been endowed with huge oil reserves like other of its Arab counterparts, it nevertheless lies on the nerve centre of oil transit and transport to Europe, USA and Asia due to its proximity to Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden. Its strategic location manifold increases its geopolitical significance - something Yemen’s warring parties and the broader coalitions which represent and support them,
understand only too well.

On the eve of its seventh year of conflict Yemen sits on the edge of a knife ... and yet for all the catastrophes the impoverished nation was made to endure, hope remains; rebirth could, if willed collectively, offer the promise of a brilliant future - one which would unburden itself from past mistakes to reinvent itself a grand modern democratic project, on the basis of gender equality and strong governance.

Prior to the current conflict, power and resources in Yemen were consolidated at the central level by a group of political, social, tribal and military elites, a reality which intrinsically prevented any meaningful form of social and economic mobility.

Yemen’s elite’s failures to decentralise and clamp down on corruption only served to feed the fire of dissent.

A country divided between two governments: an internationally recognized government led by President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, based in Riyadh, and a de facto government run by Ansar Allah from the country’s capital, Sana’a, both competing authorities have so far failed to provide basic services to citizens, thus opening Yemen to rapid disintegration.

There is no military victory to be had in Yemen. Any delay in brokering peace will only serve to embolden those fringed armed groups, that, from the shadows, wait for an opportunity.

Both the international and regional community ought to conceptualize a new approach to Yemen, beyond the brokering of ceasefires to instead focus on working on national solutions - without losing sight of Yemen’s regional distinct needs and thus build towards long-term governance.

Today’s failures are very much the result of such oversight.

President Hadi’s government currently lacks the capacity and infrastructure as well as the political clout required to operate inside Yemen in a cohesive and meaningful way.

As for the Houthi, Hadi’s main opponents, they have depleted state revenues to finance their military efforts at the expense of basic services.

But that is not all, Yemen’s ills have also been compounded by the emergence of armed non-state actors - a direct result of Yemen’s chronic governance vacuum

Given the current absence of consolidated strong central institutions, further fragmentation is prone to happen.

The current two-party settlement, (Riyadh Agreement - 2019) is unlikely to translate into long-lasting peace. Most of the northern governorates are under Houthi control, which would suggest that the agreement is logistically impractical. Northern ministers will lack decision-making authority in the region, a direct challenge to the overall authority of the state and the Republic as it stands today.

Further recalibration will thus need to be considered if in fact one wishes to reinstate a sense of political and institutional legitimacy, so that the government could represent a fully functioning federated Yemen.

Beyond political inclusiveness through fair and equal representation of Yemen’s many social, political and religious iterations, any meaningful resolution will need to accelerate the participation of women.

To exclude women, over half of Yemen’s total demographic from the current peace-brokering narrative will only lead to further failures, notwithstanding misery for millions of already endangered souls.

While Yemen’s crisis is most dire, it is not isolated, rather it has become symptomatic of a wide-spread malaise. Indeed, our 21st century has been defined in violence and political instability, and as data shows, standard peace-making methods have proven ineffective at addressing such trends - nearly half of the conflict-resolution agreements forged during the 1990s have failed within five years of their signing.

Recidivism for civil war is alarmingly high, with 90 percent of civil wars in the 2000s occurring in countries that had already experienced civil war during the previous thirty years. It is this reality all actors engaged in brokering Yemen’s peace must grapple with and more importantly still, ought to overcome. If no real solution has been brought to the table as yet it is now painfully obvious that for Yemen to attain peace and security, new thinking is needed.

As it were, Yemen’s solution may lie with the one demographic that has been systematically overlooked over the
The United Nations Security Council clearly acknowledged in Resolution 1325 the benefits of women’s participation in long-term conflict resolution ... and yet few efforts have been spent in Yemen to include them.

The 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference included relatively strong female voices. Almost 30% of its participants were women. Over the years, the number of women represented in these developments has dwindled as progress towards gender equality has stalled. No women participated in the 2019 negotiations of the Riyadh Agreement, a trend which we fear could lead to disastrous effects.

A growing body of research suggests that women’s participation in conflict prevention and resolution advances security interests. One study found that substantial inclusion of women and civil society groups in a peace negotiation makes the resulting agreement 64 percent less likely to fail and, according to another study, 35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years. Several analyses also suggest that higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower propensity for conflict, both between and within states.

By strengthening women’s participation in a country such as Yemen, which suffers from a litany of overlapping and interrelating issues, could allow for strides to be made towards stability as well as cementing much needed socio-economic advancement.

For Yemen to successfully rebuild itself, all actors would need to work together and pull together in unity to achieve political stability through the promotion of strong governance.

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