

This is Cameron Lallana reporting with Hershee Gupta.

Today we will be returning to the Yemeni Civil War, taking a closer look into the immeasurable human cost of the conflict, which is now close to its third year, with no end in sight. Later, we'll cover the state of human rights and the Yemeni people after years of total war. But before we delve into that, I'll be talking with Mohammad Aburak about the history of the Houthi and Southern Transitional Council resistance to the central government among a few other topics.

Mohammad has a lot of insight to offer, so stick around. And thanks for listening to KDVS news.

Play interview

And that was Mohammad Aburak.

Many Americans may remember the highly-secretive Joint Special Operations Command raid in Yemen last January that left one Navy SEAL dead in the infamous first Special Forces operation of the Trump presidency. What they might not remember, though, was the less-covered story of the civilians who died that night. Journalists with The Bureau of Investigative Reporting spoke with the people in the village in the days after the attack, and tallied a total of 25 civilians killed—including one American citizen, Nawar al Awlaki. Such has been the pattern of reporting on civilian life in Yemen—which is to say, almost not at all. Little has been disseminated to the general public about the war which has left, according to the UN, more than 21 million people in dire need of aid, and subjected the Yemeni people to what is projected to be the worst cholera epidemic in recorded history. As of the end of January 2018, the WHO reports slightly over a million suspected cases of cholera and around a thousand fatalities with cholera as the confirmed cause of death. All of this has been compounded by the nigh uncountable amount of atrocities perpetrated by all sides.

As of now, the main actors in Yemen are the Hadi government (backed by the Saudi-coalition), the Southern Transitional Council (which is supported by the UAE), and the Houthis in the north, backed by Iran. The Saudi-coalition is currently comprised of Bahrain, Jordan, Monaco, Kuwait, Egypt, and Sudan. The US, UK, France, and Brazil have all provided various forms and levels of support for the Saudi-coalition and the UAE, including mid-air refueling for airstrikes, training, weapons, and munitions

“For nearly three years Yemen’s warring parties have committed war crimes with little fear that other governments will hold them to account,” Human Rights Watch’s Middle Eastern Director, Sara Lee Whitson has said.

The Saudi-coalition has been behind a number of actions that HRW has claimed may or do amount to war crimes. The most well-known among these are the Saudi-led airstrikes throughout the region—around 85 of which they claim were illegal, having a combined civilian death count of over a thousand. The strike on a wedding party in September of 2015 is probably the most infamous example of this campaign. Upwards of 140 people were killed in the strikes, which also injured more than 500. Saudi planes have also been documented using six types of cluster bombs, which scatter explosive submunitions over a wide area after being dropped and have been made illegal by over 110 other countries. In recent years, the UK, Brazil, and US-based companies have all sold Saudi Arabia such weaponry, though the Obama administration did halt sales between Raytheon and Saudi Arabia in 2016. The UK has continued to supply cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia despite being a signatory to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which commits a nation to refrain from making, using, or transferring such bombs.

Additionally, while Yemen faces an unprecedented cholera epidemic, widespread diphtheria, and famine that threatens over eight million, the Saudi-coalition has heavily restricted imports into the country, including food, fuel, and medicine. This targets one of Yemen's deepest vulnerabilities: millions of Yemeni civilians depend on food aid to survive, and access to healthcare is becoming increasingly rare as close to half of the hospitals in Yemen have been shut down. Human Rights Watch argues that this, in conjunction with a general disregard for the civilian populace, constitutes a breach of international law.

At the same time, Houthi forces have also engaged in a number of similarly destructive practices. They have launched many artillery attacks against Yemeni and Saudi Arabian cities that could most gently be described as indiscriminate, killing and wounding civilians in both countries. In recent months, the Houthis have escalated into rocket attacks, according to the Guardian, targeting both the Saudi Arabian International Airport and the Saudi king's official residence in Riyadh. All attempts have been intercepted. Though it has not yet been conclusively proven, both the US and Saudi Arabia have claimed that Iran supplied the Houthis with the weapons; for its part, the UN launched an investigation into the possible transfer last December.

The Houthis have also used landmines in at least six of Yemen's twenty-one governorates, causing an unknown number of casualties. This has made it difficult for displaced Yemeni people to return to their homes safely. Specialists who can locate and remove the mines are in short supply in Yemen. The Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor identified over

two-thousand people wounded by landmines in 2016, a number that was nearly double 2015's casualties.

Human Rights Watch has also noted a number of practices in which all sides have partaken. Most worrying among these are the use of child soldiers, illegal detention, torture, and enforced disappearances. The latter three have become increasingly prevalent as the Houthis, the Hadi government, and UAE-backed forces have developed a number of unofficial and secret detention facilities across the country. Journalists, political opponents, activists, and even some children are being arrested or disappeared in numbers that already reached the hundreds and continue to grow. Though as of yet unconfirmed, some lawyers and activists have alleged that the UAE is secretly moving high-level prisoners out of Yemen and into a UAE base in Eritrea.

At the same time, while it is important to know about the general currents, we should not forget about that which is all too forgotten: the fact that there are twenty-seven million and a half humans embroiled in this conflict. It's easy to see it as a whole, just one civil war, but there are as many tales as there are people. This is why, next week, Herhsee Gupta will delve into the stories of individual Yemeni people. So please, join us again. And thank you for listening.