

# The Compulsion of Water Cooperation

Since last September when the United Nations declared water as a sustainable development goal, a number of countries have intensified efforts to promote water cooperation with their neighbouring countries. The Middle East is missing in this action.

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For decades, Iraq, Syria and Turkey negotiated treaties for cooperating on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers without reaching any conclusion. The failure of the states to find a settlement has resulted in an advantage for the non-state actors, particularly Daesh. The violent extremist groups in the region now control some of the dams, pipelines, storage tanks and monitoring stations. They use water as a weapon to force people to surrender to their wishes. This state of affairs has made it impossible to maintain the Mosul dam in the Northern Iraq. Several experts have warned about the risk of imminent collapse of the dam which could drown and kill half a million people in a few hours.

The Middle East is caught up in a cascade of catastrophes. There are

no easy solutions. The only way out is for all countries to accept big compromises and to negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement with water cooperation prominently included in it.

Water issues usually form an important part of peace agreements. In 2015, we commemorated the bicentennial of the Congress of Vienna, which established the regime for the river Rhine and the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine. This year marks 160 years since the Paris Peace Treaty establishing the first Commission on the Danube. Both commissions exist today in their modernized forms and are among the elements of European stability.

In constructing the post-Cold War Europe, water played an important part. Slovenia subscribes to the Danube Protection Agreement and is a depository state of the Sava River Agreement. The latter is the first multilateral issue oriented agreement in South East Europe concluded after the Dayton Peace Agreement which stopped the war in Bosnia. There is a close relationship between regional peace and water cooperation.



A similar pattern of relationship between water and peace was established in Central America. As soon as the Central American Peace Plan was successfully negotiated by the Costa Rican President Oscar Arias in the 1980s, it was followed by a set of regional water cooperation agreements.

The relationship between water and peace is not only a matter of post-conflict arrangements. Water management is an important instrument for the prevention of conflict. The establishment in 2010 of the



Commission on the Administration of the River Uruguay, following the peaceful resolution of a bitter dispute between Argentina and Uruguay, is an example of the political necessity of administering environmental matters in an effective and preventive manner.

Moreover, there exist other initiatives, far ahead those known in Europe, that lay down the foundations for long-term regional cooperation and stability. The Mekong River Commission is one of them. So far it excluded China from its fold. Last November, Chinese foreign minister,

Wang Yi, announced the establishment of Lacang Mekong cooperation mechanism to foster cooperation on the Mekong River between China and her Southeast Asian neighbours.

The countries in the Nile River Basin are also giving up their old rivalry in favour of joint management of their water. Exactly a year ago, the Presidents of Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan met in Khartoum to agree on joint planning of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

The Senegal River Basin Organization is probably the most far reaching arrangement today. The Organization manages the water assets in Mali, Senegal, Mauritania and Guinea as a "regional common", transcending national interests. Inspired by the Senegal River Basin Organisation, the basin organisations in Congo and Gambia rivers are expected to intensify their cooperation this year.

When governments not only in Europe and North America but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America can nurture trans-boundary cooperation, what is holding the Middle East back?

The discussion in the Middle East is characterised by the fears of poten-

tial losses resulting from regional cooperation. The countries in other parts of the world focus on potential benefits. It is about choice between the psychology of benefits and the psychology of losses.

Last November, 15 countries came together to co- convene the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace. This provides an opportunity for the leaders of the Middle East to engage in order to draw lessons from the successful examples of cooperation in other parts of the world and craft their own future. The risk of the likely breakdown of the Mosul dam indicates that it is no longer about merely the collapse of the states. It is about the survival of large segments of population. The choice is between compromise and catastrophe, between dignity and death, and the region does not have much time left to make the obvious choice.

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## Yemen Conflict: Al-Qaeda 'Used Surface-To-Air Missile' To Bring Down Emirati Fighter Jet

**Exclusive:** Terror group's acquisition of sophisticated weaponry raises the stakes in the country's bitter civil war, and causes consternation in Washington



A FRENCH-MADE MIRAGE JET, SIMILAR TO THE ONE PICTURED, WAS ALLEGEDLY SHOT DOWN WITH RUSSIAN MUNITIONS AFP

Al-Qaeda has acquired sophisticated surface-to-air missiles. The Independent has learned, which were used to shoot down an Emirati fighter jet in a dangerous escalation of the civil war raging in Yemen.

A French-made Mirage jet, flying in the air force of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), crashed into a mountain side just outside the southern port city of Aden on 14 March. Authorities claimed that the crash was "the result of a technical malfunction", but sources dispute this, claiming that the jet was shot down with Russian munitions. The incident raises the spectre of other jihadist branches accessing sophisticated surface-to-air missiles in Syria, Iraq and further afield.

The UAE is part of a Saudi-led coalition that has carried out a year-long war against Shia Houthi rebels, primarily from the air. Also involved in the war is al-Qaeda's regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). With the bombing war dragging on, AQAP has worked assiduously and quietly to consolidate its hold in south Yemen.

Two pilots flying the jet were killed in the crash and locals reported seeing Apache helicopters and the jet engaged in an attack on AQAP forces dug into a district to the west of Aden. Security sources have estimated that some 300 jihadist fighters were under attack at the time the

jet came down.

A source in Yemen told The Independent that the surface-to-air missile was a Russian-manufactured SA-7 or "Strela". The SA-7 is a shoulder held heat-seeking missile. It has a "kill zone" range of between 15 and 1,500 metres in altitude, suggesting that the Mirage was flying low in a straining run on the AQAP positions when it was hit.

The SA-7 has been around for several decades. The most likely source is Bulgaria which, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, sold Russian military hardware, including the SA-7, to countries all over the Middle East.

The incident was the fourth time a coalition jet had crashed in the Yemen campaign, but the first in which a surface-to-air missile was used.

In late December an American-made F-16, part of Bahrain's air force, came down in Saudi Arabia. The pilot ejected and survived in what appeared to be a crash related to a technical problem.

In May of last year, a Moroccan pilot died when his F-16 crashed in the north Yemen governorate of Saada. The Houthis claimed at the time that the jet was flying low and was hit by anti-aircraft guns positioned in the mountains. Coalition authorities said technical problems caused the crash.

with the first anniversary of the start of civil war in Yemen.

In one of the blasts, an ambulance laden with explosives was detonated as it arrived at a military checkpoint in the Buraia area in northwestern Aden, killing about 14 soldiers and civilians, eyewitnesses and security sources said.

Dozens of people were also wounded in the attacks, for which ISIS claimed responsibility and which coincided

## Ceasefire Announced In Yemen After One Year Of War

BEIRUT — On this day one year ago, Saudi Arabia spearheaded a coalition of nine Arab states and began a prolonged campaign of bombing against the Houthis, an Iran-backed Shia armed political group. Months of bitter fighting has taken its toll on Yemen's besieged citizens, leaving more than 3,000 people dead and a country in ruins. But respite is in sight: The United Nations brokered a temporary ceasefire agreement Monday that could finally put an end to the conflict.

The temporary ceasefire is set to begin on April 10, a week ahead of peace talks scheduled to resume later in the month. Along with the de-escalation of the conflict, Yemeni officials told the Associated Press that the Houthi rebels, who took over the country's capital from the internationally recognized government in 2014, have agreed to put down their weapons and leave the city of Sanaa. But fighting in Yemen has become increasingly complex, and the fragmentation of the state has enabled terrorist groups to flourish.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is one such group. The Sunni militants have established a stronghold in the border provinces between Yemen and Saudi, and are enemies of both Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, who have repeatedly said one of their main goals is to push AQAP out of Yemen.

Despite this shared ambition, the Saudi kingdom did not want to see the Houthis gain any more territory in pursuit of this goal, especially not in Yemen's coveted oil territories. Last year, several countries allied with Saudi Arabia announced they would send ground troops to fight the Shiite militias in the main battlegrounds in the oil-rich province of Marib, where AQAP and tribal militias were battling Houthi rebels.

With such a range of combatants and political and religious rivals, Mohammed Faiz, a field liaison officer for an NGO living in Aden, an eastern port-city, is skeptical that Yemen will see a lasting truce. He told International Business Times that Houthi rebels are unlikely to put down their weapons.

"There was a truce, but Houthis have never committed and still there are some conflicts in Taiz, Ibb, and Shabwa [other regions of Yemen]," Faiz said. "I hope [there will be a truce] there is no sign from Houthis indicate that they are



A SUPPORTER OF YEMEN'S FORMER PRESIDENT ALI ABDULLAH SALEH WITH HIS FACE PAINTED IN THE COLORS OF YEMEN'S NATIONAL FLAG ATTENDS A RALLY MARKING ONE YEAR OF SAUDI-LED AIR STRIKES IN YEMEN'S CAPITAL SANA'A MARCH 26, 2016. PHOTO: REUTERS/SHALED ABDULLAH

looking for peace talk."

While the war in Yemen has not garnered the international attention that Syria's civil war has received, the conflict was not unexpected for those paying attention to mounting tensions between rival powers.

At its most basic level, the war is between internationally-backed President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi's government and Houthi rebels. But the conflict in Yemen, like the ones in Syria, Iraq and Libya, has also drawn in various international powers and has given rise to several terrorist groups hoping to capitalize on the ensuing political chaos. On Friday, 22 people were killed in Aden in a triple suicide bombing, claimed by the Islamic State group, who is opposed to both the government and Houthi rebel forces.

Houthis are a Zaidi Shiite rebel group that was active during the 2011 revolution to overthrow former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. They reportedly receive support from both Iran and the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, not unlike the President Bashar Assad's regime in Syria and various Shiite militias in Iraq.

"The Shiite-Sunni clash was transplanted from Iraq and Syria into Yemen," Peter Knoope, an associate fellow at International Center for Counter-Terrorism, an independent think tank based in The Hague, told IBT shortly after the war began. "The potential was always there, but outside



PRO-GOVERNMENT ARMY SOLDIERS RIDE ON THE BACK OF A TRUCK IN THE FARDHAT NAHM AREA, WHICH HAS RECENTLY BEEN TAKEN BY THE ARMY FROM HOUTHİ REBELS AROUND 60KCM (40 MILES) FROM YEMEN'S CAPITAL SANA'A, FEB. 20, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS/SAJI OUIDIA

forces ... (have) inflamed the actual outbreak over the last months."

In September 2014, Houthis seized the Yemeni capital of Sanaa and began to expand their control to other areas of the country, describing themselves as the only group able to improve quality of life for the average Yemeni. But since the group is relatively small their fast-paced expansion across Yemen came as a surprise to international actors, who did not respond until the following year.

In early February 2015, at least seven countries closed their Yemeni embassies and evacuated their personnel. Embassy closings on such a large scale are usually a sign of coming chaos — the same thing had happened in Libya the previous year, just before that country descended into a full-blown civil war. Among the countries, who closed their Yemen embassies, were Saudi Arabia and the U.S., two of the country's biggest financial backers, due to the "deteriorating security and political situation" in the capital.

While closing embassies does in fact diminish risk, it also sends a strong political message. In the case of Yemen, embassy closings from the U.S., Saudi Arabia and some European countries was a first attempt to discredit the Houthis and let the rebel group know they would not be receiving international recognition.

Yemen also took a financial hit when Houthis took over the capital. Saudi

Arabia was one of Yemen's biggest financial backers and this support only increased after Hadi took power in 2012. The kingdom gave Hadi's government nearly \$4 billion, in addition to money pledged by the Sunni states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. When Hadi resigned his position on Jan. 22 last year, Saudi cut all funding.

But the financial cutoffs and political power play were not enough to deter the Houthis. As the Shia group advanced on Aden, Hadi fled the city and Saudi Arabia announced it would intervene on his behalf the following day. Saudi Arabia and a coalition of Arab and Gulf States launched Operation Decisive Storm on March 26, intending a short aerial campaign against Houthi rebels that would reinstate Hadi's government.

A year after the first bombs fell on Yemen, the war is still ongoing and Yemen's economy is in an even worse condition. Roughly half of its population is below the poverty line and lives without access to clean water. Today, 20 million people (80 percent) of the population are in need of humanitarian assistance, third more than before the conflict began.

Yemen ranked seventh out of 178 in the Fund for Peace's 2015 Fragile State Index (last year it was ranked eighth) based on several factors including sectarian violence, poverty, state security, public services and the government's legitimacy. Yemen ranked worse than Syria, Iraq and Libya.

## Yemen Bombings Claimed By ISIS Kill At Least 26

ADEN: Three suicide bombers struck security checkpoints in the southern Yemeni city of Aden on Friday, killing at least 26 people, residents and security sources said.

Dozens of people were also wounded in the attacks, for which ISIS claimed responsibility and which coincided

with the first anniversary of the start of civil war in Yemen.

In one of the blasts, an ambulance laden with explosives was detonated as it arrived at a military checkpoint in the Buraia area in northwestern Aden, killing about 14 soldiers and civilians, eyewitnesses and security sources said.

The other two bombs hit checkpoints on the road to a base used by the Saudi-led military coalition that is fighting in Yemen. Security sources said at least 12 people died, though with no immediate reports of coalition soldiers among the casualties.

Nizar Anwar, a spokesman for the local government in Aden, said the

bombers were targeting the coalition command base but local fighters guarding the checkpoints prevented them from reaching their targets.

"More than 20 people were killed, most of them civilians," he said in a statement. Amaq, a news agency affiliated with ISIS, said the group's Yemeni

wing claimed all three attacks and that at least 27 people had died.

The blasts ended a near one-month lull in the violence that has plagued the port city, which fighters loyal to Yemen's president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi recaptured from the Iran-allied Houthis, a local militia, in July.

The Saudi-led coalition entered Yemen's war a year ago to try to prevent the Houthis and forces loyal to ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh from taking control of the country.

Other armed groups including ISIS and al Qaeda's local wing have thrived in the chaos.