# Ending the war in Yemen

## What is the issue?

- As one of the first key foreign policy decisions, U.S. President Joe Biden decided to end the U.S.'s support for Saudi Arabia's six-year-long war on Yemen.
- In this backdrop, here is a look at the course of the war over the years and the possible options for an end.

## What are Biden's recent decisions?

- Biden halted weapons sales to Saudi Arabia.
- He appointed a Special Envoy for Yemen.
- He also removed the Shia Houthi rebels from the list of foreign terrorist organisations.
    - Shia Houthi rebels control the north-western parts of Saudi Arabia.
- Both former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump looked away from Yemen.
- Yemen was notably amidst a multipolar civil war and Saudi bombing.
- It descended into chaos and witnessed a humanitarian catastrophe.

## What is the war in Yemen all about?

- Saudi Arabia, the UAE and their allies went to Yemen in March 2015.
- They had clearly defined objectives to -
    i. drive the Houthi rebels, who are backed by Iran, out of the capital Sana'a
    ii. stabilise the country under the government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi that they support
- The Saudi-led coalition imposed a blockade on Yemen.
- They hoped this would eventually weaken the Houthis.
- They also started a bombing campaign aimed at wrecking the rebels militarily.
- This campaign was however a failure.

## How is it evolving?

- The 6 years of war prove that the Saudi strategy of blockade and bombing was a failure.

- The Houthis continued to amass weapons, even technologically advanced drones.
- They continue to use these to attack Saudi targets across the border, despite the blockade.
- The Houthis entrenched themselves in the north-west despite the military and economic challenges.
- The only success for the Saudis, seen tactically, was that the Houthis were limited to the north-west.
- But the Saudi-backed government failed to consolidate its position even in the south.
- A separatist group, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), has established its rule in southern Yemen.
- The UAE, which backs the STC, has pulled out of the Saudi-led coalition.
- All this is happening while the humanitarian situation in Yemen is worsening by the day.
- The war has killed over 10,000 people.
- It has pushed the country to the brink of a famine.
- According to the UN, 50,000 Yemenis are starving to death and 16 million will go hungry in 2021.
- They are depending on food assistance to survive.
- But the war is making it difficult for aid groups to operate in the country.
- Many more are dying due to preventable diseases.
- Yemen already lacks proper health infrastructure and essential medicines.

## What should the priority now be?

- The crisis in Yemen is not only about the Saudi-Houthi conflict.
- It has many more dimensions such as humanitarian, civil, geopolitical and sectarian issues.
- Finding a solution to such a complex, multipolar conflict is challenging.
- The immediate focus of the international community should thus be on tackling the humanitarian situation in Yemen.
- The UN recently held a conference to raise up to $2.41 billion for aid works in Yemen.
- But it got pledges only for $1.35 billion, which means the aid operations would be impacted further.
- Even the limited humanitarian work cannot be sustained if there is no reprieve in the fighting.

## What is the way forward?

- The Saudis should reconsider if it should continue with a failed strategy.
- The situation in Yemen keeps worsening; the Yemeni people continue to

suffer.

- Also, the continued Houthi rocket and drone attacks have left a hole in Saudi Arabia's national security umbrella.
- The Houthis are also under pressure.
- If they want international legitimacy, they should stop fighting and start talking with other stakeholders.
- A ceasefire is in everybody's interest. But who will initiate is the question now.
- The Biden administration should use its leverage to pressure Riyadh to lift the blockade, which is a key Houthi demand too.
- The U.S. should take this up as a confidence-building measure and push for talks for a lasting ceasefire.
- Once a ceasefire between the two main rival blocs is achieved, the U.S. and its regional allies could call for a multilateral conference.
- This should involve all stakeholders to discuss Yemen's future.
- Yemen can find a way out of the current crisis only with an immediate end to the war and further diplomatic assistance.

**Source: The Hindu**

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