



Water Poverty as a Result of the Houthi Siege of Taiz

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Introduction

The Houthi group is considered a “terrorist group based on the Wilayat of the Imam and it follows the Twelver Order, similar to the Iranian model.”

They possess a huge arsenal of weapons and ammunition thanks to its relationship with Iran, which is the main supplier of weapons to the Houthis, in addition to their seizure of many weapons from the Yemeni army.

They also adopt a political approach that rejects any solutions to the Yemeni crisis. They are the direct cause of the failure of the Geneva peace talks in September 2018, as the Houthi delegation was absent from Geneva on the pretext that they did not obtain guarantees for their return to Sanaa.

They practiced all kinds of terrorist crimes, including killing, kidnapping, torturing and displacing thousands of Yemenis. According to official Yemeni statistics, the Houthi militia blew up 898 private properties and public facilities, in addition to violating homes, and schools, violating the sanctity of mosques, and turning them into military barracks and rest houses for its members.

In June 2022, the militia, backed by Iran, took advantage of Sana'a's residents' need for water in light of the drought in the city due to the delayed rains, to make money, gain profit and generate revenues under illegal pretext.

It is worth mentioning that thousands of residents in Sana'a suffer from a severe shortage of drinking water. This is due to its interruption from the General Water System in conjunction with a doubling of its price.

To add to that, the oil shortage crisis, further complicates the situation, “as there are reports that 40% of wheat farmers were unable to water the crop this year; due to the lack of petroleum materials in the market” referring to its role in operating groundwater pumping engines, as the percentage of dependence on groundwater for irrigation represents 67%.

There are also natural reasons, such as delayed rainfall, low water levels in groundwater wells, and waste resulting from the expansion of the “qat” tree



cultivation phenomenon, but the Houthis' cutting off the water coming from those wells is a major part of the causes of the suffocating crisis in the city.

First: Water Sources in Yemen

Yemen is living a humanitarian and environmental disaster. It is a country suffering from chronic poverty and devastating wars. Water is running out in Yemen due to the overexploitation of aquifers, population expansion and climate change.

The total area of the Republic of Yemen is 527,970 square kilometers, but Yemen is an economically weak country, and its economy is not developed, and it relies heavily on international aid, and suffers from many problems, the most important of which are corruption, various conflicts and the tribal mentality that controls officials, agriculture in Yemen depends in the first place on direct rainfall, harvesting running water on the slopes, and seasonal flooding in valleys. There are two different rainy seasons: from March to May, the precipitation comes from the confluence of the Red Sea with the Arabian Sea and is known as summer rain. There is also a late summer rainy period from July to September centered around the convergence zone, the late summer rain represents 50-70% of the average annual precipitation.

Some of the most important water sources are:

- **Seasonal Floods**

There are no permanent rivers in Yemen, but there are seven main valleys carrying seasonal floods that descend from the western cliff in the spring and late summer to the Red Sea, and several small valleys descend towards the Gulf of Aden and the Empty Quarter in the east, one of the most important valleys in southern Yemen is Wadi Hadramout, which is an area long isolated from the rest of Yemen, where the average annual flow in the main coastal valleys of the Yemeni Red Sea is more than 2500 m³.

Seasonal floods were the main source of irrigation for agriculture in the Tihama region before the introduction of pumping wells. The area of land under floods in a given year can vary greatly. Where some have said that the lands irrigated by inundation range between 8000 and 16,000 hectares from year to year.



These floods represent an opportunity, as well as a permanent danger due to the severe damage that can be caused by major floods. So, Sheikh Zayed of the United Arab Emirates funded the construction of the modern Marib Dam to improve agriculture in this region famous for its ancient monuments. Marib is located about 120 km east of Sana'a. It was the seat of the Kingdom of Sheba. It is still an important archaeological site and was made mainly of land, with a length of about 680 meters, and about 18 meters in height at maximum height, the dam that diverted water during the flood season, has extended to 20 km. The inscriptions refer to the efforts of local rulers to repair flood damage and rebuild the dam.

- **Springs**

Springs are an important source of local supply and irrigation in the highlands. In the past, the area of irrigated lands from springs was twice what they were irrigated from wells, but this changed rapidly with time. A tank or reservoir for eventual assignment in a gravity flow distribution channel network.

In some areas such as Wadi Zohr, spring water is fed directly into the canals. The assignment was based on a cycle of rotation of rations, depending on the volume of water, the area of land to be irrigated, the number of shareholders and the needs of the crops, one cycle repeated every 17 days with each specific quota equal to three hours.

The right to access water in the system was based on the specific plots of land owned, in the long-established allotment system, irrigation works may have multiple lots on different days, so that one does not necessarily have to wait 17 days between irrigations. A particular share can also be traded with another irrigation partner.

- **Wells**

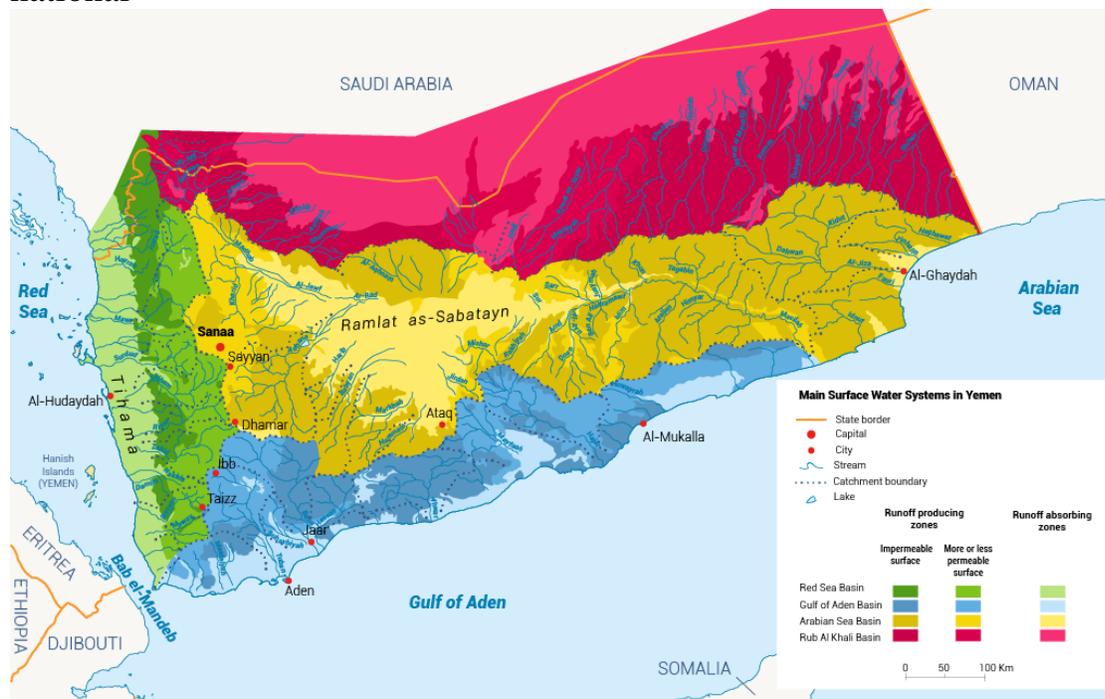
Wells in Yemen were drilled by hand until rigs were introduced in the 1960s, so depth was determined not only by groundwater but also by the physical capacity of rigs, as wells near the coast were generally shallow, reflecting the high level of groundwater that descended from the heights, especially near the main valleys.

The traveler Ibn al-Majawar, who lived in the early third century, claimed that the wells near the coastal city of Zabid were 12-16 fathoms deep, about 1.7 meters tall; He also noted that groundwater levels there could drop dramatically, while at the



same time describing wells around Aden at a depth of more than 18 metres, in a valley not far from the southern port city of Aden, which had not had suitable wells in the past.

The water was lifted by rope and pulley, using human power alone for small wells and draft animals for deep wells, although few diesel pumps were installed in the era of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen, the drilling of wells increased rapidly in the seventies, in 1975 the vast majority of wells were in The Tihama area of Hodeidah, which used to represent 25,000 hectares of well-irrigated land from the national total.



(A map showing the most important water resources in Yemen)

Second: Causes of the Water Crisis in Yemen

- The use of tube wells and water pumps has drawn the country away from traditional agricultural practices and water management systems, and the country can no longer live in balance with its natural resources.
- Increasingly extracting water from groundwater with a limited resource, regardless of the depth of drilling. In 2010, it was estimated that groundwater withdrawal exceeded replenishment by 30%.



- Also, among the causes of the water crisis in Yemen is the catastrophic conflict that has displaced thousands of farmers. The delicate balance of the mountain slope systems built over centuries is increasingly disrupted by the lack of labor needed for maintenance, and thus the effectiveness of the previous use of water for irrigation has been eroded dramatically. dangerous.

Third: The Impact of Water Shortages in Yemen

- Yemen has been particularly at risk due to the lack of fresh water in the rivers. The total renewable water resources per capita in Yemen, as measured by the Food and Agriculture Organization, is very low, in 1992, it was 158.6 cubic meters per year, and in 2012 this figure was reduced to 84.39 cubic meters, and in 2014 it decreased to 78.26 cubic meters. The vast majority of the extracted water, estimated at 90%, is used in agriculture, and there are large parts of Yemen that will run out of water between 2021 and 2031. The only part of Yemen that appears to have enough of water for years to come is Hadramawt, where recharge and existing groundwater aquifers can provide needed water and local needs for several thousand years.
- Women and girls in rural areas often collect water from great distances, subject themselves to sexual harassment, drown in open water tanks, and suffer miscarriages caused by carrying heavy water bowls, even when there are new water systems in villages, which are generally not connected pipes to homes, and another problem arises between the need to secure water for domestic uses in competition with the expansion of crop irrigation.
- The diminishing and disappearance of water resources affects human well-being, adding to the already dire humanitarian situation of poverty and ongoing conflict in Yemen, there have been reports a decade ago of the disappearance of entire villages in some areas due to the drying up of local wells and the consequent shortage of groundwater.
- The decline in cultivated land in the north began during the civil war in the 1960s and accelerated since the beginning of the last war in 2015. The increasing water scarcity has been exacerbated by the erosion of slopes, forcing farmers to sell their land, increasing the population, and widespread population displacement. There are reports in Houthi-controlled areas, agricultural lands, small dams, wells and pumping systems are damaged from the bombing campaign. Ground fighting in the fertile southern highlands areas



of Ibb and Taiz also affects traditional terrace systems and reduces food security.

Fourth: Al-Houthi militias' violation of international humanitarian law

International humanitarian law is a branch of public international law, consisting mainly of treaties and customary international law as well as general principles of law (given Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice).

Although international human rights law and international humanitarian law differ in scope, they do provide a range of protective measures for persons in an armed conflict, whether they are civilians, or persons no longer actually participating in the conflict.

The Houthi militia prevented international relief organizations from delivering relief aid and distributing it in the districts, which led the world to denounce, expressing that these measures are "terrorist and in violation of international and humanitarian law."

The siege of the Houthis led to Taiz and their meager water sources. Which made individuals resort to unclean and unsafe sources to obtain drinking water, which led to many of them suffering from chronic diseases, especially children, due to their need for a clean environment and integrated care,

What is also inconsistent with international humanitarian law and human rights protection law is the Houthis' control of hospitals and the prevention of access to treatment for citizens and the provision of health support to treat their wounded, and the Houthis' violation of the provisions of international humanitarian law that obligated the parties to the conflict to cooperate with humanitarian medical staff as a humanitarian act.

As happened with the "Doctors Without Borders" organization, and the "Red Cross" and forcing them to harness the support provided by the organization to the "Abs" rural hospital in Hajjah, northwest of Yemen, to treat its wounded fighters who fell during the battles taking place in the areas of Haradh and Hiran in the coastal governorate.



The Houthis' violation of medical staff is one of the reasons for the disruption of the work of international organizations, as they take advantage of medical support to serve their military goals.

This led the international organization to enter into negotiations with the Houthi militia, which controls the Abs hospital, to ensure the security and safety of the medical teams and patients in the hospital and to follow up on the response to the medical needs of the population in light of the continuing violent confrontations and the lack of health care services in the region.

While the international organization provides support to more than 11 hospitals and 20 health facilities, in the Houthi militia-controlled areas in northern and western Yemen, and focuses on treating victims of violence and other emergencies, and providing free services in the field of mother and child care and mental health.

The brutality and crimes of the Houthi militia did not stop at attacking hospitals, but extended to convert schools and hospitals into weapons depots, use civilians as human shields for their military operations, hold citizens hostage in their military sites, and use areas of homes and public facilities as a center for launching missiles. All of these violations and more are considered a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

Fifth: The Houthi terrorist militia's encroachments

In 2019, the Houthis used the "water" weapon to besiege Taiz, so Houthi snipers targeted water tanks with the aim of sabotaging the water infrastructure as a collective punishment for all the residents of Taiz, forcing citizens to transfer water bottles from a mobile charitable tank to their homes.

Some human rights reports stated that children in Taiz left schools and turned to work in fetching water, not only that, but the Houthi militias carried out many terrorist attacks, so snipers fired bullets and artillery shells, around the tanks area where these children gathered to fetch water, which led to killing and injuries. Lots of kids in the area.

The children were able to withstand with their families during that siege imposed on them by the Houthi terrorist group. The 11-year-old girl, H, A, who lives in the "Sina" neighborhood in the center of Taiz, was able to bear many burdens following



a severe water crisis. She hit the city in southern Yemen and succeeded after filling one of the "canisters" with water, as she was in a state of extreme fatigue, after she left the "Sina" school for girls to serve her family and work in transporting water.

Among the methods of punishment and weapons used by the Houthis was to disrupt the groundwater wells, as they attacked the water tanks and hit the missiles. The scarcity of water in Taiz.



In addition to the Houthi snipers targeting the tanks of houses, and bombing projects that deliberately sabotaged the water infrastructure, as a policy of collective punishment against the population, concentrated in "Aden" before liberation and neighborhoods of "Hodeidah City", "Taiz" and "Hajour"; Where it was subjected to the destruction of dozens of tanks for civilians after the siege.

Which in turn led to the creation of a major crisis in the liberated neighborhoods of Taiz; Where commercial water tanks with "White" (capacity of 6 thousand liters) were raised for twice their price; Where the price of each of them reached about 50 US dollars.



As the population's need per day amounts to 35 thousand cubic meters, and before the war the establishment produced 18,000 cubic meters, and in the midst of the ongoing war it returned to producing 3 thousand cubic meters, with a deficit of approximately 144%.

Sixth: The Position of the United Nations and International Organizations

International organizations demanded to pressure the Houthis to operate these wells, as they are humanitarian service projects. Any employment of them would be considered terrorism and a new war against the citizens of Taiz.

The United Nations said that the war had caused a major water crisis that led to the spread of diseases and epidemics, and that every year about 14,000 Yemeni children, under the age of 5, died due to malnutrition and diseases caused by lack of water.

In addition, nearly 90% of the population of Yemen relies on water tanks to secure their daily needs, while 15 million civilians suffer from access to clean drinking water.

A government report also stated that population growth affects water problems, raises demand, and dwindles fresh water resources, due to excessive pumping of groundwater, high consumption per capita, and mismanagement of water resources.

The country's water deficit was also estimated at one billion cubic meters annually, following a decrease in the groundwater level at a rate of up to 7 meters in some water basins, most notably the "Sana'a and Saada" basin.

The United Nations also launched an expanded campaign under the name "The United Nations Exposes Al-Houthi" to remind the world of the many crimes and violations committed by the militias documented in UN reports, and the duration of the campaign was 3 days, in addition to classifying Al-Houthi as a terrorist group and listing it as an entity under the arms embargo.

The UN reports unanimously agreed that the Houthi militia prevented the mission to support a new agreement from fully implementing its mandate and controlling the



movements of its observers, and they also took advantage of the “Stockholm” agreement to protect military objectives.

Conclusion

Violations of the Houthi group against civilians and children and causing water poverty are considered war crimes, punishable by international legislation and the tragedy that occurs against the citizens and children of Yemen, and Taiz in particular, must be put to an end.

There have been many Houthi incidents of murder, terrorism, human rights violations and infringement on the rights of citizens to water and a decent life. This is due to the fact that the Houthi group, which is a terrorist group, misses all the meanings of humanity, and directly violates international humanitarian law, which requires everyone to unite to curb these violations that Hundreds of innocent civilians and children will be the victims.

Therefore, work must be done to collect all the incidents of violations and crimes that occurred by the Houthi group and to issue a report and statement that advocates the right of the victims to condemn this extremist and terrorist group as a result of its violations against children and Yemenis, and to inform the international opinion of the extent of the disaster that Yemenis have been experiencing since the Houthi coup in Yemen. By compiling these facts, aim to mobilize an international opinion to prosecute them before the international judiciary.