

In Yemen, peace remains as elusive as ever



A CLOSER LOOK
TASNEEM TAYEB

with the administration's commitment to review the designation of the Houthi rebels as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO) in the wake of the aggravated humanitarian crisis in Yemen caused by the war, had already given the hope that perhaps this new administration would correct its course with regard to the war in Yemen.

This, however, does not mean the war is over. If anything, the war is far from over and for many reasons. "We are ending all American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales," said US President Joe Biden, announcing the US decision to pull out of the war. Does this mean the Saudis, the Emiratis and the Iranian-backed Houthis have come to an understanding to finally end this war? No.

The war wages on. And to end this, the Biden administration now has to play a diplomatic role to bring all the warring parties to the table to expedite peace talks and come to a resolution at the earliest. There is another catch: while announcing the US withdrawal from the Yemen War, Biden also added, "At the same time, Saudi Arabia faces missile attacks, UAV strikes, and other threats from Iranian-supplied forces in multiple countries. We're going to continue to support and help Saudi Arabia defend its sovereignty and its territorial integrity and its people." And the Saudis face direct threat from the Houthis, who on previous occasions have targeted Saudi strategic assets and locations. This means that while the US will no longer directly partake in the war by providing

support to the Saudis, it will nonetheless be confronting the Houthis if they do not stop going after the Saudis, which will likely have a ripple effect on the war and the humanitarian crisis.

And the US operations will continue in Yemen to fight the terrorist elements operating within the country, namely the al-Qaeda and the ISIS. This time however, it is expected that the operations will not take a toll on civilian lives, as it did ever since the start of the war six years ago.

Hundreds and thousands of civilians have been killed in the Yemen war. "The war had already caused an estimated 233,000 deaths, including 131,000 from indirect causes such as lack of food, health services and infrastructure", suggested the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in December 2020. US-made arms and ammunitions have been used to target civilian locations in Yemen. A report published by *The New York Times* suggests, "When Saudi F-15 warplanes took off from an air base in southern Saudi Arabia for a bombing run over Yemen, it was not just a plane and bombs that were American. American mechanics serviced the jet and carried out repairs on the ground. American technicians upgraded the targeting software and other classified technology, which Saudis were not allowed to touch. The pilot was likely to have been trained by the United States Air Force."

And a report by *The Guardian* has traced the origin of cluster munitions that had killed 14-year-old Raja Hamid Yahya al-Oud on March 23, 2018 in a coalition strike on a farm in Saada in north Yemen, to Milan, Tennessee, in the United States.

The human toll of the Yemen war has drawn criticism from all quarters, and the US cannot continue to have more Yemeni civilian blood on its hands. While the Biden administration has taken the right decision in withdrawing from the Yemen war, it has also invited challenges from many fronts.

To ensure this two pronged approach



A Yemeni student stands on top of the debris of a school in March 2019, which was damaged following a Saudi-led coalition air strike.

PHOTO: AFP

to Yemen, the US will have to walk a tight rope. First of all, while helping the Saudis in defending their territorial integrity against the Houthis, determining what is "offensive" and what is "defensive" would be a tricky challenge. From the very beginning, the Yemen war has been seen by the Saudis as a defensive measure against rising Houthi powers in the region. And while there is debate both for and against this Saudi narrative, going forward, the US will have to be more careful about its actions to make sure that while helping its ally, the US does not again get embroiled in the Yemen war.

Secondly, the diplomatic engagement to fast track the peace talks will be a challenge. Iran and the Saudis are strong regional powers and foes. Both the countries and

their allies are engaged in proxy wars in many areas, and their ideological differences are rooted in the fragmented history of the Middle East. Getting the Iranian-backed Houthis, the Saudis and the Emiratis to rise above their individuals interests to end this war would be difficult. The appointment of career diplomat Tim Lenderking as the US envoy to Yemen is a move in the right direction, but how successful he will be to get these regional powers to overcome their differences remains to be seen.

And there will be pressure on the US administration internally to resume arms sales to the Saudis and Emiratis. Arms sales to the Saudis have increased significantly during the war. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Saudi

Arabia had been the "world's largest arms importer from 2015 to 2019, the first five years of the Yemen war. Its imports of major arms increased by 130 percent compared with the previous five-year period. Despite the wide-ranging concerns in the US and the United Kingdom about Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen, both Washington and London continued to export arms to Saudi Arabia from 2015 to 2019. A total of 73 percent of Saudi Arabia's arms imports came from the US, and 13 percent from the UK."

"In the five years before the war, US arms transfers to Saudi Arabia amounted to USD three billion; between 2015 and 2020, the US agreed to sell over USD 64.1 billion worth of weapons to Riyadh, averaging USD 10.7 billion per year. Sales to other belligerents in the war, like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), also rose exponentially," added the same report.

The Yemen war has created a ready and increasingly expanding market for US arms, and the dealers have enjoyed the fruits of this. Now with the US taking a back foot in the Yemen war, which means limiting of arms sales to the Saudis and the Emiratis, among other restrictions, the arms dealers will have a tough time selling their lethal weapons. And they are likely to create pressure on the Biden administration to revisit the country's Yemen policy.

Stricken by deaths, destruction and famine, Yemen is on the verge of collapse. People are dying by the hour. And the US is one of the perpetrators of this crime against humanity. There will be pressure on the US to continue to be a part of this mayhem—especially from the powerful international arms sale rackets and of course from the other actors who are profiting from this. But the US must make sure that this ends before more lives are lost. Will the US administration be able to handle this pressure? Only time will tell.

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Dealing with loss and damage in COP26



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
SALEEMUL HUQ

LOSS and damage from human induced climate change is an issue that has emerged in recent years, as the adverse impacts of climate change are becoming more and more visible around the world, ranging from more severe cyclones to super wildfires and frequent floods, as well as heat waves and droughts. In Bangladesh and West Bengal last May, we suffered from the adverse impacts of Cyclone Amphan, which became a super cyclone because of the higher-than-normal sea surface temperature in the Bay of Bengal. Fortunately, the loss of human lives in Bangladesh as well as India was not as great as the many thousands who had died in previous such super cyclones because of better cyclone warning and shelter systems, but the devastation of homes, agriculture and infrastructure was great and many people have still not been able to return to their homes, months later.

The important point at issue is that loss and damage from human induced climate change is different from adaptation to climate change and also different from natural climatic and weather events. Hence, it deserves to be addressed at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations.

However, the issue of how to tackle loss and damage from climate change has been a very thorny and contentious one at the UNFCCC for many years, as the developed countries refused to acknowledge it in fear of becoming open to claims of liability and compensation.

The breakthrough in the UNFCCC process came at the 19th Conference of Parties (COP19) held in Warsaw, Poland in 2014, where countries agreed to set up the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on Loss and Damage. An important part of loss and damage is how to deal with displacement of people as they lose their livelihoods and are then forced to become climate migrants or

climate refugees.

Dealing with loss and damage from human induced climate change in the upcoming COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021, will be a make-or-break issue for the most vulnerable developing countries. It will therefore be incumbent on the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, as Chair of COP26, to hold discussions with all the key countries, as well as experts and other relevant stakeholders, prior to the COP in November, if there is to be

scientific and technical advice to countries being affected by loss and damage due to human induced climate change. The second, much more contentious, demand, was for the developed countries to provide funding to the developing countries suffering from loss and damage, which went beyond adaptation as well as insurance.

At the end of COP25 in Madrid, the first demand was successfully achieved with the agreement to set up a new Santiago Network

It is useful here to look at other examples under the UNFCCC which might be applied or even built on. The most relevant example, in my view, is the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), which was set up some years ago to provide technical assistance to developing countries to tackle climate change, and has been quite successful. It is run as a separate entity by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on behalf of the UNFCCC and has a focal point in every developing country, through which requests for technical assistance can be made which the CTCN then responds to. This model and institution have been working quite well so far.

The CTCN has been able to provide technical assistance to many developing countries, including to Bangladesh, to support both adaptation technology, such as rain water harvesting, and mitigation technology, such as solar energy. It has thus been able to establish a good working relationship with all the vulnerable developing countries.

One option for consideration for the SNLD therefore, would be to replicate the procedures for setting up the CTCN, where different organisations were invited to bid for it and UNEP was selected to set it up. This option would, however, require some time to get it up and running.

Another, faster option, might be to mandate the CTCN itself, which is already a fully functioning Secretariat, to also tackle advice on loss and damage, in addition to their existing mandate which is on technology only. This option would save time by using an existing institutional setup.

There are of course pros and cons of each option, but it should be possible to have a rational discussion or even debate and come to an agreed outcome at COP26. The key factor will be the willingness of the COP25 Presidency, namely Chile, to take up the challenge to get this issue resolved at COP26.

The second, more contentious issue of funding loss and damage is no longer on the official negotiating agenda for COP26, as it was in COP25, so it will need to be discussed and tackled at a political, rather

than negotiating, level. Here, the Government of Bangladesh has an important role to play as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the current chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), which is a high-level political forum of nearly 50 of the most vulnerable developing countries, who have recently decided to push for a political outcome on loss and damage at COP26, particularly on funding beyond adaptation and even insurance.

It is therefore incumbent on the UK as the Presidency of COP26 as well as the US under President Biden to take this issue up with Bangladesh, as well as the other vulnerable developing countries, to find a possible way forward that might not require all 196 countries to agree, but rather start with a coalition of the willing. This would involve those who are willing to support ways to deal with loss and damage, which are now clearly attributable to human induced climate change, in the poorest countries, perhaps as a solidarity fund rather than as compensation, which still remains a taboo concept for many developed countries.

One practical example for other developing countries to look at, and perhaps learn from, is the proposed National Mechanism on Loss and Damage being taken forward in Bangladesh as a public-private partnership (PPP) initiative for a two-year action research project involving government ministries and agencies, non-governmental organisations, academics and researchers, as well as the private sector, such as insurance companies. This will be piloted by Bangladesh with its own resources initially, but if successful after two years, other developed countries can also contribute to it. The aim is for Bangladesh to develop robust, transparent and reliable systems to identify loss and damage from climate change and support the victims to not just recover, but to better adapt to future climate change impacts as well. If successful, it may be a model for other developing countries to try as well.

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a fruitful outcome. Waiting for COP26 to start the discussion will be leaving it too late.

Another important aspect will be the role of President Biden and his Climate Envoy John Kerry, who need to be willing to discuss this thorny political issue if the US wishes to regain the credibility on tackling climate change that it lost under President Trump. The last four years, particularly the last year, has seen the planet enter into a climate-changed world where loss and damage, attributable to human induced climate change, has already become a reality.

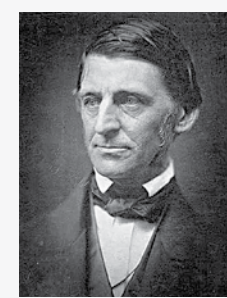
How can we reach a landing ground where all parties might agree to tackle this thorny topic?

Let me start by giving an update on where we stand at the moment in the light of COP25, which was held in Madrid, Spain in December 2019. Going into COP25, the vulnerable developing countries joined together to put forward two key demands on tackling loss and damage, under the previously agreed WIM. The first demand was to set up a technical advisory body under the UNFCCC to provide

on Loss and Damage (SNLD) but the second demand for funding was not agreed upon, beyond asking the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to look into the matter. It was also referred to the Finance Committee of the UNFCCC. The significance of the name comes from the city of Santiago, which is the capital of Chile, who had the joint Presidency of COP26, together with Spain.

Based on these outcomes from COP25, there are two ways forward. The first is to develop the implementation of the SNLD, which was agreed upon but not fleshed out. This should be relatively easy as all countries have already agreed to it, but the devil is, as always, in the details. If this issue is not discussed and fleshed out then it will be reduced to being just another website! Indeed, the UNFCCC Secretariat has already set the website up and is also planning to hold a consultation on the topic. Such a result is completely inadequate from the perspective of the developing countries, whose expectations from the SNLD go well beyond this.

QUOTABLE Quote

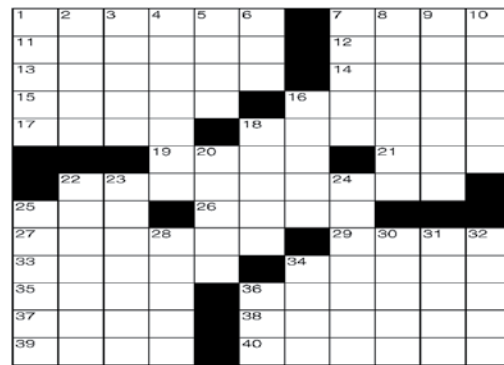


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 (1803-1882)
 American essayist, poet and lecturer.
Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Gown features
 - 7 Ship staff
 - 11 Quiz show fodder
 - 12 State frankly
 - 13 Take offense at
 - 14 Hunting garb, for short
 - 15 News item
 - 16 Clan symbol
 - 17 Mansion part
 - 18 Where the Fraser flows
 - 19 List-ending abbr.
 - 21 Made a rush
 - 22 Wee
 - 25 Gift tag word
 - 26 Deceitful sort
 - 27 Come to
 - 29 Puts away
- DOWN**
- 1 Scatter
 - 2 Famed Roman fountain
 - 3 Out of bed
 - 4 Gets satisfaction for
 - 5 Cream buy
 - 6 Was inactive
 - 7 Georgia city
 - 8 Forum icons
 - 9 Eventually
 - 10 Like some bobsleds
 - 16 Shire of "Rocky"
 - 18 Plane part
 - 20 10th president
 - 22 Grateful replay
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