



Conflict Factsheet

Jabal Sabr Mountain Water Conflict in Yemen

Type of conflict
Sub

Intensity
2

Conflict Locality
Western Asia

Time
1997 –ongoing

Countries
Yemen

Resources
Water



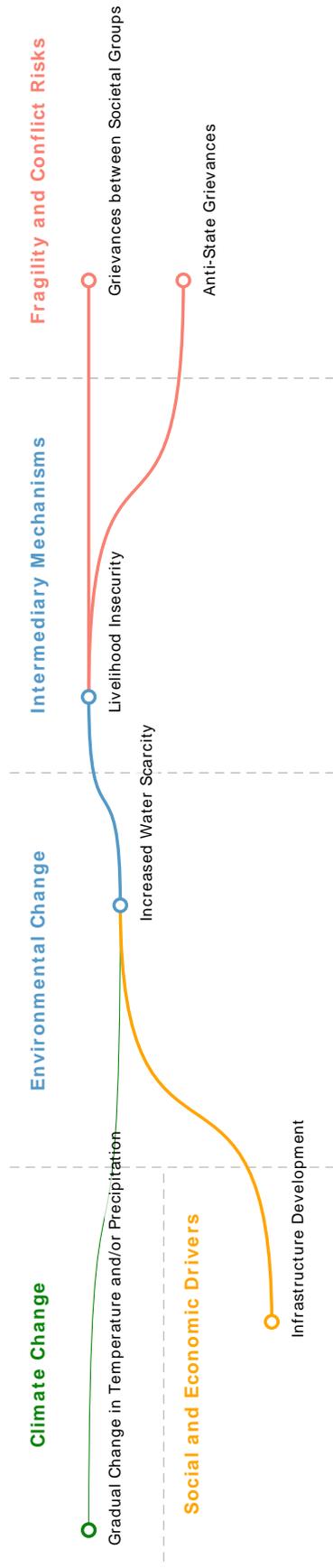
Local resource
competition

Conflict Summary

Since 1997, the two villages of Quradah and Al-Marzooch in the Jabal Sabr Mountain are fighting over access to water. Plans for an upstream diversion of a spring by one of the villages enraged the other. Destruction of water infrastructures and killings have persisted since then and brought governmental forces on to the scene on several occasions. Their unwanted involvement however led the villagers to fight back. Only after a presidential intervention could the level of violence diminish.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Water

Water-stressed Area

Proliferation of Weapons
Weak Institutions



Conflict History

Yemen's water resources are under extreme stress due to continually decreasing rainfall (McSweeney, New & Lizcano, 2010) and excessive groundwater exploitation (Ward, 2009) and are more and more likely to dry up soon (Boucek, 2009). Concomitant competition over the increasingly scarce resources is rising. Against this backdrop, local conflicts over water proliferate (see: [Local Violence over Water Resources in Yemen](#)) – one of which is the dispute between the two villages of Quradah and Al-Marzooch on Jabal Sabr Mountain outside Ta'iz city.

In the Ta'iz region, water has become so scarce that even quantities needed for domestic usage are hardly available; in Ta'iz city, public access to water is reduced to as little as every 45 days (Kasinof, 2009). In the mid-1990s, the village of Quradah renovated its piped water supply system with the aid of governmental funding. The water for its 8,000 inhabitants is supplied from a spring that feeds into a collection tank. However, since that tank is just uphill of the spring supplying Al-Marzooch, its 800 villagers soon got concerned that they would receive less water as a consequence of the new project. The resource is vital both for the provision of drinking water and the cultivation of qat, which is central to the villager's livelihoods.

In response, the villagers of Al-Marzooch hence decided to sabotage the project by blowing up parts of its infrastructure. Subsequent arrests by the police did not halt the vandalism and villagers from Al-Marzooch continued to blow up more installations and equipment after the governor of Ta'iz had ordered to carry on with the project.

State troops subsequently sent in to calm the situation only exacerbated the violence on the ground (Ward, 2009). In Yemen, most people are reluctant towards any outside intervention. This became very obvious in this case where in June 1999 both villages took up arms against the governmental soldiers who in turn attacked Quradah with heavy artillery and rockets, arrested many, and caused hundreds to flee (Al Shoura, 1999 in Ward, 2009). Moreover, over the years temporarily stepped-up security measures, including security check points on the streets and armed patrols, have at times become targeted by the fighting parties. Thus, governmental interference not only contributed to the outbreak of the conflict through their financial support for the renovation plans, it also stirred anti-state grievances among the conflict parties and its military intervention might even have perpetuated the violence.

Therefore, continuance of conflict and violence could not be averted. Having started in 1997, fighting between the two villages has sporadically continued to this day. Throughout the country, it is typical for these kinds of local conflicts to endure for many decades, continually claiming lives of quarrelling civilians. In the dispute between Quradah and Al-Marzooch at least 17 people died and over 100 have been injured so far (Al-Moshki, 2014). Perhaps in contrast to other cases of water conflicts in more tribal areas of Yemen where other historic context factors might play a more important role, this conflict can be comparatively easily traced back to "the very high value that the two communities placed on drinking water [which] made them prepared to resort to violence to defend it" (Ward, 2009).



Resolution Efforts

In response to the violence between villagers, traditional mediation was attempted but proved ineffective in sight of the high tensions revolving around the water sharing problem. Al-Marzooch did not halt its attacks for the time of the mediation process. Nonetheless, a partial success of the process was to get the case to court.

The verdict pronounced in 2003 said that both villages were to share the water from a collective tank, with different ratios. Quradah could connect a 4-inch pipe, and Al-Marzooch a 2-inch pipe with a pro rata reduction in supply in case of shortage (CEDARE, 2006). This judgement was reluctantly accepted and managed to ease the violence between villagers for some time. Not entirely resolved though, the conflict continued to persist and claim lives (Al-Sakkaf, 2013; Al-Yasiri, 2013; Al-Moshki, 2014). Some killings have been followed by arrests and trials, however without being able to stop the conflict.

Local and regional politicians held up their mediation efforts and met with local leaders. Ultimately, a presidential delegation comprising 30 leaders of Ta'iz was sent in by President Hadi. It included a presidential advisor and prominent businessman, as well as a tribal leader Sheikh. They ran meetings with the governor of Ta'iz Shawqi Hayel, local military and security leaders, and with other local figures, after violence had broken out again in 2012. While violence seems to have lessened since, the case is still pending in court as of 2014 and the willingness to cooperate of both villages is rather low.

It can be seriously questioned whether such a high mobilization of outside politicians will be possible for the settlement of every local water conflict of this size.



Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering

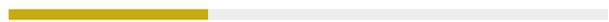


INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Municipal



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.



Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.





Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

3

After the case was brought to court, a verdict was pronounced concluding that both villages were to share the water from a collective tank with different ratios. While violence between villagers was reduced for some time, the conflict persisted as the ruling was only reluctantly accepted. Furthermore, local and regional politicians have attempted to mediate between the fighting parties with some success in reducing violence. However, the willingness to cooperate of both villages is still low.

Resources and Materials

Conflict References

[Local Violence over Water Resources in Yemen](#)

[Water Shortages and Public Discontent in Yemen](#)

References with URL

[Al-Moshki, A.I. \(2014\). Presidential Delegation Aims to End Fighting Over Taiz Water Source. Yemen Times, March 2014.](#)

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[Al-Yarisi, A. \(2013\). Water dispute claims two more lives in Taiz.](#)

[Boucek, C. \(2009\). Yemen: Avoiding a downward spiral \(Vol. 12\). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.](#)

[CEDARE \(2006\). Water Conflict and Conflict Management Mechanisms in the Middle East and North Africa Region.](#)

[Fitch, C. \(2015\). Will Yemen run out of water?](#)

[Kasinof, L. \(2009\). At heart of Yemen's conflicts: water crisis.](#)

[McSweeney, C., New, M. & Lizcano, G. \(2010\). UNDP Climate Change Country Profiles: Yemen.](#)

[Ward, C. \(2009\). Water Conflict in Yemen: The Case for Strengthening Local Resolution Mechanisms. In: Jagannathan, N. V., Mohamed, A. S., & Kremer, A. \(Eds.\). Water in the Arab World. Management Perspectives and Innovations. Washington DC: World Bank, pp. 233-268.](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/jabal-sabr-mountain-water-conflict>