

A MEASURE OF WESTERN DOUBLE STANDARDS

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Yemen is not Ukraine. But in both places, there is war, coupled with human suffering. But how do the politicians react? How does the media react? How do the people in Berlin, Paris, London, or even in Zurich react? Gods may do what cattle may not... Two people may do the same thing, but it is never identical.

Donald Trump explained the U.S.-Saudi relationship to his supporters with his trademark beer-table humor: "I said to King Salman, 'King, we're protecting you. You wouldn't last two weeks without us. You should pay for your military.'" Trump's first foreign trip was to Saudi Arabia in 2017, where he performed a traditional saber dance with the princes after striking a deal to supply more than a hundred billion dollars' worth of arms. Trump tweeted at the time, "jobs, jobs, jobs."

By that time, the Saudi Air Force had been bombing Yemen day-after-day, for two years. The Gulf monarchy, at the head of a military alliance of Arab countries, has been waging a war against Yemen since 2015. According to Riyadh, the war's goal was to end the uprising by the Iran-backed Huthi militia "Ansar Allah" and restore the fled Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansur Hadi to office. In reality, however, Saudi King Mohammed Bin Salman is concerned with far more than the constitution and legality in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia regards the small southern neighbor as its backyard, where it must maintain order for geostrategic reasons. Since the middle of the last century, the Saudis have intervened militarily in Yemen six times. In the most recent intervention, the U.S., Britain and France provided most of the support.

Yemen was the poorest country in the Arab world even before the war. It produces gas and oil, but its reserves are estimated at only 0.2 percent of the world's proven reserves. Yemen, however, lies on the strait of Bab-al-Mandab, a strategic bottleneck between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and four million barrels of oil pass through there every day. Free passage is essential for the Gulf monarchies. The West is thus pursuing its well-known "vital interests" in Yemen. A bipartisan study for the attention of the U.S. Congress late last year listed the reasons for the war. "International terrorist groups" were operating in Yemen, it said, and a failed state of Yemen would not only pose a threat to shipping, but would also allow Iran "to threaten the borders of Saudi Arabia."

The insurgent Huthi militias have taken control of much of the country since 2014. Their leaders were

trained in Iran at the Islamic University of Qom. They are fighting Hadi's government, as well as the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi Wahabis, who are spreading fundamentalist Islam in Yemen. However, as is the case throughout the Middle East, it is not a matter of "religious wars" between Shiites and Sunnis, but of political power-struggles fought along ethnic-confessional lines.

The Huthis belong to the Hashemites, an elite of political leaders and religious scholars who claim direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Until the proclamation of the republic in 1962, this tribal nobility had held political power for centuries. Western governments say they are convinced that the Huthis are being supplied with missiles and combat drones by Iran, despite an arms embargo and naval blockade of Yemen's coasts. Tehran categorically rejects any involvement in the military action in Yemen.

Yemen had long been a country divided in two: the north under Turkish Ottoman rule and the south under British colonial rule. In the 1960s, the "non-aligned" nationalism of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser radiated across the Arab world, throwing oil on the conflagration of independence movements. In 1962, a Republic of Yemen triumphed in the north over the old, semi-feudal tribal society. In 1967, a "People's Democratic Republic" was proclaimed in the south. The north was oriented toward the West, while the south became a bridgehead for the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a reunification took place—almost simultaneously with the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany—which, similar to Germany, resulted in the extensive economic takeover of socialist southern Yemen by the capitalist north.

Yemen, a country torn apart

At that time, Ali Abdullah Saleh had already been president of northern Yemen for twelve years, and no one suspected that he and his clan would hold on to power for another two decades. Since the uprisings against Ottoman and British colonial rule in the last century, Yemen was long a torn country where power struggles were fought with military force, and political alliances and fronts changed constantly. Violent uprisings, coups and assassinations were almost the normal way of changing the government throughout these years. The tribes and their culture, their forms of jurisprudence and conflict management still carry more weight than the state judiciary, police and administration.

For 33 years, Saleh managed to play the clans and interest groups off against each other and to buy loyalties. When the so-called "Arab Spring" reached Yemen in 2011, the balance of power managed by

Saleh collapsed, and all attempts to establish a reform government and a peaceful transition, mediated by the Gulf Cooperation Council and the UN, failed. That was the moment when the Huthis began their political and military offensive. They were able to capture the capital Sanaa within a short period of time in 2014 and are steadily advancing further south.

In Yemen, despite all the denials on both sides, the power struggle between the U.S. and the ayatollahs' Iran is being fought in a proxy war. In this respect, the Saudi fighter jets and helicopters from the U.S. are nothing more and nothing less than the military tool of Western geostrategy. Saudi Arabia is waging a preemptive war that costs it \$200 million a day to prevent the enemy Iran from coming near the Saudi border, through its influence over the Huthis. Doesn't this kind of reasoning sound kind of familiar since February 24, 2022?

But no Yemeni flags have been spotted on balconies in London or Paris. No accounts of Saudi businessmen have been frozen in Zurich. No school classes are singing in the streets of Berlin to raise money for Yemen, and no parliamentarian has traveled to Yemen to express dismay in front of the ruins of the air strikes. The West is always ready to manage conflicts that can be blamed on the Russians or the Chinese with great indignation. When it comes to its own wars, it is less precise about its indignation.

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