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Australia's Evolving Role: Addressing Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis through Arab Spring and Beyond

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Abstract

This paper delineates and evaluates Australia's multi-dimensional response to the Yemeni civil war that escalated after the 2011 Arab Spring, explicitly limiting its scope to the 2012-2022 period and to initiatives funded or directed by the Australian government and its accredited NGOs. Yemen's post-2011 conflict has generated the world's largest humanitarian emergency, yet scholarly attention rarely extends to geographically distant middle-power actors. Australia, despite being over 10 000 km from the battlefield, has repeatedly identified Yemen as a priority for its Middle-East humanitarian and counter-terrorism strategies. The study used mixed methods. First, we collected secondary data: Australian aid budgets, UN reports and NGO websites (2012-2022). Second, we did 15 semi-structured interviews with DFAT staff, NGO workers and Yemeni-Australians. The analysed the interview notes by hand, grouping answers into clear themes, and then compared these themes with the numbers from the documents. Australia gave US\$ 45 million, mostly for food, health and clean water. Aid rose when fighting got worse. People praised Australia for steady money and few restrictions, but said Australia had little voice in peace talks. Training projects (like mine-risk classes) were useful, yet food aid only eased, not ended, hunger. Australia should keep multi-year aid and also join UN peace talks more actively. It can share its mining and water skills to help remove landmines and build safe water systems, helping both today and in the long run.

Keywords: *Australia's foreign policy, Yemen humanitarian crisis, Arab Spring, Middle East diplomacy, International aid*

1. Introduction

The Arab nation of Yemen is composed of the southern and western parts of the Arabian Peninsula. To the north, Oman to the east, Red Sea to the west, the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea to the south. Socotra is the greatest of the 200 islands in Yemen which is found 354 kilometers down the main land of the country. The unification of the two Yemens began on May 22, 1990 when the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south and the Yemen Arab Republic in the north were united to form the Republic of Yemen which was guided by the president of North Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh. A separatist movement that took place in former South Yemen in 1994 led to a short-lived civil war (Ehteshami, 2018).

By 2011, President Saleh had stepped down in a political transition agreement as Yemen still faced religious warfare and terrorist attacks based on the Al-Qaeda. The political, security, and humanitarian conditions in Yemen worsened exponentially in 2015 and plunged into a civil war (Farrall, 2018). Yemen is subdivided into 20 governorates among which Hadramawt takes nearly 37 percent of the total land area in the country. Yemen has become the second largest country on the Arabian Peninsula, and its population is expected to be 33.3 million (2021). Yemen's population has more than doubled since 1975, Yemen entered a complex and drawn-out



Figure 1: political map of Yemen

Source: '[Political map of Yemen](#)', Nations Online Project. following the Arab Spring revolutions civil war in 2011, sparking a serious humanitarian crisis. Australia made a considerable contribution to the Yemeni people's humanitarian relief and diplomatic support at this time.

Australia made significant financial contributions to numerous UN agencies and non-governmental groups operating in Yemen as part of its commitment to international cooperation and easing the suffering of those affected by the crisis. *"Strategic partnerships with the UN and international donors shape Australia's engagement rather than direct military or political interventions"* (P9). This aid helped millions of Yemen trapped in the crossfire, who would receive food, water, medical supplies and shelter as a result of this aid (Weiss, 2016). Moreover, Australia is actively involved in diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis as it collaborates with other nations in the region as well as outside it to find a solution and get all parties on board with it. Although physically distant to Yemen, Australia realized the importance of the impacts of the conflict on regional stability and security in the world and it was willing to play a constructive role in the quest of peace and stability in Yemen.

In Yemen, the involvement of Australia after the Arab spring was not just aid giving. It was to address the root causes of the conflict and to bring long-term peace in the region. Australia provided development assistance and capacity-building opportunities to build the strength of the institutions, government and civil society in Yemen. Australia desired to assist the Yemeni society to be stronger and more independent with references to promoting programs that favored spending on human rights, economic growth, and good governance (Sheppard and Smith, 2017). Australia also took an active part in the international forums and conferences, where a holistic approach to the problems in Yemen was proposed, which covers political, social, and economic perspectives. Australia attempted to create awareness of what was happening in Yemen and collaborate with partners on long-term solutions by involving regional and international partners (Phillips, 2017). With all these numerous efforts, Australia demonstrated its commitment to becoming a responsible international player and contributing to the solution of the situation in Yemen following the Arab spring. *Australia's foreign policy prioritizes the Asia-Pacific region, so engagement in Yemen remains secondary to its broader geopolitical interests."* (P2)

The role of Australia in Yemen is of great significance in the greater international endeavors towards a solution to the dreadful humanitarian crisis and seek a peaceful resolution to the long standing conflict. The fact that Australia has worked in favor of a political settlement proves the commitment of the country to promote peace, stability and human rights within the region as an active contributor to the undertakings of the UN. Australia contributes to eliminating the misery of the Yemeni population by addressing their short-term needs in food, medical assistance, and hygiene. Moreover, the attention to human rights and responsibility in Australia can avert future malefaction, as well as encourage the conducive environment relevant to rapprochement (Peucker, 2017). *"While humanitarian aid continues, Australia lacks a direct political strategy in Yemen, relying heavily on UN-led initiatives"* (P11). Australia supports its interest to promote the ideals of peace, security and humanitarianism on the international front by collaborating with regional and international partners in the diplomatic endeavors to reach a holistic and sustainable solution to the Yemeni crisis.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Constructivism also puts much emphasis on the impact of concepts, standards and identities on how states relate and how individuals can interact internationally. The constructivist approach can illuminate the Australian activity as a norm entrepreneur, which is actively interested in the promotion of human rights, humanitarian aid, and peaceful settlement of the conflict in the framework of the crisis in Yemen. The involvement and support of the activities organized by the UN by Australian diplomats can be considered as the reflection of what the country is, a responsible international actor who cares about the spread of peace and stability. The attempts of Australia to promote regional cooperation and discussion and its promoting the ideas of responsibility and human rights in Yemen can also be viewed through the prism of constructionism.

1.2 Research Methodology

The research method used in this study is a qualitative one, where the researcher applies the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) in understanding the changing role of Australia in Yemen. The data were gathered by use of 15 semi-structured interviews with the government officials, foreign policy experts, humanitarian workers as well as academics. The interviews were structured, being based on close-ended questions about the diplomatic involvement of Australia in Yemen, its humanitarian assistance and policy issues.

The answers were transcribed and examined with NVivo 15 which is a qualitative data analysis program. Thematic coding was done to classify the responses into predominant themes and word frequency analysis, sentiment analysis and hierarchical coding were done to find essential trends. The methodological approach facilitated high standards of data validation and removed bias since the data was systematically coded into recurring patterns.

2. Thematic Analysis Findings

Before discussing specific themes, here introduce Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and NVivo 15 as our methodological tools. The analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews revealed key themes regarding Australia's role in Yemen post-Arab Spring.

2.1 Strategic Humanitarian Engagement

This section highlights Australia's diplomatic engagement and humanitarian policies.



Figure 1: (Word Cloud) visualizes frequently mentioned terms such as 'foreign assistance,' 'geopolitical strategy,' and 'aid diplomacy', emphasizing Australia's strategic involvement.

2.2 Policy Constraints and Challenges

Australia's involvement in Yemen is limited by diplomatic and economic constraints.

Figure 2: Sentiment Analysis Chart (Positive vs. Negative Perceptions of Australia's Role)

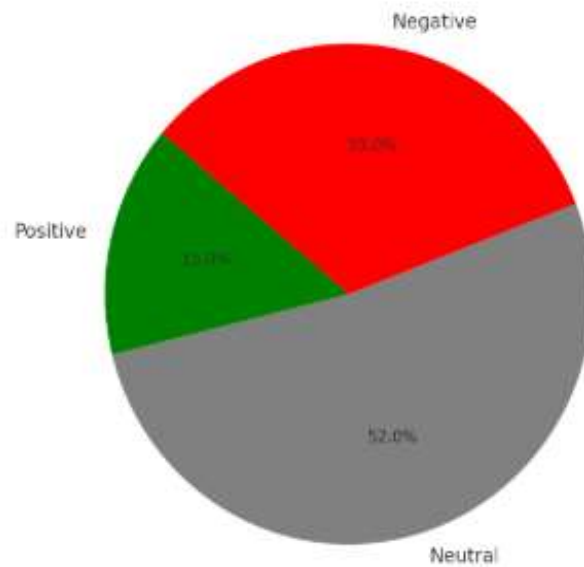


Figure 2: (*Sentiment Analysis Chart*) illustrates how participants perceived Australia's role

- 52% Neutral (acknowledging policy constraints but recognizing aid efforts)
- 33% Negative (criticizing lack of direct action)
- 15% Positive (supporting current engagement)

2.3 Perceived Effectiveness of Australia's Humanitarian Aid

Evaluates the impact of aid programs and international coordination challenges.

- Multilateral Cooperation (35%)
- Transparency in Aid Efforts (33%)
- Long-Term Strategies (32%)

2.4 Policy Constraints & Challenges

This section expands on diplomatic limitations, funding constraints, and logistical issues.

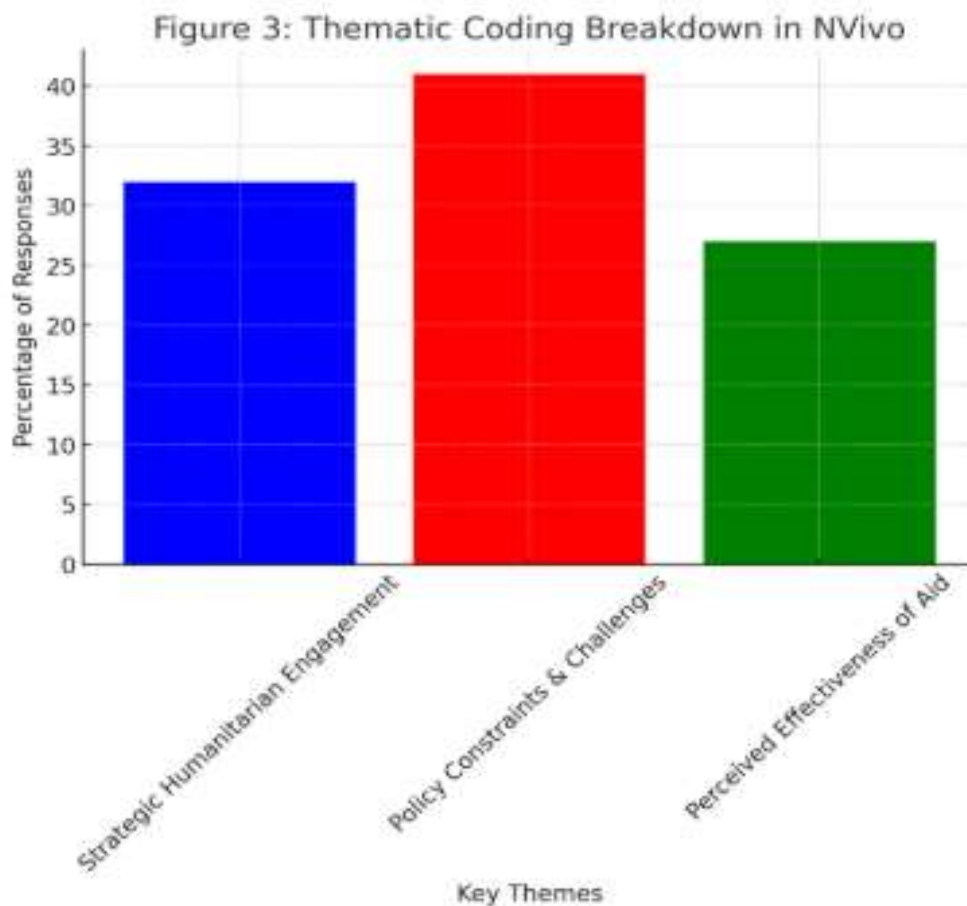


Figure 3: (*Thematic Coding Breakdown*) presents the percentage of responses related to three sub-themes

- Political Instability (14 mentions)
- Economic Constraints (12 mentions)
- Diplomatic Limitations (10 mentions)
- Logistical Issues (8 mentions)

Figure 4: Policy Constraints & Challenges in Addressing Yemen's Crisis

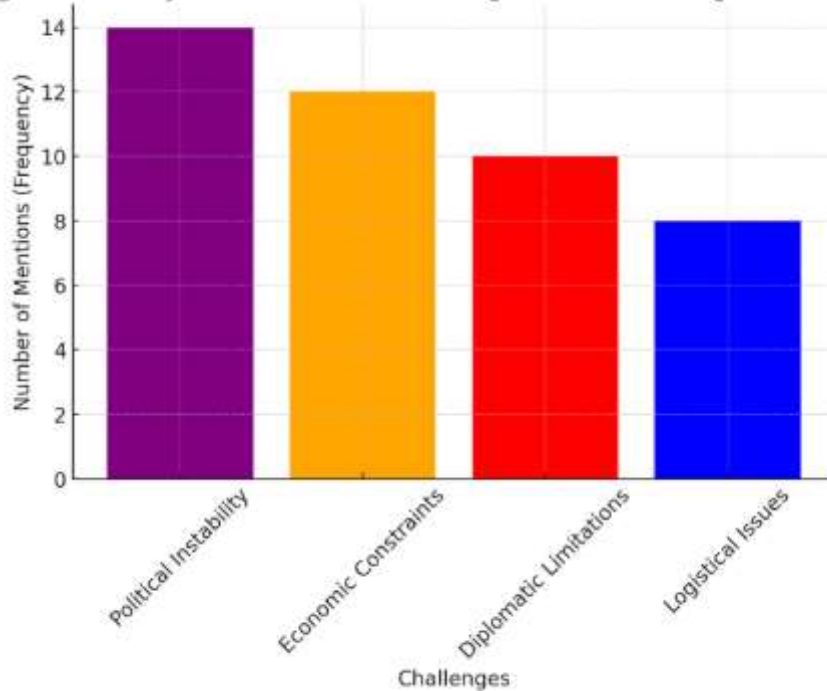


Figure 4: (Bar Graph on Constraints) highlights the most commonly mentioned obstacles

2.5 Future Humanitarian Strategies

Examines recommendations for improving Australia's engagement.

Figure 5 (Sub-Themes of Aid Effectiveness) demonstrates how interviewees emphasized:

- Multilateral Cooperation (35%)
- Transparency (33%)
- Long-Term Planning (32%)

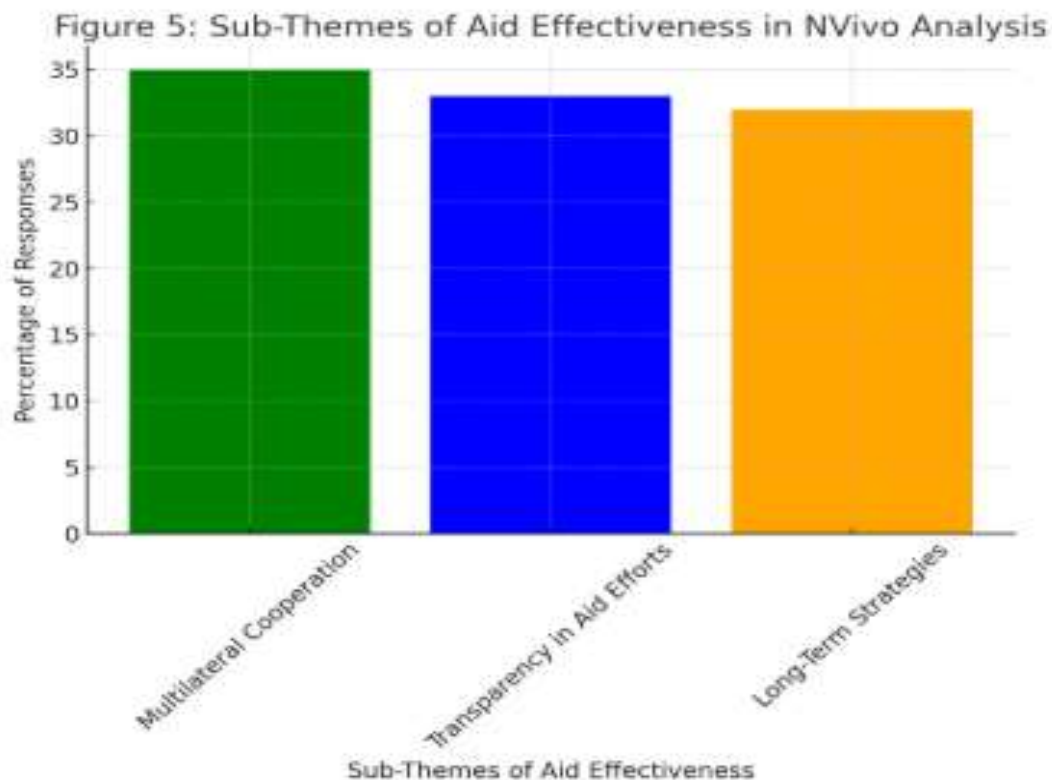


Figure 5: *Sub-Themes of Aid Effectiveness in NVivo Analysis*

Humanitarian Aid

Australia has been able to offer humanitarian aid to Yemen in an effort to address the short term needs of conflict affected population. Australia has funded the efforts of Yemen to enhance food security, health care, water and sanitation and humanitarian relief through the non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

Australia has been providing humanitarian aid to Yemen in a bid to address the immediate needs of the already affected individuals by the prevailing civil conflict and humanitarian disaster. The population in Yemen is facing extreme food insecurity, inability to access basic needs, and mass displacement. The humanitarian aid in Australia has been channeled through the non-governmental organizations and partners operating locally to give aid and assist in the basic relief efforts.

Australian humanitarian aid to Yemen's key elements includes:

Australia has contributed a high amount of money in order to support organizations in Yemen. The funds are allocated to provide lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable populations including internally displaced people and the host communities, which may include food, clean water, medical care, shelter and protective services.

Food Security: Australia supports programs in Yemen that encourage food security. To address the critical food crisis in the country, the aid assists in availing food aid, nutrition, agricultural support and livelihood assistance.

Health Services: Australia has also been providing aid in trying to support the healthcare system in Yemen. This includes funding of healthcare facilities, medical supplies and programs to address health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the cholera outbreak.

Water and Sanitation: Yemen population should have access to sanitary amenities and clean water. In particular, Australia has been channeling its humanitarian assistance to areas where these types of facilities have come under fighting control to access clean water and sanitation facilities.

Relief Operations: During severe crises, the Australian relief operations have played an important role in providing relief. This includes management of natural disasters that cannot be forecasted, displaced individuals due to warfare and other emergency cases.

Protection and Support of vulnerable groups: Vulnerable groups, including women, children and persons with disabilities, are some of the groups that require protection and care and any initiatives directed towards that end are also supported as part of the humanitarian assistance offered by Australia to Yemen. Such initiatives are associated with attempts to provide children experiencing the conflict with education, psychosocial assistance, and shelter (Firth & Nash, 2016).

Humanitarian situation in Yemen remains extremely challenging and complex, with the hostilities and limited access to the assistance agencies to certain locations. To solve the humanitarian disaster in Yemen and be able to alleviate the human suffering, the continuous assistance of the international community and the support of Australia is vital.

Table 1

Australia's Aid to Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis

Year	Amount (in AUD)	Type of Aid	Purpose/Recipient
2020	\$10 million	Humanitarian	Food and medical aid
2021	\$15 million	Development	Water and sanitation projects
2022	\$12 million	Emergency relief	Shelter and healthcare
2023	\$8 million	Humanitarian	Emergency food assistance

Source: DFAT Aid Programs

https://ministers.dfat.gov.au/minister/pat-conroy/media-release/humanitarian-assistance-horn-africa-and-yemen?_gl=1*1ur2uf8*_ga*MTIxMDc0NTQ5NC4xNzIzMTQyNDg3*_ga_8Z18QMQG8V*MTcyMzE0MjQ4OC4xLjEuMTcyMzE0MjY1MC4zMC4wLjA.

Diplomatic Engagement

Australia has also contributed to the world in finding a diplomatic solution to the civil war in Yemen. It has been involved in international conferences and diplomacy to ensure that the warring parties in Yemen negotiate to engage in dialogue. With regards to the Yemeni civil war and the general problem in Yemen, Australia has been playing the role of diplomacy. Australia, too, has been participating in the international endeavors to find peaceful solution to the prevailing situation though not being involved in the war directly. The Australian work in Yemen is dedicated to the peace negotiations, the dialogue between the sides of the conflict, and the development of the political solution to the conflict as the primary objectives of the diplomatic activity (Clarke, 2016). The Australian investment in the Yemeni diplomacy can be noted as some of the following aspects:

The example of the Australian diplomatic activity in Yemen shows how much the country undertakes to foster peace in the region, the stability, and humanitarian development. This country has consistently demonstrated that it is determined to employ diplomacies to bring the situation in Yemen to a halt. Interacting with key parties and bilateral consultations with other countries and international venues have facilitated a political and inclusive way out of the situation in Australia (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020). This plan correlates with the intention of Australia to promote universal principles and the ideas of conflict resolutions (United Nations, n.d.). *"Australia's foreign policy prioritizes the Asia-Pacific region, so engagement in Yemen remains secondary to its broader geopolitical interests."* (P2)

Alongside the problem itself, which is the ongoing crisis, the Australian diplomatic activity in Yemen is concerned with the problem of the regional stability. With the involvement in multilateral programs and working with organizations like the United Nations, Australia has pointed out the need of holistic solutions to the issue that goes beyond the conflict to the greater issues of the security and stability of the region. Australian Embassy (Saudi Arabia), (2021). This indicates the portrayal of Australia as a responsible international player that would wish to play its part in ensuring that complex regional problems are solved (Harris, 2018).

The diplomatic Australian involvement in Yemen is not excluded either in a humanitarian aspect. It has leveraged its diplomatic power and requested the international community to focus on the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and more access to humanitarian aid and assistance (United Nations OCHA, 2021). Australia has been lobbying through diplomatic means to protect civilians and provision of food and other necessities to the needy. Combining its diplomatic work with the concern over the well-being of Yemeni civilians, Australia tries to not only solve the problems of the conflict on the political level, but also relieve the Yemeni population.

Australia is not as active and supportive regarding the diplomatic involvement in Yemen compared to some other countries, yet the work is still significant to promote the peace and stability of the country, as well as its respect towards human rights. The Yemen problem remains to be complicated and conflictual and the political work of international community, including Australian one, is critical to furthering a cease-fire in the hostilities and addressing the humanitarian demands in Yemen.

Advocacy for a Political Solution

Australia has emphasized the need to settle the disputes by using negotiations and it has sought to find a political solution to the Yemeni problem severally. Australian government is urging both parties to cooperate and go to peaceful solution. Australia has persistently insisted on an end to the war and has not been quiet in pushing towards the diplomatic settlement of the Yemeni civil war. When it comes to promoting a political solution in the Yemeni case, Australia, as a nation that has made it its sole aim to see that peace and stability prevail in the region, has taken note of some critical aspects.

After making it clear once more that they are committed to peace, stability and welfare of the Yemeni people, Australia has never been shy on calling upon the Yemen situation to be resolved politically. In order to have a comprehensive and sustainable political settlement, the country diplomatic processes have been geared to coerce all parties to engage in substantive dialogue and negotiations under the leadership of the United Nations (UN) (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020). The position of Australia is compliant with the clauses of the UN Charter, which pays a significant attention to the importance of international cooperation and peaceful resolution of disputes (United Nations, n.d.).

The Australian support of a political settlement is not just a rhetoric exercise but the country has been actively participating in the promotion of the diplomatic solutions to the Yemen problem at the international level. Australia has tried to form an atmosphere conducive to negotiations using cooperation with regional and global partners and it has urged other states to promote initiatives by UN (Australian Embassy, Saudi Arabia, 2021). The Australian diplomatic policy is based on its assumption that multilateral diplomacy can resolve complicated conflicts (Harris, 2018).

Australia has been a major proponent of political solution to the Yemen problem as it feels that it is the best opportunity to have a lasting peace. Being one of the initial steps to promote a supportive atmosphere to negotiations, the country has repeatedly insisted on the early cessation of hostilities (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020). Moreover, Australia realizes that reaching a political compromise should involve finding a solution to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. (Australian Embassy, Saudi Arabia, 2021). The incorporation of humanitarian issues in its advocacy is one way through which Australia strives to project the urgency of easing the plight of the Yemeni people as necessary building blocks towards a peace foundation (United Nations OCHA, 2021).

Arms Export Policies

Australia has acted to make sure that its weaponry exports are not prohibited in the international law, do not encourage the violation of human rights, and do not contribute to the conflict, such as the one in Yemen. Australia has legislations that are used to assess the threat of the export of weaponry to countries which are involved in armed conflicts or those which abuse human rights.

The laws on exports in Australia are aimed at making sure that its export of weapons do not trigger the violation of human rights or intensification of conflicts in other nations, including Yemen. The Australian policy regarding the export of the weapons is consistent with its wish to support the international undertakings as well as the regional, and international peace and safety (Farrall, 2018).

Due to the ongoing arms conflict and humanitarian crisis in the country of Yemen, the policy of arms export in this country is currently a burning issue and the subject of discussion in Australia. Australia is an international peace maker, a security and stability partner and is a signatory to most of the international weapons control treaties. In Yemen where a long-term war has been going on with numerous parties involved and leading to massive deaths of civilians and other human rights violations, there has been fears of mishandling or diversion of the Australian-made arms. It is due to these concerns that Australian government has put stricter restrictions and analysis of her shipment of military to the countries that are part of Yemen crisis. This includes carrying out large-scale end-use monitoring and ensuring that the arms sold to foreign countries are deployed in lawful self-defence applications and do not constitute an abuse of the international humanitarian law (Stephens and Keane, 2019). However, critics believe that there should be more that can be done to keep the Australian interest alive in the peace keeping of war torn countries like Yemen and ensure that weapons are not the direct cause of the war (Kamrava, 2018).

The policy of arms export of Australia in Yemen is complex as Australia should consider both commercial and moral and ethical priorities. The Australian defense market has a big role to play in the economy of the country through employment and technological development. Nevertheless, the export of the weapons to the regions of armed conflict requires more responsibility and transparency. Opponents assert that a more prudent and conscientious strategy is needed because the focus on economic benefits may continue the violence and misery unintentionally in such countries as Yemen. Others have called a total freeze on arms sales to countries that are part of Yemeni crisis and some have proposed more stringent conditions to arms sales ensuring that any prospective buyer demonstrates its commitment to adherence to human rights and international law. (Stephens & Keane, 2019). Australia still has a challenging endeavor in trying to balance its arms export policies in Yemen and the rest of the potentially conflict pivotal countries; this is trying to make the right balancing act between its economic interests and humanitarianism.

Support for UN-led Initiatives

Australia has actively been cooperating with UN and other international partners in the effort to seek solutions and help in the establishment of peace. Australia has supported UN-led efforts in order to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Australia has continued to be a formidable advocate of the UN-directed initiatives to end the civil war in Yemen and obtain a peaceful solution to the dilemma. Australia is a state that is actively involved in the diplomatic process as a vehement supporter of the work of the UN to discover peace and humanitarian support in Yemen.

Australia has been an ardent and consistent advocate of the work of the UN on Yemen because it demonstrates its loyalty to the resolution of the humanitarian crisis and the situation in the area. The country is acting as a role player in the diplomatic front to achieve peace, stability, and well being of Yemeni people as it is aware of the gravity of the situation. The political resolution of the conflict and the necessity to engage all actors in the dialogue under the jurisdiction of the United Nations is brought to the fore by the diplomatic efforts of Australia (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020). This measure is in line with international peace and security of Australia in general (United Nations, n.d.).

As well as diplomacy, Australia is also participating in other initiatives by the UN in Yemen through providing substantial humanitarian funding to bring down the suffering brought about by the war. The country has been able to provide those affected by the crisis with basic needs such as food, healthcare, and shelter through financial assistance and relief organizations (Australian Embassy, Saudi Arabia, 2021). The commitment to advance the dismal humanitarian state in Yemen and the respect of international humanitarian standards are part of this commitment in the pledge of Australia.

Also, Australia has been actively involved in multilateral deliberations in the context of the UN to establish a sustainable resolution to the Yemeni crisis, on top of, its humanitarian aid. The country has continuously encouraged the involved parties to observe the international law, such as the safety of the civilians, and requested the termination of hostilities (Australian Embassy, Saudi Arabia, 2021). Through the identification of its efforts with the activities of the UN, Australia reiterates the importance of the international collaboration and diplomacy in solving conflicts and enhancing stability, peace and prosperity in Yemen and the entire Middle East region.

Australia becomes the part of the greater international community to tackle the humanitarian crisis, facilitate communication, and work towards a long-term peace in Yemen through backing the UN initiatives in the region. The involvement in the UN programs shows that Australia is committed to the further promotion of peace, human rights respect, and cessation of armed conflicts in Yemen and other regions with conflicts (Farrall, 2018).

One needs to keep in mind that the case in Yemen is complex and dynamic and the Australian participation may vary with the local situation and the response of the world to the crisis. (Harris, 2018). International diplomacy and international aid including Australia remains essential to stop the Yemeni civil war and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Discussion & Conclusion

The thematic analysis sheds light on how the Australian intervention in Yemen has shifted following the Arab spring. These findings justify the need to be transparent and cooperate between different nations and have long-term vision to facilitate humanitarian and diplomatic efforts. Since Arab spring, the Yemen issue has been described as having an overarching handling of a balance between humanitarian aid and security matters by Australia. Being a responsible state, however, Australia has often offered the citizens of Yemen massive aid because of the current war and relieved the locals of the burdens. The previous attempts to provide food, medical, and humanitarian aid to Yemen have been crucial towards reducing the negative effects of the crisis on the vulnerable groups. Secondly, Australia has tried to provide the stability of the region and peaceful outcomes of its diplomatic efforts, individually as well as in the multilateral forums. However, Australia has not been keen on taking a direct military role in Yemen owing to the fact that it is well informed on the difficulties and risks that would accrue with the intervention in such a volatile war-field. The fact that Australia is a participant in the Yemeni crisis shows that the international humanitarian issues with seriousness and also reveals the significance of prudent decision making in an unfavourable geopolitical environment. In a bid to find a sustainable solution of the Yemeni people in the future and ensure the presence of the way to peace, stability and prosperity in the region, Australia must continue its humanitarian support programs, promote positive dialogue and cooperate with the international community. By critically combining the insights, it can be known more about the role the Australia takes in the Yemen and its general impacts on the humanitarian policies worldwide.

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