Push for US to redesignate Houthis as terrorists is misguided, destructive for Yemen

From: Abdulwasea Mohammed, Oxfam’s Yemen advocacy, campaigns and media manager

It’s been a particularly devastating few weeks in Yemen. Airstrikes have escalated, queues and prices for fuel and other necessities have grown exponentially, and we were cut off from the world and from each other for over four days. At night, we are comforting our children and afraid to leave our homes as airstrikes explode nearby.

Reading opinion pieces like that from Dennis Ross (“A needed warning for Yemen’s rebels — and for our allies and enemies alike,” Jan. 24), that dismiss the humanitarian consequences of the U.S. designating the Houthis as a terrorist organization makes it even more difficult to keep hope.

Last year, many of us in Yemen were encouraged by the change in U.S. policy when President Biden lifted a ban on arms sales to the coalition, appointed an envoy to engage with all parties for peace, and removed the terrorism designation placed on the Houthis in order to maintain the pipeline of food, fuel, medicine, and humanitarian aid. He did this because he did not believe the Yemeni people should pay for the Houthis’ conduct.

We didn’t oppose the designation because we are blind to the Houthis’ attacks on civilians, but because of its deadly consequences. Over the past year, the situation has only deteriorated. Families lack homes, work, and a brutal conflict, with thousands of families forced to flee their homes many times over — further depleting any savings they had managed to build.

The economic crisis has driven the price of food, fuel, medicine, and more out of reach for many — all while facing the additional fallout of COVID-19. Since 2015, nearly half of Yemeni families have seen their livelihoods disrupted as Yemeni currency value has dropped over 700 percent. Public wages have been unpaid or cut for months — one month’s salary cannot secure one week’s worth of food.

Yemeni lives are being caught in regional dynamics and politics, and more will be lost should this designation move ahead. Yemenis saw widespread and appropriate condemnation when the Houthis struck the United Arab Emirates and we also heard near silence in response to the deaths of hundreds of Yemenis and even more destruction of the infrastructure we need to survive.

I hope political analysts writing in D.C. will consider the severity of the situation and be mindful of the balance more carefully before urging this dangerous move any further. We need all voices urging all parties to the conflict, the U.N. Security Council, and other world leaders to do everything in their power to bring renewed urgency to peace talks.

Sana’a, Yemen

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CONTRIBUTORS

A reset on federal election legislation

By Trey Grayson and Nick Troiano

A new report by the Bipartisan Policy Center — in partnership with Issue One, American Enterprise Institute, R Street Institute, and Unite America (the organization we lead) — draws upon a bipartisan task force of two dozen election officials from 20 states to propose 10 recommendations for minimum state election standards.

These recommendations pair Democratic priorities on voting access, such as requiring seven days of early voting and access to no-excuse absentee ballots, with Republican priorities on security, such as requiring post-election audits and options for verifying voters’ identity. Adoption of these standards would give states additional much-needed funding for election administration, with less money coming from the private sources that many objected to in the 2020 election.

These recommendations are neither onerous nor designed for partisan advantage. In fact, 72 percent of them are already met on average by individual states nationwide, red and blue alike. With federal funding incentives, we could close the gap and ensure an equitable baseline for election administration across the country, while upholding states’ constitutional oversight of their elections.

Two states meet all of the recommended standards: Colorado and, contrary to the mainstream narrative, Georgia.

Seven more states are just one shy of meeting them all: Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Virginia and Washington.

States with the most ground to make up include both Delaware and New York. Putting aside hot-button issues like mail-in ballots and voter ID, there are many common sense standards both sides could champion: For example, states should ensure ballots are counted seven days before the election so results (and voter confidence) do not lag far behind.

States should share their voter lists with each other to prevent outdated or multiple voter registrations. States should provide physical security to election administrators and their staffs who come under threats or harassment.

Of course, some may argue it’s not enough: funding incentives can’t overcome state law. That’s the point. Congress can make meaningful progress on elections without turning the temperature up even higher, further undermining confidence in our democracy, or inviting potentially restrictive rewrites of election law a couple years from now.

Congress has a history of bipartisan election reform. Twenty years ago, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was passed in response to the controversy of the 2000 election. HAVA created standards for voting systems, such as replacing punch-card machines, and created the Election Assistance Commission to provide grants that would incentivize their adoption. The Senate passed HAVA 99-2.

This approach is not exclusionary to other steps Congress can and must take to defend our democracy — including reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act and reforming the Electoral Count Act. The Senate’s bipartisan group of lawmakers would be wise to do all of the above. And if Democrats truly believe the threats facing democracy are existential, they should be the first to agree that something is better than nothing.

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