

Forum: *Security Council*

Issue: *The ongoing situation in Yemen*

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Introduction

The ongoing situation in Yemen has been developing and evolving over the past sixty years. The country has undergone multiple transitions of power, shifting from British control to the Yemen Arab Republic, the People's Republic of Yemen, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and finally the Republic of Yemen, which it remains today.

The country is currently embroiled in a bitter civil war which has been ongoing since 2015, when the Houthi rebel group seized control of the Yemeni capital of Sanaa and forced President Hadi to exile in the Southern city of Aden. Since then, multiple Saudi-led airstrikes, Islamic State and al-Qaeda attacks, and blockades have created a situation boiling with political unrest and one of the current worst humanitarian crises in the world.

Currently, there is an ongoing conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The conflict in Yemen is seen as a proxy war of this conflict. Iran backs the Houthi rebels, and Saudi Arabia leads an Arab coalition assisted by powers such as the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) in supporting Hadi's government. Serving as the site of the proxy war between the two powers exacerbates the situation in Yemen, as it is already one of the poorest states in the Arab world.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen is one of the most pressing facets of this topic. UNICEF has stated that "Yemen is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world", and around 80% of its population (around 24 million people) need humanitarian aid. This crisis has been caused by military conflict as well as blockades which lead to a lack of adequate supplies and safe living facilities.

Definition of Key Terms

Houthi

The Houthi movement (also called Ansar Allah, or “supporters of God”) is made up of Zaydi Shiites, a minority Muslim group. The movement is dedicated to fighting corruption. Zaydis have been attempting to gain control of Yemen since around the ninth century. Yemen fell to the Houthi rebel group in 2015, and soon after the Saudis went to war to stop the Houthis from taking over the country. Today, the conflict between the Houthis and the Saudis has led to a humanitarian crisis due to blockades.

Gulf Cooperation Council

The council is made up of six countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman), and was formed in 1981 to unite Arab countries. They initiated demonstrations in 2011 which toppled Saleh’s rule as leader.

Proxy war

A proxy war is one that takes place between small countries which are each backed by or supporting the interests of larger, more powerful countries.

Sectarian conflict

A sectarian conflict is one that is between specific ethnic or religious groups and leads to violence between these groups based on their religious and ethnic differences.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

IDPs are people who remain in their home country but are not living in safe conditions. They are under government protection but move to areas within their country where humanitarian aid is difficult to be delivered.

Background Information

The Yemen Civil War

Yemen has been undergoing a devastating civil war since 2011. The war has had tremendous impacts on political stability, infrastructure, and human rights in the country.

Pre-2011 History

The conflict in Yemen has been building for many decades. Yemen was under British control from 1839 to 1967, after which the former British territory became the People's Republic of Yemen. In 1969, the southern part of the country was named the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen following a communist coup. Border clashes followed by an Arab League ceasefire between Northern and Southern Yemen occurred in 1972, and conflict continued until 1990, when the two reunited as the Republic of Yemen. The South seceded once again in 1994, and conflict continued.

Beginnings of the War

After a 2011 Arab Spring uprising, a forced political transition from Ali Abdullah Saleh (the president at that time, a known authoritarian) to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi failed. Hadi faced a series of problems from terrorism to rebellions to corruption and lack of food and job security for the Yemeni people. During his presidency, the Houthi movement, which backed Saleh, gained power. They had support from many Yemenis who were unhappy with the political transition, and the Houthis took over the Yemeni capital of Sanaa, then attempted to control the whole country in 2015. This forced Hadi to leave Yemen, and concerns about Houthi power led to a Saudi Arabia-led coalition beginning an air campaign to defeat the Houthis. This coalition was backed by the US, UK, and France.

Current Political State

After four years of a military stalemate, Yemen remains in a civil war. Hadi's government has remained in the city of Aden while Hadi himself resides in Saudi Arabia. The Houthis remain in Sanaa and Northwest Yemen and continue their attempts to control other cities such as Taiz and attack Saudi Arabia. Due to conflict over the control of Sanaa's biggest mosque, the Houthi-Saleh alliance collapsed in 2017. Saleh was killed in a Houthi attack on the capital later on. Following more coalition attempts at breaking the deadlock, the two groups reached an agreement for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange. The UAE withdrew its troops from Yemen in 2019, and later that year Saudi-backed government forces began fighting a UAE-backed separatist movement — the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The STC took over Aden, demanding a power-sharing deal with Saudi Arabia. Fighting escalated between the Houthis and the coalition in January. In April, the STC brokered a peace deal with the internationally recognized government and announced they would govern Aden and South Yemen. A ceasefire due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was declared by Saudi Arabia in April but rejected by the Houthis.

Geographical Significance

Yemen's physical location is a significant factor in the cause of the longstanding conflict in the region. The nation is located on a strait that links the Gulf of Aden with the Red Sea. A large portion of global oil shipments pass through, so it is an economically important location for many oil-dependent economies.

Key Issues

The Humanitarian Crisis

Conflict and blockades in Yemen have had a devastating impact on human rights in the country.

Death by War Violence

In March 2020, the UN announced that at least 7700 civilians were killed in violence related to the Saudi-led coalition air attacks. However, the actual total was estimated to be much higher.

Death by Malnutrition and Other Health Causes

Save the Children has estimated that 85,000 children may have died between April 2015 and October 2018 from malnutrition. Additionally two million children (including nearly 360,000 children under the age of five) struggle to survive. Furthermore, an estimated 80% of the Yemeni population, roughly 24 million people, need humanitarian assistance. Likewise, around 20 million individuals need help with food security, and 10 million are close to famine. The country not only lacks healthcare facilities and clean sanitation but is also dealing with the cholera outbreak and repercussions of COVID-19.

The Yemen Civil War

The fight for control over Yemen has been ongoing, and there is still no single clear official leader of the country.

Internationally Recognized Government

Currently, the Yemeni government is led by Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Hadi ruled since 2012, briefly resigned, and was exiled from the capital of Sanaa in 2015. He later returned to set up his government in the Southern city of Aden. The government is backed by a Saudi-led

coalition of countries including Bahrain, Jordan, and the UAE (countries which are majority Sunni Muslim). The US also supports this coalition.

Houthi Rebels

The Houthi rebels (see Key Terms section) are backed by Iran and oppose the current government, creating the main source of the political conflict in this area.

The Proxy Situation

The proxy situation in Yemen is one that involves religion, geography, and economy. As stated in the introduction, Yemen is considered part of a proxy war in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran backs the Houthis, as they are both the majority Shiite Muslims. Shiite Muslims have significantly different Islamic beliefs than Sunni Muslims, the majority in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, since many Middle Eastern countries have a primarily oil-based economy, both countries are interested in the oil passage route in Yemen.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Yemen

Yemen, the country this issue is centered around, is one of the main parties involved in this conflict. As explained in previous sections, Yemen faces multiple crises. First, there is political conflict between the internationally recognized government and the Houthi rebel group. Additionally, what has been called the world's worst humanitarian crisis is taking place there.

Houthis

The Houthi rebel group (formally Ansar Allah) is a movement based on the Zaydi Shiite Muslim minority in Yemen. The group took over the capital of Sanaa in 2014. Their movement is based on fighting corruption in Yemen.

Officially Recognized Government

The officially recognized government in Yemen is led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The government has signed the GCC Initiative, an agreement that created a new constitution with a referendum, and a general election.

Saudi Arabia

Involvement

Saudi Arabia is the founder of the coalition (made up of Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and the UAE) that supports Hadi's government. Upon Hadi's request for a coalition in 2015, they formed a group of Sunni Arab states after he fled to Saudi Arabia in exile from Sanaa, which led to airstrikes and military attacks against the Houthi forces.

Views

As the coalition leader, Saudi Arabia is strongly in support of Hadi's government. They provide much of the military support and lead attacks against the Houthis.

United States of America

Involvement

The US is the biggest Saudi arms supplier. However, there has been backlash around the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, as well as civilian deaths due to Saudi-coalition led violence (where the US' involvement has also led them to be accused of war crimes). These controversies have led to limits in weapons sales and supplies to the Saudi forces.

Views

The US government, especially Congress, has long held divided views on the Yemen issue. However, they currently support the Saudi-led coalition, along with Western allies such as France, Germany, and the UK. The US has multiple interests in the region, such as Saudi border security and overall peace in the area, free passage of oil through the Bab al-Mandeb strait, and counterterrorism cooperation with the government in Sanaa. More recently in 2018, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called for a peaceful resolution to the Yemen conflict and for an end to coalition airstrikes on populated Yemen areas.

Iran

Involvement

Iran provides military and supply support to the Houthi rebel forces. Their Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, has also been accused by Hadi's government of working with Iran in aiding the Houthis.

Views

In the view of Saudi Arabia, the Houthis are suspected to be an Iranian proxy government instead of an indigenous rebel group, and the two groups share geopolitical needs as both seek to challenge the Saudi and U.S. dominance of the region. Other regional specialists argue that this is a limited theory, as the Houthis and Iranians follow different schools of Shiite Islam.

United Kingdom

Involvement

The UK's involvement in sending military aid to coalition forces has led UN experts to suggest that they could be liable for war crimes in Yemen. Additionally, Yemen was under British control for many years in the 19th and 20th centuries, so there is colonial history in the region.

Views

The UK supports the Saudi coalition and provides supplies to coalition forces. Stationed in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the British ambassador pledges to address the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Al Qaeda

Involvement

Al-Qaeda, a terrorist group, has also caused significant damage in the region. They killed 17 US personnel in an attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and attacked the oil supertanker MV Limburg in 2002, after Yemen expelled more than 100 foreign Muslim clerics earlier that year. They attacked the US embassy in Sanaa in 2008, killing 12. Once Hadi was inaugurated as president in 2012, he was unable to defend against al-Qaeda attacks in Sanaa. Their leader in the Arabian Peninsula, Nasser al-Wuhayshi, was killed in 2015 in Yemen by a US drone strike.

Views

Al-Qaeda is not directly aligned with either side in the Yemeni Civil War, and the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia has launched multiple operations to combat its attacks in the region.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Involvement

The UAE is a member of the Saudi-led coalition and has supplied military aid to fight back against Houthi rebels and al-Qaeda along with other coalition members.

Views

The UAE sees improving relations with Saudi Arabia and the US as two foreign policy objectives in its involvement in the Saudi-led coalition. As a result, the nation works closely with them in the actions it takes in the region.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Involvement

The GCC signed an initiative in 2011 which would transition power in Yemen from former president Saleh to current president Hadi in exchange for Saleh's immunity. Saleh also would remain head of the parliamentary majority General People's Congress party.

Views

The ultimate goal of the GCC is to strengthen and promote unity among Middle Eastern states. Thus, any action it takes aligns with this mission.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
May 22nd, 1990	<p>Unification of Yemen</p> <p>An agreement between the Yemen Arab Republic (Northern Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (Southern Yemen) led to the formation of the combined Republic of Yemen. The North would be led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the General People's Congress, and the South would be led by Ali Salim al-Beidh and the Yemeni Socialist Party.</p>
April 27, 1994	<p>Beginning of Yemeni Civil War</p> <p>After a tank battle in Amran, surrounding Sanaa, the civil war officially began. President Saleh declared a state of emergency.</p>
May 21st, 1994	<p>Southern Secession</p> <p>The YSP announced the secession of Southern Yemen from the rest of the nation, forming the unrecognized Democratic Republic of Yemen.</p>

Agreement on Ceasefire

June 30th, 1994 An agreement mediated in Moscow, following the conditions of UNSC resolution 924, leads to a temporary ceasefire.

Capture of Aden

July 7th, 1994 Pro-Saleh forces captured the city of Aden, breaking the ceasefire and ending the civil war with a military victory.

First Direct Presidential Election

September 23, 1999 President Saleh won with 96.3% of the votes, beginning his fifth term as President.

International Border Treaty between Yemen and Saudi Arabia (Jeddah Treaty)

June 12th, 2000 A border agreement ended the border issue between the two countries and created the boundaries of Yemen still in place today.

Beginning of Sadaa War

June 1st-September 30th, 2004 After a Yemeni government police operation against Hussein al-Houthi, a former Parliament member and Zaydi activist, fighting broke out between the government and the Houthi movement, which was led by al-Houthi's father after his September 10 killing.

Protests against President Saleh (Yemeni Arab Spring)

January 1st-January 27th, 2011 As the Arab Spring movement spread, calls for the overthrow of President Saleh began.

Transfer of Power between Presidents Saleh and Hadi

September 12th, 2011 With the Presidential Decree No. (24) FY 2011, Saleh handed over his executive powers to Vice President Hadi.

Resignation of President Hadi and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah

January 22, 2015

A failed agreement to end the political and military stand-off between the Houthis and Hadi's government led to both the President and PM resigning and being placed under house arrest.

Houthis seize power, flee of Hadi

February 6-February 21, 2015

After the Houthis announced they would suspend the constitution and the House of Representatives, Hadi withdrew his resignation and fled Sanaa to Aden, which he declared the temporary capital.

Houthi-Saleh fighting begins in Aden

March 25th, 2015

Houthi and Saleh forces entered Aden, where they faced resistance from the majority as well as Hadi and the Southern Movement.

Intervention of Arab Coalition

March 26th, 2015

The Saudi-led Arab Coalition began Operation Decisive Storm to reinstate Hadi's government, and Hadi fled to Riyadh.

Blocking of humanitarian aid by Arab Coalition

November 6th, 2017

Planes carrying humanitarian aid attempted to land in Yemen but were blocked from landing by the Arab Coalition.

Assassination of former President Saleh

December 4th, 2017

Houthi forces killed Saleh in Sanaa, following a three-day battle.

Riyadh Agreement between Yemeni government and Southern Transitional Council (STC) proposed

November 5th, 2019

The power-sharing agreement proposed would end the conflict between the Yemeni government and Houthis.

Southern Yemeni leaders pull out of Riyadh Agreement talks

August 26, 2020

The STC announced that the southern separatists would no longer participate in consultations on the agreement.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Assistance to Yemen, 17 December 1983 (**A/RES/37/166**)
- Outcome of the Universal Periodic Review: Yemen: decision / adopted by the Human Rights Council, 24 September 2009 (**A/HRC/DEC/12/112**)
- Security Council resolution 179 (1963) [on reports of the Secretary-General concerning developments relating to Yemen], 11 June 1963 (**S/RES/179(1963)**)
- Security Council resolution 2201 (2015) [on the situation in Yemen], 15 February 2015 (**S/RES/2201**)
- Technical assistance and capacity-building for Yemen in the field of human rights: resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council, 29 September 2011 (**A/HRC/RES/18/19**)
- UN sanctions Ali Abdullah Saleh, 06 November 2014
- Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) on arms embargo against Ansar Allah/Saleh, 14 April 2015 (**S/RES/2216**)
- Security Council Resolution 2452 (2019) on United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement, 16 January 2019 (**S/RES/2452**)
- Security Council Resolution 924 (1994) on the Situation in Yemen, 1 June 1994 (**S/RES/924**)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In the past, numerous solutions were explored. The treaties, resolutions, and agreements described in this report have been signs of progress in the region, but none have stuck.

Multiple ceasefires and peace agreements, such as the 1994 ceasefire mediated in Moscow, have been attempted. However, either side of the party commonly broke the ceasefire, preventing further progress on peace. Possible explanations for failed attempts could be the lack of alignment between politicians' words and their actions. The aforementioned call for peace by US Secretary of State Pompeo is one such example. Overall, it seems that oil and power interests outweigh peace interests for many parties involved in the conflict. The short span of past ceasefires leaves not enough time to address the destruction in the region. Thus, using ceasefires as a potential solution should be explored with caution,

unless there are conditions put in place that make the breaking of peace difficult and discouraged, and there are incentives for both sides to maintain the ceasefire.

Sanctions, such as the 2014 UN sanctions on Saleh, have also been endeavored. However, Saleh remained influential with the Houthi movement until his 2017 assassination. Sanctions, as well as blockades, can impact the feasibility of the delivery of humanitarian aid. Therefore, it is important to consider the potential civilian impacts of any solutions explored.

Possible Solutions

Creating a Partition

The idea of partition has been brought up by scholars on the issue. Partition would be dividing Yemen into two parts, as it used to be. Proponents of this argument say that political dissent began after the unification of the North and South in 1990, and since then Yemen has never been able to maintain a fully unified society because of differences over nationalism. Thus, partition by giving the Houthis control of North Yemen and giving South Yemen to Hadi and the STC would arguably be the only solution to guarantee the interests of both sides are fulfilled and peace can be achieved.

Setting Up Peace Talks

Further peace talks are also a potential solution, although doubt has been raised due to the failure of peace talks and agreements to have fully lasting impacts in the past. The French Security Council representative, Nicolas De Rivière, stated in October 2020 at the United Nations that the parties should “resume discussions in coordination with the Special Envoy [Martin Griffiths]”. This demonstrates that there are countries committed to discussion for ending regional conflict, so further peace talks are a viable option. However, both parties must be willing to compromise and work together to benefit themselves and the nation as a whole.

Ending Blockades and Evacuating Civilians

Seeing as the humanitarian crisis currently ongoing in the region is in drastic need of being addressed, civilian evacuation and the ending of blockades are also a potential solution. One of the main causes of the severe human rights violations ongoing in the area is that it is difficult for aid and infrastructure to reach civilians. Thus, military clashes should be put aside to either allow aid in or allow civilians out to safer regions. In this case, other member nations and NGOs must be willing to support civilians, whether with shelter or supplies.

Resolving the Saudi-Iranian Conflict

Resolving the Saudi-Iranian conflict would also bring an end to its Yemeni proxy war. As mentioned before, the conflict in Yemen is considered an extension of the long conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Seeing as religious differences are a significant part of the conflict, this could be potentially done through the appointment of a religious council to create an agreeable Fatwa (a formal interpretation of an Islamic law).

Reviewing Previous Peace Attempts

Reviewing an older attempt at peace, analyzing why it failed, and taking measures to revise it to improve its chance of effectiveness in the future is yet another way this conflict can be brought to an end. This could be achieved through the creation of a special task force or UN group to review past attempts at peace and redevelop them.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>
- II. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c77jz3mdq72t/yemen>
- III. <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis>
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