

FORUM:	Security Council
ISSUE:	Situation in Yemen
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POSITION:	Head President of Security Council

Introduction

The ongoing Yemen civil war began in 2014 when the Houthi rebel group ousted Yemen's internationally recognized government (IRG). Since then, the Houthis have taken control of most of the country, with numerous other regional parties—including a Saudi-led coalition, a Southern secessionist party, and al-Qaeda—becoming involved in the conflict. There have been many short-lived ceasefires ranging from days to the longest at 6 months, but a permanent peace deal has yet to emerge. In conjunction, the situation in Yemen has been called “the worst humanitarian crisis in the world” by the United Nations (UN): more than two-thirds of the population (21.6 million) require humanitarian aid, and almost half (46%) of all healthcare facilities are partially or completely non-operational (World Health Organisation).

Background

Reunification of Yemen

Since the 19th century, the territory of modern Yemen had been a province of the Ottoman Empire. When the Empire collapsed in 1922, Yemen split into two territories—North Yemen became an independent democratic republic, while South Yemen was administered as part of Northern India and later revolted to become a secular Marxist state governed by the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP).



Figure #1: North and South Yemen pre-unification

In the late 1980s, oil exploration near North-South borders engendered interest in bilateral collaboration to exploit resources and mutually boost economic growth (Whitaker). In November of 1989, President Abi Abdullah Saleh of North Yemen and General Secretary Ali Salem al-Beidh of South



Yemen accepted a unity constitution for the unification of the two countries. As the Northern population was, and remains, four to five times larger than that of the South, Sanaa¹ became the seat of government with Saleh serving as President and al-Beidh as Vice-President. A 30-month transitional period to unify the two political and governmental systems was set.

North/South Inequality

Yemen's first national elections were held on April 27th 1993. The YSP placed third, with 18% of seats in parliament and 18% of votes, dominating votes in the South and affirming its legitimacy as a regional representative party. Meanwhile, the General People's Congress (GPC) and the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (frequently called Islah), parties affiliated with Saleh, gained 61% of seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union).

The YSP argued that because of its landslide popularity in the South, it had the right to govern that area, while Saleh proposed a 3-way coalition with the GPC holding majority seats, but the YSP refused to



Figure #2: The official flag of the YSP

accept anything other than a 50/50 power split as established during the interim. As such, fighting broke out in late April of 1994 between the unintegrated armies of North and South but ended quickly on July 4th of the same year when Northern troops entered Aden. Despite certain ranged strikes occurring against cities in the North, almost all of the actual fighting occurred in the South (Day).

In the weeks following, there was an influx of Northerners entering Southern cities, occupying homes of evacuated

YSP officials and seeking to profit from the North's victory, followed by a spread of corruption in provincial bodies. Southerners felt that their land, less densely populated than the North's but nearly twice as large and containing the majority of the country's oil reserves, was being inequitably appropriated by the rulers of North Yemen. This remains a grievance today (al-Beidh).

Sunni-Shia Divide

¹ Sanaa, the capital city of Yemen, may also be found spelled *Sana'a* or *Sana* in research materials; the first transliteration is used throughout this report



Sunni Islam and Shia Islam are the main denominations of Islamic teachings², with roughly 90% of Muslims being Sunni and 10% Shia. One of the most significant proxy wars in modern history, between majority-Sunni Saudi Arabia and majority-Shia Iran, has emerged from this ideological disagreement. In Yemen, Zaydi Muslims, a subset of Shia Islam common in Yemen, gave birth to the Houthi movement emerged in the 1990s partially because of the Sunni-Shia divide; it claimed to fight for economic development, reducing corruption, and ending Shia marginalisation in Yemen.

2004 Houthi Insurgency

In 2004, the IRG attempted to arrest Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a Zaydi religious leader and former parliamentarian, accusing him of setting up unlicensed religious centres and issuing a \$55,000 bounty for his arrest. Al-Houthi, in turn, accused Saleh of financial corruption and seeking to enrich his own family rather than better the nation. Starting in June, the IRG began to arrest hundreds of Houthi members, with the situation quickly devolving into full-scale civil war between Houthi members and the Yemeni army. Despite beginning as a small movement, the Houthis quickly solidified themselves as a formidable threat to the IRG as they received military backing from Iran and grew in numbers.

On September 10th 2004, Hussein al-Houthi was killed and one of his brothers, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, became the rebellion's leader, while his father, Badreddin al-Houthi, became the spiritual leader (Al Jazeera).



Figure #3: Yemeni government troops prepare for battle against the Houthi

The violent insurgency continued until August 11th 2009, when the IRG launched Operation Scorched Earth, meant to be an “iron fist” against the rebels. Hundreds of thousands were displaced by the offensive which was carried out through tank and aircraft warfare in the Sadaa region.

On January 1st 2010, the IRG offered a conditional ceasefire. The conditions included “the re-establishment of safe passage on roads, the

surrender of mountain strongholds, a full withdrawal from all local authority property, the return of all military and public equipment seized during hostilities, and the release of all the detained civilians and soldiers”. On the 30th, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi accepted these ceasefire conditions (Al Jazeera).

² Further reading on division between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as historical basis for the Saudi-Iranian proxy war, can be found [here](#)



Arab Spring

In 2011, a wave of pro-democracy protests known as the Arab Spring spread across the Arab world, sparking protests against the IRG and Saleh's 33-year rule³. On January 27th, a protest with over 16,000 participants took place in Sanaa; on February 2nd, Saleh was forced to make the concession that he would not run for re-election in 2013.

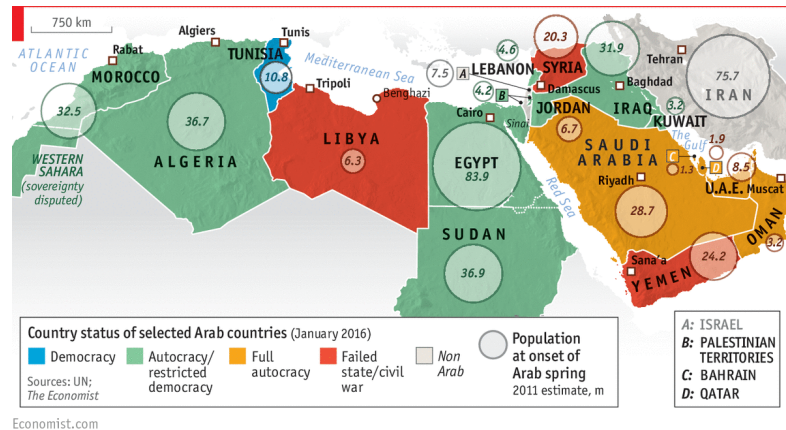
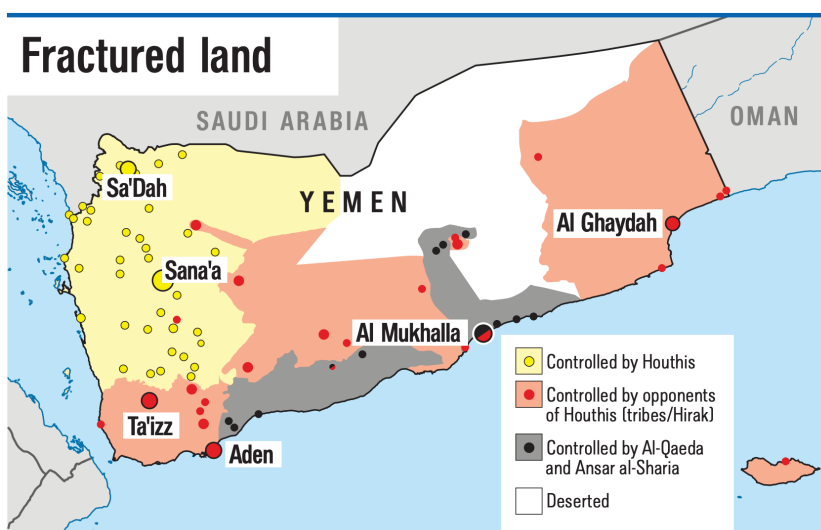


Figure #4: Effects of the Arab Spring as of 2016 based on governance system

On November 23rd 2011, after tumultuous negotiations with the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC)⁴, Saleh finally signed the GCC plan for a formal transfer of power, which he would relinquish to Vice-President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi within 30 days in exchange for immunity from prosecution for him and his family. A presidential election was held on February 21st 2012 in which Hadi won 99.8% of the vote with a reported 65% turnout despite the lack of choice in candidacy (Kasinof).

2014 Houthi Insurgency

On September 21st 2014, the Houthis took control of Sanaa after a series of violent clashes with



governmental forces. As the moral guidance division of the Yemeni armed forces declared its “support for the people's revolution”, the army did not formally intervene, and unsuccessful opposition attempts were by forces affiliated with Islah. Throughout the rest of 2014 and January 2015, the Houthis continued to obstruct

Figure #5: Territorial control in Yemen as of January 2015

³ An interactive timeline on how the Arab Spring transpired in each of the Middle Eastern countries can be found [here](#)

⁴ A regional intergovernmental union between Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates established in 1981



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governmental processes, taking control of the port city Hodeidah⁵, attacking Hadi's residence at the presidential palace, and fortifying their presence at key locations, including intelligence headquarters (26sep).

On January 22nd, Hadi and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah resigned from their posts after being placed under house arrest by the Houthis. In the power vacuum, chaos erupted—senior Houthi officials rejoiced, some Southern cities declared that they would no longer accept orders from Sanaa, and protesters in Aden flew the flag of South Yemen. With the Houthis now “the official authority” in Yemen, Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia (Newsweek).

Saudi-led Intervention

Following pleas from Hadi in March, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of nine countries and launched Operation Decisive Storm, an intervention consisting of a bombing campaign and later naval blockade onto Houthi forces in Yemen. In April, Operation Decisive Storm was declared ended because they had “successfully eliminated the threat” posed by Houthi weaponry and the second phase of intervention, Operation Restoring Hope, was launched. Despite its stated goal of “continuing to protect civilians, continuing to fight terrorism and continuing to facilitate the evacuation of foreign nationals and to intensify relief and medical assistance to the Yemeni people”, suggesting the new phase would be more political than military, the coalition continued air strikes against the Houthis (Reuters).

2022 Truce

The conflict persisted from 2014 to 2022 punctuated by short-lived ceasefires, but in April of that year, the parties reached an agreement for a 2-month ceasefire mediated by the United Nations. This truce, the most significant break in hostilities since the commencement of the war, resulted in a considerable decrease in violence and casualties and was extended twice. Despite the expiration of the truce's official terms in October 2022 at 6 months, the cessation of fighting between the

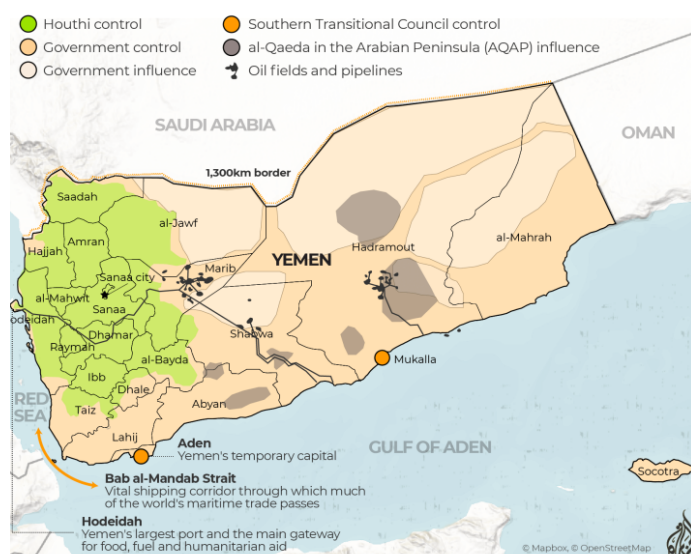
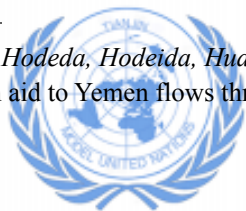


Figure #6: Territorial control as of January 2022

⁵ Hodeidah, also spelled Hodeda, Hodeida, Hudaïda, or Hudaydah, is a key port in Western Yemen on the Red Sea; the majority of humanitarian aid to Yemen flows through Hodeidah



Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition has been mostly upheld.

Saudi-Iranian Proxy War

Saudi Arabia portrays itself as the Sunni authority while Iran portrays itself as the Shia authority. This has led to a struggle for dominance in the Middle East that affects almost every conflict in the region, with the two providing support to opposing parties in wars in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Qatar, and Iraq to varying degrees⁶. The situation has been described as a new cold war (World Politics Review).

In the case of Yemen, Saudi Arabia openly supports the IRG with the Saudi-led coalition, while Iran is widely suspected to be arming the Houthis as well as providing support through Hezbollah⁷, a Lebanese proxy, and its paramilitary network. Though any accusations of involvement have been denied by Iranian officials, Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei announced his “spiritual” support of the movement in 2019 (Reuters).

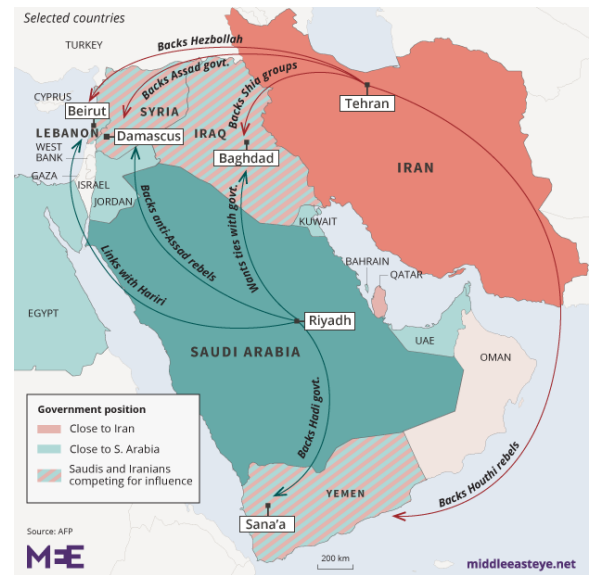


Figure #7: Saudi and Iranian influence in the Middle East

2025 U.S. Offensive

From the 2022 truce until 2025, the parties have largely been in a stalemate, with periodic skirmishes and attempts to forward the peace process but no major developments.



Figure #8: A site in Sanaa struck by U.S. missiles

On 15th March 2025, President of the United States Donald J. Trump launched a series of large-scale air strikes on the Houthis, initially killing at least 31 according to the Houthi-run health ministry and seemingly intending to continue for several days (Cursino). He posted on the Trump-owned Truth Social platform, “To all Houthi terrorists, YOUR TIME IS UP, AND YOUR ATTACKS MUST STOP, STARTING TODAY. IF THEY DON’T,

⁶ An overview of the Saudi-Iranian proxy war’s progression from the Arab Spring onwards can be found [here](#)

⁷ Further reading on Iranian militia Hezbollah can be found [here](#), and reading on its involvement in Yemen [here](#)



HELL WILL RAIN DOWN UPON YOU LIKE NOTHING YOU HAVE EVER SEEN BEFORE!”⁸ U.S. officials have justified the attacks as a measure to combat the Houthis’ disruption of maritime trade in the Red Sea and their air strikes on Israel⁹.

President Trump has also said that, should Houthi-backer Iran threaten the U.S., “America will hold you fully accountable and, we won't be nice about it!” (Stewart and Ghobari).

In response, Hossein Salami, Commander of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, has said to state media: “We warn our enemies that Iran will respond decisively and destructively if they take their threats into action”, although the U.S. was not directly mentioned. Iran has also emphasized that the Houthis act completely independently from them.

Problems Raised

Political Fragmentation

After the Arab Spring forced President Saleh to step down after more than three decades in power, the transition of power to Vice President Hadi, facilitated by the GCC, was not smooth and failed to produce a more stable democratic system. Hadi’s government, like his predecessor’s, did not adequately address the grievances of marginalized groups and Southern secessionists. Later, he was also forced to step down as the Houthis capitalized on popular frustration with the sitting government. Since then, there has been no legitimate, unified government—the IRG is plagued by severe internal division, with the Presidential Leadership Cabinet heading it possessing dubious claim to authority and the organization as a whole only controlling areas of the South and East. Sanaa is controlled by the Houthis along with large areas of the Northwest, and Aden is controlled by the Southern Transitional Council (STC). There is also the further confounding factor of foreign influence from Saudi



Figure #9: Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi, leader of the STC

⁸ Capital letters quoted from original text

⁹ On March 24th, 2025, journalist and Editor in Chief of *The Atlantic* Jeffrey Goldberg was accidentally added to a group chat with several U.S. national security leaders in which war plans regarding the Yemen strikes were discussed; a fascinating insight on U.S. foreign policy in Yemen can be gleaned from the published article [here](#)



Arabia, the U.S., and Iran. It is impossible here to summarize the different regional powers at play here¹⁰, but suffice to say, there is little hope that Yemen can be peacefully reunited under any one banner.

Humanitarian Crisis

The war in Yemen has become what the UN repeatedly calls the world's greatest humanitarian crisis. Over 24 million Yemenis—approximately 80% of the population—require some form of humanitarian assistance, which hinges on the inconsistent availability of ports like Hodeidah, which affects the flow of food, fuel, and medicine. 2.2 million children were acutely malnourished in 2017, and the number has not decreased since (Madhok and Al Sharafi).



Figure #10: Acute child malnourishment is one of Yemen's most pressing needs

The collapse of sanitation and civil infrastructure in general has also created a public health crisis. Nearly half of the country's healthcare facilities are teetering on the brink of dysfunction, if not already deserted. Low vaccination rates mean that the Yemeni population is highly vulnerable to outbreaks of malaria, polio, and measles, to name a few. Inability to transport children to healthcare providers has compounded the crisis for the most severely impacted part of the population. Recently, a massive cholera outbreak caused over 1,000 deaths in the nation, impacting almost 100% of Yemen's districts. The spike in cholera cases can largely be attributed to water contamination, which fluctuates based on floods and the rainy season.

Despite the insecurity in the nation, political and otherwise, Yemen is home to over 61,000 refugees, most of whom hail from Ethiopia and Somalia, countries which also face protracted conflict-related humanitarian crises. Many of these refugees live in impoverished and inhumane conditions in the already densely-populated regions of Aden and Sanaa. The vast refugee population creates a unique demographic that Yemen bears responsibility for and also puts significant pressure on essential services.

International Actions

Saudi-led Intervention

¹⁰ Other smaller powers include the Hadrhrami Elite Forces and the Yemeni National Resistance, but they are not as significant as the three named.



Starting from Operation Decisive Storm, the Saudi-led coalition has been directly involved in Yemen's situation. Although it is backed by most other Arab League states and some Western states, international reactions have been critical, with suggestions that Saudi intervention has caused Yemen's landscape to devolve further into violence and chaos. Evaluating its efficacy is difficult due to the opacity of the situation.

Although it lent military legitimacy to resistance of the Houthi takeover, the coalition's collateral damage to civilians and key infrastructure has been enormous, calling into question the decision-making process behind its operations. Saudi Arabia's incentives for intervening may be more concerned with its vested interest in preventing Iranian power from spreading than Yemen's peace processes. The Houthis have also begun probing the Saudi-Yemeni border and firing ballistic missiles towards Riyadh in recent years, so not only did the situation in Yemen not improve, Saudi Arabia may have inadvertently created a national security threat for themselves (Darwich).

Stockholm Agreement

The Stockholm Agreement¹¹, signed in 2018, has three components: a ceasefire in Hodeidah, a prisoner exchange, and an “understanding on Ta'izz”.



Figure #11: The Stockholm Agreement is a source of hope for successful negotiations in the future

The first component received the most attention from the UN and has been largely effective: an estimated 150,000 people who had evacuated the city returned after the ceasefire, and humanitarian aid channels have been significantly cleared. Before 2015, almost 80% of imports and 90% of wheat imports in Yemen were dependent on Hodeidah; the World Food Programme alone, in its best month of December 2019, provided food assistance to 12 million Yemenis, mostly through Hodeidah. Fighting

has mostly ceased in that city with minor breaches, and a stronger UN presence has been established.

The second and third components have been less successful. The prisoner release has not reached the numbers promised in the agreement—only a few hundred have been returned to their families at most—and was mostly done through local mediators with only some involving the International Red Cross,

¹¹ The full text of the Stockholm Agreement can be found [here](#)



excluding the UN from the process. No effort has been made to de-escalate fighting in the Islah-controlled Ta'izz governorate (Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen).

Saudi-Iranian Détente

In early 2023, China brokered a détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran, promising to restore diplomatic relations and affirming “respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states” (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Sweden). Saudi Arabia and Iran formally cut ties in 2016 and have been engaged in various proxy wars since, including the one in Yemen. Iran resumed diplomatic operations in Saudi Arabia and vice versa by mid-2023.

Although nothing concrete regarding Yemen has come out of this deal yet, it will likely cause a gradual de-escalation as both Saudi Arabia and Iran reduce support for the parties they back (Jalal).

Key Players

Internationally Recognised Yemeni Government (IRG)

The official and internationally recognised Yemeni government is a democratic republic. Its political capital is Sanaa in the North, while its economic capital is Aden in the South. Post-reunification, it has been constantly unstable due to religious and political disagreement between North and South Yemen. As it stands, the IRG is not in control of most of Yemen, and the country has no functional central governing body.

Houthi Insurgents

The Houthi insurgents, officially Ansar Allah (Supporters of God), are part of a Zaydi-Shia political and military movement, with their namesake being Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. It can be argued that the Houthis currently control more of Yemen than the IRG.

Southern Transitional Council (STC)

The Southern Transitional Council, a secessionist organisation formed in 2017, now controls most of South Yemen, including the Southern capital Aden and the island of Socotra. It is part of the Southern Movement for separation of North and South, rooted in



Figure #12: The Sarkha (“The scream”/“The collective outcry”), slogan of the Houthis



dissatisfaction with Saleh's exclusionist and North-favouritist politics¹². It was decried as illegitimate by Hadi immediately upon its establishment but has continued to gain power since (Al Jazeera), and it is currently backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Saudi-led Coalition

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is comprised of nine countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Senegal) and was formed at the request of ousted President Hadi. It has faced extensive international backlash for escalating the conflict.

United States of America (U.S.)

The Obama and first Trump administrations continually supplied weapons to the Saudi-led coalition despite widespread public and governmental backlash; the Biden Administration declared an end to support for the coalition but continued to vehemently denounce the Houthis. Since 2015, the U.S. has provided more than \$5.5 billion in humanitarian aid to Yemen. After the second Trump administration entered office, the U.S. has become more active in escalating operations against the Houthis¹³.



Figure #13: The U.S. is one of the largest humanitarian aid providers to Yemen

Possible Solutions

Meeting Governance Challenges

To date, most international and UN efforts have been focused on securing a long-term ceasefire similar to the 2022 one to deliver aid and begin a restoration of infrastructure rather than determining a clear victor. Taking into account the aforementioned ceasefire and the 2023 Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, all parties may also be more amenable to a long-term or permanent ceasefire to recuperate and enter into formal negotiations regarding Yemen's reform.

¹² Further reading on the Southern Transitional Council and its current relationship with Hadi's IRG can be found [here](#)

¹³ Further reading on the U.S. strikes and how the second Trump administration's approach differs from previous approaches can be found [here](#); U.S. National Security Advisor Michael Waltz's reaction to the initial strikes captures the general sentiment:

“👊🇺🇸🔥”



Additionally, the North-South divide and the Sunni-Shia divide must be addressed. The former is because the South perceives the North as enriching themselves disproportionately on Southern oil, as well as the fact that their governance systems were vastly different before reuniting, causing long-term resentment and actors like the STC to appear. The latter is both because the Saudi-Iranian proxy war is rooted in sectarian differences, and because the Houthi movement itself has inherently religious motivations. A new system of government must take both of these into account. Possible alternatives include re-separating South Yemen into a socialist state, forming a coalition government with representatives for all parties, or dividing the country into a federal system with separate governorates controlled by different parties under a centralized but less controlling government.

Dispatching Humanitarian Aid

What with the ever-worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen, the need for organized and



Figure #14: Limited access to clean water has compounded health emergencies, particularly the cholera outbreak

targeted aid is urgent. Unique to this crisis is the difficulty of dispatching aid within the nation considering the militarization of crucial ports including Hodeidah. The United Nations, along with its relevant humanitarian agencies and other third parties, should prioritize negotiating safe passageway through the country for aid providers during any talks that may occur.

Particularly needed in the country right now is fuel, which is needed to power hospitals, transport food, and pump water. The recent fuel shortage drives up the price of water and inhibits access to these basic necessities. Not only should the aforementioned organizations prioritize safety for aid providers, they must also streamline and consolidate aid efforts by targeting highly influential factors such as the fuel shortage.

Glossary

Arab Spring

A series of pro-democracy uprisings and protests that began in 2010 and spread across the Arab world, significantly impacting Yemen in 2011 when citizens protested against President Saleh's long-standing regime.



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Ceasefire/Armistice

A temporary suspension of combat in a war in which multiple parties mutually agree to cease aggressive actions, often proposed during peace negotiations.

Coalition

A temporary alliance between governments or political parties for combined action.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

A regional political and economic union of Arab states in the Gulf, comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Houthi Movement/Ansar Allah

A Zaydi-Shia political and armed group of insurgents originating in northern Yemen who are primarily responsible for the ongoing civil war.

Humanitarian Aid

Assistance provided to meet the needs of civilians, including food, medical care, and shelter.

International Recognition

The status of a new state being formally accepted by other established states.

Operation Decisive Storm

A 2015 military intervention led by Saudi Arabia against the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, aimed at restoring the IRG and curbing Iranian influence.

Operation Restoring Hope

The second phase of the Saudi-led intervention, announced in April 2015, with the stated purpose of supporting humanitarian aid and reconstruction. However, airstrikes and military actions continued.

Paramilitary

A group organized similarly to a military force but not part of a country's formal armed forces, such as the Hezbollah group based in Lebanon.

Prisoner Exchange

The mutual return of detained individuals between two opposing groups.

Proxy War

A conflict where external powers support opposing parties to pursue their own interests.

Reunification of Yemen

The merging of North Yemen and South Yemen into a single state in 1990.

Saudi-led Coalition



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A military coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia that intervened in Yemen's civil war in 2015 to support the IRG and contain Houthi advances.

Secessionism

The idea of favouring formal withdrawal from the country or larger group to which something belongs.

Southern Transitional Council

A secessionist political and military group that seeks the re-establishment of South Yemen as an independent state which currently controls Aden.

Sectarian Violence

Violence motivated by religious, ideological, or political differences.

Shia

The second-largest branch of Islam, comprising about 10% of Muslims worldwide.

Sunni

The largest branch of Islam, comprising approximately 90% of Muslims worldwide.

United Nations Special Envoy

A diplomat appointed by the UN Secretary-General to mediate peace and oversee conflict resolution in specific regions.

Zaydi

A branch of Shia Islam practiced predominantly in northern Yemen which form the religious base of the Houthi movement.



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