



SC: Security Council

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Issue: The Saudi Arabian-led intervention of Yemeni Houthi forces

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I. Introduction

The conflict in Yemen, which is usually accepted to have started in 2014 with the Civil War between the Houthis and the Hadi government, has entered its ninth year. However, the country was far from stable from the years before that, with multiple insurgencies and uprising against the government during the Arab Spring. The intervention of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched on 26 March 2015, led to a stalemate between parties of the conflict. The long-term conflict between the numerous parties, some supported by foreign parties, led to a worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen, resulting in poverty and famine.



Figure 1: Map of Yemen

As of mid-July 2022, the UN-sponsored ceasefire agreed upon by the parties of the conflict holds. However, significant challenges remain on the road to ending the conflict and ensuring long-term peace and stability. The ceasefire that was proposed on 1 April 2022 by the UN Special Envoy Grundenberg has been extended by periods of no longer than two months (SC/14853). Even so, there have been problems with its implementation, such as the road closures on Taiz that result in transportation problems and deprive the population of essential goods including food, medicine and aid, resulting in a humanitarian crisis (Yaakoubi). Disagreements regarding the collection and sharing of taxes and the restrictions regarding fuel ships at the Hodeidah port (Yaakoubi). The uncertainty regarding the truce and the economy hampers economic growth, making it difficult for a solution to the humanitarian crisis to be found. These challenges highlight the importance of “securing post-conflict peace”.

II. Involved Countries and Organizations

Saudi Arabia



The Saudi-led coalition that was involved in the intervention starting on 26 March 2015 included “Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (except Oman), Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan” (Stenslie 1). It also received logistics and intelligence support from the United States (US). The airstrikes that resulted in civilian casualties received criticism, especially in the aftermath of the Khashoggi killing. The naval blockade that was imposed shortly after the beginning of the intervention contributed to the famine in Yemen. Saudi Arabia and Iran had been vying for influence on Yemen before the start of the conflict as a part of the larger struggle for influence over the Middle East, formed “along the Sunni-Shia divide” (Darwich 126). Saudi-Arabia perceiving the Houthi movement as a proxy of Iran in Yemen is largely accepted to be a factor leading to the intervention. “[T]he ascendancy of King Salman al-Saud to power in January 2015, and the parallel rise of his ambitious son, Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the position of Minister of Defense” are considered by some to have influenced the decision-making process regarding the intervention (Darwich 126).

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Although the United Arab Emirates (UAE) became a part of the conflict in Yemen as a part of the Saudi-led coalition, unlike Saudi Arabia whose main focus was to combat the Houthi forces, the UAE also had the aim of combatting the Muslim Brotherhood and Islah party, which has affiliations with the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), in addition to the initial aim of combatting Houthi forces (Abdul-Ahad).. Additionally, support given by UAE to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which clashed with the Hadi government supported by Saudi Arabia multiple times for control of Aden has been a point of contention between the two states. UAE has “reduced its direct military involvement [in Yemen] in 2019” (Falk). However, it continues to have influence in the area through the local militias it has funded and trained, which act as its proxies (Johnsen).

Houthis

Houthis are Zaydi Shiites, meaning that they are members of the Zaydism branch, which differ from the majority of the Shiite Muslims that belong to a branch of Twelver Shiism, of Shia Islam. During the late 20th century, Zaydi elites and religious authorities felt their positions and the Zaydi traditions threatened by the Wahhabi influence in the area, which led to an increased emphasis on the Zaydi Shia identity (Zeidan). The Zaydi community organized around the leader Hussein Badr al-Din Houthi, the person after which the movement was named, in the late 1990s (Zeidan). “The American invasion of Iraq in 2003” led to a deep radicalization of “the Houthi movement” (Riedel). The Houthi criticism of the policies of President Saleh resulted in them “[rising] up against Saleh’s government six times between 2004 and 2010” (Robinson).



When protests inspired by the Arab Spring started in Yemen, the Houthi movement, also referred to as Ansar Allah, took part in the uprisings against the government. They boycotted the 2012 elections in which Hadi was elected president. Despite participating in the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), they were unsatisfied with the result and later took control of Sanaa, and took over the government (*refer to the "Timeline"*). Despite having participated in uprisings against the Saleh government, they allied with him in 2014. The Houthis gained ground quickly until the start of the Saudi-led intervention in 2015. As of July 2022, they control the Northeast region of Yemen, including the port city of Hodeidah and the city of Sanaa.

Iran

Although stating that it provides political support to the Houthis, Iran denies providing weapons for them (Falk). However, Iran is thought to be providing a variety of weapons, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), missiles, naval mines, other weapons and training to the Houthis since before the start of the conflict (Jones et al.). A draft resolution referring to the findings of the Panel of Expert "that the Islamic Republic of Iran [was] in non-compliance with paragraph 14 of the resolution 2216 (2015) by failing to take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale, or transfer of three types of prohibited items to designated persons or entities, including 'extended-range' short-range ballistic missiles (ER-SRBM), ER-SRBM related military equipment, and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology" (S/2018/156 2) was vetoed by the Russian Federation ("UN Documents").

United States of America (USA)

The press release delivered on 25 March 2015 stated, "President Obama has authorized the provision of logistical and intelligence support to GCC-led military operations. While US forces are not taking direct military action in Yemen in support of this effort, we are establishing a Joint Planning Cell with Saudi Arabia to coordinate US military and intelligence support" ("Statement by NSC"). As a part of the mentioned logistics and intelligence support, the US has provided in-air refueling of planes, search-and-rescue, and assistance in the analysis of intelligence (Zenko). However, arguably the most significant impact of the United States on the Yemen conflict was due to the arms it has provided for the Saudi-coalition. The fact that the US continued to provide arms to be used in aerial assault, despite knowing that such assaults could constitute a breach of international law due to the damage to civilians, resulted in the US being criticized as being complicit in war crimes. The US involvement in Yemen was reduced after the inauguration of President Biden; however, although reduced, arms exports to the coalition continue and President Biden was criticized for not doing enough to end the blockade of Yemen (Sheline and Riedel).

III. Focused Overview of the Issue



1. Unification of Yemen

The Republic of Yemen was formed in 1990 as a result of the unification of South and North Yemen with Ali Abdullah Saleh, the President of North Yemen before the unification, assuming the Presidency of the unified Yemen (Robinson). Despite the unification, due to political infighting between politicians belonging to the former north and south, problems in integrating the militaries, and grievance[s] due to “continued exploitation of southern oil fields” to fund the north, a unification in the true sense did not take place (Day 6). Tensions flared up again in May 1994, during which the South, backed by Saudi Arabia, attempted to secede from the Republic of Yemen (Riedel). The Civil War ended in July 1994 with the forces led by President Saleh overcoming the separatist forces in the South and gaining control of the country, leading to reunification (“Yemen Profile”). However, the separatist goals in the South persisted and “reemerged in 2007 as the Southern Movement” (Robinson).

2. The Houthi Movement

Another factor that was of significance for the Yemeni conflict was the Houthi movement. Although Ali Abdullah Saleh, who came to power in 1978 in North Yemen, was a Zaydi general, there was discontent among the Houthi community regarding the corruption he committed and what was perceived to be his support of Saudi Arabia and the imperialist ambitions of the US in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq (Riedel). The movement was also supported by Hezbollah and Iran, an enemy of Saudi Arabia. The Houthis started insurgencies in the northern regions of Yemen, such as the Saada province, which were met with military campaigns initiated by President Saleh (Riedel). Although there were negotiations for peace agreements and military campaigns by the government of Yemen, numerous insurgencies took place during the 2000s.

3. Protests

The effects of the Arab Spring were felt in Yemen during the early 2010s. In 2011, opposition against President Saleh grew (Robinson). Protestors, who were discontent with the human right record of Yemen, the insufficiency in democratic processes, and corruption, demanded the resignation of President Saleh. The widespread protests, collectively named the Yemeni Revolution, led President Saleh to announce that he would not run for another term. Protests demanding the immediate resignation of the president continued and some were met with violence from the government. “While Yemeni security forces focused on putting down protests in urban areas, AQAP made gains in outlying regions” (Robinson). Despite promises made by President Saleh that he would resign, agreements for a transfer of power, including one that was negotiated by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), did not materialize for the first half of 2011.



On 3 June 2011, President Saleh was injured in an assassination attempt. He was taken to Saudi Arabia for treatment, where he remained for the following three months (Beaumont). During that time, Vice President Hadi assumed the role of acting president. After returning to the country, Saleh signed an agreement for transfer of power outlined by the GCC. Accordingly, he handed over control to Hadi and did not run for reelection in the 2012 election, in exchange for immunity from prosecution (Robinson). Pursuant to the GCC-brokered agreement the former president Saleh had signed in the process leading to his resignation, “the UN-sponsored National Dialogue Conference (NDC) convened 565 delegates in 2013 to formulate a new constitution agreeable to Yemen’s many factions”; however, it was not able to produce a result that satisfied the Houthis and the Southern Movement (Robinson).

4. Civil War

In September of 2014, the Houthi forces captured Sanaa, the capital city at the time (“Timeline”). President Hadi resigned, the parliament was dissolved and replaced with the Supreme Revolutionary Committee led by the Houthis. Hadi traveled to Aden, where he announced that he remained to be the president of Yemen and that Aden was to be the temporary capital of the country. The Houthi forces continued to capture ground and came to the outskirts of Aden where the Hadi-led government was based. Amid the Houthi advance, on 25 March 2015 Hadi called for assistance from the United Nations Security Council and fled to Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, as Saudi airstrikes on the Houthis began on 26 March 2015 (Stenslie 1).

5. Saudi-led Intervention

The Saudi-led coalition struck Houthi forces and their allies through an air campaign and ground troops. “In 2016, the UN brokered” ceasefire was successful in achieving “a months-long cessation of hostilities that reduced airstrikes and fighting, and initiated peace talks in Kuwait”; however, the talks were not able to produce results (“Yemen”).

Meanwhile, Aidarous al-Zoubedia, the former governor of Aden, who was removed from his position in April by Hadi, forms the Southern Transitional Council (STC), an organization pursuing separatist ambitions in the south, with backing from the UAE (“Battle of Aden”). A conflict between forces



Figure 2: Distribution Control over Yemen



loyal to the Hadi government and the STC took place in January 2018 over the control of Aden (“Battle of Aden”). Such conflicts between STC and the Hadi-government took place sporadically, until a power sharing agreement was reached in November 2019 (“Yemen”).

“Opposition to the Saudi-led coalition grew as the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul draws attention to the human rights record of Saudi Arabia. Negotiation in Sweden resulted in the signing of agreements between the Houthis and the Hadi government; however, there are issues in their implementation (Robinson). The UAE reduced its involvement in the conflict in 2019. Similarly, the US policy towards Yemen shifted with the inauguration of President Biden, who defended a decreased involvement of the US in the conflict. The UN brokered a ceasefire in early April, which continues as of mid-July, with efforts to extend it for six more months. “Yemen’s Interim President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi transferred his powers to an eight-member Presidential Leadership Council, which was sworn in on April 17 in Aden” (Ardemagni). Although “there are undoubtedly going to be, within both camps, hardliners who will prefer to continue the battle in search of complete victory”, there is a greater will, compared to the beginning of the intervention, on part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the US, and possibly Iran for bringing an end to the conflict that has been in stalemate for an extended period of time and has been damaging to the GCC countries’ “broader interests in regional security and stability” (Feierstein 228, 227).

IV. Key Vocabulary

Civil War: Civil War is a type of violent conflict in which two or more groups in a country fight against each other “over control of the government, one side’s separatists goals, or some divisive government policy” (Fearon).

Arab Spring: Arab Spring refers, collectively, to the pro-democracy protests that began in December 2010 and took place in the Middle East and North Africa, including Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Oman, Syria, Libya, and Bahrain (“Arab Spring”). The first protests of the Arab Spring are considered to start when Mohammed Bouzazi, a Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire in protests of the local municipal officials. The series of protests in Tunisia, which was called the Jasmine Revolution, resulted in the President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who had been the president for more than 20 years, to resign and flee to Saudi Arabia in January 2011 (“Arab Spring”). Inspired by the events in Tunisia, protests took place in different countries in the region; however, few resulted in regime change, and the ones that did, such as the protests in Libya and Syria, failed to produce peace, stability, democracy, or economic prosperity.



Military Intervention: Military intervention can be “defined as the movement of troops or military forces by one independent country, or a group of countries in concert, across the border of another independent country ... or actions by troops already stationed in the target country” (Pearson 261).

Operation Decisive Storm: Military operation launched by a coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia, and includes “Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (except Oman), Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan” and received “logistics and intelligence” support from the US (Stenslie 1).

War Crime: War Crimes, as set forth in the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court, are actions that constitute “[g]rave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949” or international law in general for international conflicts or, in cases of an armed conflict not of international character, breaches of the “article 3 common to the four Geneva conventions” or “violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts not of an international character, within the established framework of international law” (*Rome Statute* 4-6). Such breaches of international law include the intentional killing of the civilian population, “destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity”, or the violation of the rights of prisoners of war (*Rome Statute* 4-6).

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): The Gulf Cooperation Council is a “political and economic alliance” comprised of six countries located in the Arabian Peninsula, namely “Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman” (“Gulf Cooperation Council”).

V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
2004	Fighting between the Houthis and Yemen military forces takes place. Hussein al Houthi, the Houthi leader is killed (Riedel)
08/2009	A renewed military campaign, named “Operation Scorched Earth”, against the Houthis in the Saada province is launched (“Yemen Profile”)
03/06/2011	Assasination attempt against President Saleh occurs
11/2011	Saleh agrees to a transfer of power as outlined by the GCC
02/2012	Hadi is elected president after the elections in which he is the only candidate
09/2014	Unsatisfied with the result of NDC, Houthis take control of Sanaa (“Timeline”)



02/2015	Hadi flees the Aden following the government takeover by the Houthis
25/02/2015	Hadi calls for assistance from the UNSC amid Houthi advance towards Aden and flees to Riyadh (Stenslie 1)
26/03/2015	Operation Decisive Storm—the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen—begins
05/2015	Former president Saleh, who was suspected of supporting the Houthi forces since 2014, and forces loyal to him formally ally with the Houthis (Montgomery)
05/2017	Aidarous al-Zoubedia, the former governor of Aden, who was removed from his position in April, forms the Southern Transitional Council, with backing from UAE (“Battle of Aden”)
12/2017	Soon after switching sides by voicing his support for the Saudi-led coalition, President Saleh is killed amid clashes between forces loyal to him and the Houthis (Wintour)
01/2018	Battle of Aden takes place, in which STC, backed by UAE clashed with the Hadi government, backed by Saudi Arabia for control of the city of Aden (“Battle of Aden”)
12/2018	Stockholm Agreement is signed. Despite the truce mostly holding in Hodeidah, it is not fully implemented (Robinson)
11/2019	A power-sharing agreement between STC and the Hadi-government is brokered by Saudi Arabia (“Timeline”)
04/2022	A UN-sponsored ceasefire takes effect

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- S/2018/1134 - Letter dated 20 December 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2018_1134.pdf



The letter includes, in its annex, “the agreements reached in Sweden on 13 December 2018 at the conclusion of the intra-Yemeni peace consultations” which are the “agreement on the city of Hudaydah and the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra’s Isa, an executive mechanism on activating the prisoner exchange agreement and a statement of understanding on Ta’izz” (S/2018/1134 1). The UNSC later announced its support of the said agreements in Resolution 2451 (S/RES/2451).

- S/RES/2216

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2216.pdf

The UNSC resolution puts into place an arms embargo, and expands the scope of the mandates of the Sanctions Committee and Panel of Experts—both “established pursuant to paragraph 21 of resolution 2140 (2014)” —for the implementation of the arms embargo (S/RES/2216 5-6).

VII. Failed Solution Attempts

Although whether the intervention by the Saudi-led coalition could be considered a solution attempt is highly questionable, it is important to highlight the failures of the intervention in bringing stability to the region. The airstrikes by the Saudi coalition against the Houthis and their allies failed to properly differentiate between military and civilian targets, leading to a high number of civilian deaths, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and other actions that could amount to war crimes, and, thus, led to an opposition by the population against the intervention. Additionally, the blockade imposed by the coalition exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the area, such that the Yemen crisis remains to be among the worst humanitarian crises today, with famine and poverty prevalent in the country, and a major portion of the population dependent on foreign humanitarian aid to survive (Hubbard). Additionally, the intervention by foreign powers and the support given to local militias by foreign powers with the aim of furthering their own agendas could have resulted in a prolongation of the conflict.

The Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen was established pursuant to the the Human Rights Council resolution calling for the “establish[ment of] a group of eminent international and regional experts with knowledge of human rights” by the High Commissioner with the aim of reporting on the human rights situation in Yemen (A/HRC/RES/36/31 4), which was a significant step towards providing transparency and accountability for the actions of the parties to the conflict. However, a resolution calling for the renewal of the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts was rejected in the Human Rights Council with 18 votes in favor,



21 votes against, and 7 abstentions, which is thought to be a result of lobbying by Saudi Arabia (Kirchgaessner).

VIII. Possible Solutions

Multiple ceasefires were organized between the parties throughout the conflict. The most recent one being the two-month-long ceasefire proposed by the UN Special Envoy Grundenberg on 1 April 2022 and agreed upon by the parties (SC/14853). The ceasefire was extended in June 2022 for another two months, i.e. until 2 August 2022 (SC/14931). As of mid-July, the truce holds, despite issues in the implementation of certain parts of the agreements, such as road closures in Taiz, issues with tax sharing, and the arrival of oil ships to the Port of Hodeidah (Yaakoubi). The United Nations is working on extending the ceasefire by another six months, which could be a significant step in ending violence (Yaakoubi). In his visit to Saudi Arabia, President Biden stated that Saudi Arabia had a favorable position towards extending the truce. The Houthis, following this statement, expressed unwillingness to extend the truce; however, an extension to the ceasefire following negotiations is still considered to be possible (Hatem). Although there are considerable challenges to be surmounted for a longer truce to be put in place, continuing such efforts are important in reducing violence in the region and making an end to the conflict possible. Additionally, considering the nature of the existing problems regarding the ceasefire and the humanitarian crisis in the country, issues relating to trade, economy, and transportation of trade goods should be a topic of discussion in ceasefire negotiations (“Brokering a Ceasefire”). In the event of an extended ceasefire, a plan towards long-term peace could be negotiated by the parties to the conflict. The negotiation for peace should be in a format agreed upon by the parties to the conflict and incentives for the continuation of the negotiations could be provided by the Member States.

The condition of the Safer oil tanker is also an issue, considering that the systems that are failing on the Safer ship could result in the fifth largest oil tanker spill in history. Efforts to obtain funds or assistance from Member States should continue to be pursued (“UN Plan”). Although not a long-term solution, considering that the situation in Yemen continues to be one of the largest humanitarian crises, it is important for humanitarian aid to be delivered. Additionally, the risk of a worsening of food insecurity in Yemen due to the War in Ukraine should be considered.

IX. Useful Links

- <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen>

War in Yemen | Global Conflict Tracker by the Center for Preventive Action



In addition to providing a background on the issue, the latest news section includes news related to the situation in Yemen from the last few months.

- <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/>

CIA World Factbook: Yemen

A short background of the conflict, and other information on Yemen, such as data related to its geography, economy and demographics can be found.

- <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/yemen/>

UN Documents for Yemen

UN documents, including Security Council resolutions, presidential statements and press statement can be found on the website.

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