

**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** The situation in Yemen

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**Position:** President

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## Introduction

Yemen, an Arab country bordered by Saudi Arabia to the north and the Arabian Peninsula to the south, is among the latest of the Middle Eastern countries to become embroiled in conflict. Yemen remains within the grip of its most recent and severe crisis as opposing forces threaten to disintegrate the country. While impoverished, Yemen is strategically important, and the ongoing violent power plays have and will have crucial ramifications on the rest of the world.

Yemen has never been a religiously homogenous country. Two-thirds Sunni, and a one-third Zaidi Shi'a, these two separate demographics have added to and complicated the ongoing violence. Even from its inception, the unification of North Yemen and South Yemen was extremely fragile and often subject to injections of political instability. Within a matter of years, conflicts within the coalition government resulted in a deterioration of the general security as the already-shaky situation turned into a full-blown civil war. These deep divisions still carry on till today, acting as a catalyst to the recent Houthi takeover.

A dangerous amalgamation of high unemployment and a lack of food and fuel have all but only contributed to an already strong sense of relative deprivation, fueling the collapse of security. In short, the Arab Spring-transformed Yemeni Revolution unintentionally induced the return and expansion of Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula as well as for Houthi rebels in the north to consolidate power and solidify its hold on territory. As of now, the collapse of the Yemeni government will have serious implications in the region, particularly the United States in regard to its counterterrorism strategy. The crisis in Yemen is also especially worrisome in due to its potential to destabilize Saudi Arabia as well as furthering sectarian violence in the region.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Jihad

Literally translated as “the struggle in the name of Allah” but often mistaken as the “Holy War”, a jihad is a Muslims struggle against a certain entity, but extremists take it as a mission to spread the ideas of Islam. The Arab Spring that includes Yemen is also called as the “best of the jihad” by many.

### Houthi

More popularly known as Houthi, Ansar Allah is a Shia-rebel group in Yemen currently in open conflict against the Republic of Yemen and Al-Qaeda. The rebel group primarily controls territory in the north-west. Houthis take their name from their founder and namesake, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, who launched an insurgency in 2004.

### Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is a militant terrorist group formed in 2009 through a union of the Saudi and Yemeni affiliates of al-Qaeda. This branch of al-Qaeda is considered to be one of the most active of all al-Qaeda branches. Western intelligence agencies believe this branch to also be the most dangerous al-Qaeda branch because of its technical expertise and global reach.

### Arab Spring

A string of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions across the Middle East in 2011 with, at its core, themes of deep-seated resentment of the former regimes and goals for democracy that led to varied successes and failures. These demonstrations in most places, including Yemen, were met with violent responses from the authorities. In Yemen’s case, demonstrations escalated to what is known today as the Yemeni Revolution, resulting in the overthrow of the Saleh government.

### Coup d'état

An act of assertion of a certain political force, usually related to the overthrow of the current establishment or government of a particular country.

## Background Information

### Roots of fragmentation

The historical roots behind the current conflict can be traced to the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century beginning with the fragile unification of North and South Yemen. At this time, both Yemens have already broken from Ottoman control. South Yemen, under decolonization, broke away from Great Britain to become a Marxist state, known as People's Republic of Yemen; meanwhile, North Yemen, an established republican government, became the Yemen Arab Republic. Following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the two Yemens united. Although at the time there were no clear linguistic, cultural, or ethnic elements that could divide the two, unlike today, the process of unification was fraught with conflict even after unification, triggering serious spouts of fighting in both 1972 and 1979. Generally, the process of unification can be split into two periods. The first period preceded the southern attempt at secession in 1994. Towards the very inception of their unification, the South criticized the central government for marginalizing the south along with the nomination of northerners in government positions. In 1993, President Saleh, a previous North Yemen president who also managed to stay in power during unification, declared a state of emergency following political deadlock, dismissing southern government members. This marked the onset of the second period. The dismissal of the south triggered a short civil war in 1994 that ended with the defeat of southern armed forces and reunification. However, even till today, "elements of the south still perceive unfair treatment by the north", giving birth to the South Yemen Movement.

### Growing instability

The political unrest in Yemen also led to the rise of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2000, AQAP claimed responsibility for the suicide attack on the USS Cole, killing 17 personnel. Prior to this attack, AQAP had only previously targeted fairly minimal, domestic soft targets. AQAP began to increase the frequency and magnitude of their attacks until the severe government counter-insurgency in 2010. Meanwhile, the Houthi insurgency in 2004 began when a dissident cleric, al-Houthi, launched a rebellion. The fighting displaced tens of thousands. By the beginning, 2010, a delicate, conditional ceasefire was finally agreed upon; the conditions included that of the "the re-establishment of safe passage of roads, the surrender of mountain strongholds, and return of all military and public equipment seized during hostilities". However, even after the ceasefire was agreed upon, there were still sporadic clashes between pro-government tribes and Houthi forces.

### Yemeni Revolution

The Yemeni Revolution followed shortly after the Arab Spring. In its early stages, demonstrations were initially over unemployment, lack of food, and widespread corruption; however, over time, protestors' demands shifted to that for President Saleh's resignation. By November, Saleh signed a power-transfer agreement that would shift his power to his vice-President in exchange for immunity from

prosecution. However, this deal was rejected by and enraged many Houthis. As the demonstrations dragged on, the central government inversely grew weaker, struggling to contain AQAP as well as fighting off Houthi rebels.

### **Houthi takeover and the rise of terror**

Following Hadi's inauguration as Saleh's successor, the Houthi insurgency grew unprecedentedly in strength. In September 2014, Houthi forces in conjunction with forces loyal to the late President Saleh entered the capital, forcing Hadi to agree to a "unity government". In February 2015, the Houthis dissolved parliament, declaring a Revolutionary Committee to be the interim government of Yemen. Meanwhile, Hadi managed to flee to Aden, a stronghold in the South, to re-gather whatever forces he could. On March 26, Saudi Arabia spearheaded a coalition and began an air campaign against the Houthis. Simultaneously, the Islamic State also took the opportunity to carry out its first major attacks: two suicide attacks targeting Shi'a mosques. Along with them, AQAP also grows unchecked and unhindered with the central Yemeni government distracted.

## **Key Issues**

### **Hadi-Houthi Civil War**

As mentioned earlier, two of the main opposing parties in the current conflict are the Houthis, backed by former President Saleh, who still holds much political sway and the Hadi-led government along with Sunni tribesmen from the south. This conflict that led to the involvement of the Saudis has led to a dire humanitarian situation; almost 10,160,000 Yemenis are deprived of water, food, and electricity as a result of the conflict; some 100,000 people across the country are dislocated. Also worth mentioning, at the start of the campaign, there has been an influx of refugees, fleeing into Djibouti and Somalia. Moreover, over the course of conflict, serious war crime accusations have been levied, occurring on both sides, the Saudis hitting civilians with airstrikes and the Houthis using excessive force against peaceful civilians and preventing humanitarian aid.

### **Al-Qaeda/Ansar al-Sharia Insurgency**

The initial insurgency begun by Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State has escalated into a full-blown conflict with both groups actually maintaining and governing territory. AQAP forces control a substantial amount of territory within northeastern Yemen; the US drone campaign is currently the main impediment to their advance apart from the Houthis. Jihadist control of Yemen could lead to conflict spillover with terrorist attacks into Saudi Arabia and Iran, or control of the Gulf of Aden strait and shipping hijackings. AQAP and IS are the only groups poised to benefit from the war dragging on, who are both likely to gain influence amid the chaos.

## Humanitarian crisis

The humanitarian situation in Yemen is presently very dire. According to CARE's estimates, the ongoing violence in Yemen has resulted in 21 million people (or over 80% of the population) in dire need of humanitarian aid. With more than 4000 deaths and 1.3 million displaced, the conflict has led to the destruction of infrastructure in addition to the restriction of basic, life-sustaining necessities, including fuel, food, medical supplies, and water. Accordingly, the UN launched an appeal for \$1.6 billion in July; however, as of August, the fund has only been 18% funded.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### Key players in Yemen

As Yemen begins to quickly descend into an all-out civil war, several groups simultaneously begin to rise up, gaining strength. It is crucial to understand these factions in order to address the issue; each represents a different group with a distinct agenda. Currently, no one group dominates the landscape; the central Yemeni government has been in disarray and fled to the south and allied with the Southern movement; the Houthis hold sway in the north; AQAP and Islamic State control swathes of territory ranging from the mid-west to the northeast.

### *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula/Ansar al-Sharia/Islamic State*

Considered by most Western intelligence agencies to be the most dangerous branch of al-Qaeda, the AQAP has vowed to target oil facilities, foreigners, and security forces of all sorts as it makes the toppling of the Saudi and Yemeni governments its main priority. The terrorist group has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks, in which hundreds of people have already been killed. AQAP has capitalized on the instability that has reigned in Yemen. In recent years, especially during the 2011 Yemeni Revolution, the group has established strongholds in the south and east, taking control of actual territory instead of being a mere insurgency. Currently, US drone strikes have been the main setback holding the group back. It should be noted that AQAP has "refused to pledge allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State".

The Islamic State's, which propounds an extreme version of Sunni Islam, main goal in Yemen is to essentially eclipse AQAP. Although the group has been late to join the game, the Islamic State marked its entry with a series of suicide bombings in March this year. Shi'a Houthis of the Revolutionary Committee are both groups' primary enemies, viewed on as heretics.

### *Houthis/Revolutionary Committee*

In short, the Houthis are a Shi'a rebel group predominant in northwestern Yemen. They first began by waging a low-level insurgency in 2004 in hopes of winning greater autonomy for

their province and to protect religious/cultural traditions, but have since risen in power. According to Al-Jazeera, the group has “legitimate, long term grievances of economic and political disenfranchisement by the government”. After the 1962 revolution, the northern regions of Yemen were “largely ignored economically and remains underdeveloped”. Their motives and objectives have been somewhat unclear. While the Yemeni government has consistently accused the Houthis of plotting to overthrow the republican system, Houthi leaders have claimed to only defend themselves against government attacks on their community, making their agenda ambiguous at the moment. It should also be noted that the former, deposed President Saleh has also been playing a behind-the-scenes role helping Shi’a forces, attracting tribesmen and former government forces loyal to Saleh.

### *Yemeni Armed Forces/Southern Movement*

Hadi leads the current Yemeni Armed Forces from the de-facto capital in Aden. This government in exile is presently the official internationally recognized Yemeni government. Moreover, these security forces are also backed by a substantial number of Sunni tribesmen. Prior to the 2011 Yemeni Revolution, the South Yemen insurgency remained underway, demanding secession. At the moment, however, the Southern Movement has allied itself with the Hadi-led government.

## **Coalition intervention**

### *Saudi Arabia*

As of March 2015, Saudi Arabia, spearheading a coalition consisting of nine Arab states, began carrying out airstrikes and a naval blockade of Yemen’s territorial waters in an effort to “eliminate the security threat posed by the Houthis”. Whether or not this is merely a power-play to keep a Sunni-led country in their pocket or to address a legitimate security issue is unclear for now. Saudi Arabia has already vowed to not allow for sectarian strife in the region and have to back Yemen’s beleaguered president. Meanwhile, the oil-rich country is still in the process of building a massive border fence at the border with Yemen and a naval base at the Red Sea Port of Jizan. Saudi Arabia obviously shares a very immediate security concern here; if either Houthis or Islamic fundamentalists gain complete control of Yemen, which would mean an enemy right in its backyard. Not to mention, Saudi Arabia also has a deep suspicion of Iran, attributed to sectarian tensions, hence, Yemen possibly being a proxy battle between the two. Even recently, after seeing Iran’s hand behind a popular opposition movement in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia send tanks across to crush the uprising and prevent Saudi Arabia from establishing an ally. In the 1960s during the North Yemen Civil War, the Saudis supported the royalist. During the 1994 South Yemen Civil War, the Saudis actively backed the south. During the 1980s, Saudi Arabia spent tens of billions bolstering its influence in Yemen on the propagation of Wahhabism, a sect

of Sunni Islam. As one can see, Saudi Arabia has been actively involved in Yemen since its founding.

### United States

The United States has played a fairly minimalist position in Yemen. Officially, the US supports the intervention “by providing intelligence sharing, targeting assistance, advisory and logistical support to the military intervention”. Essentially, the United States’ role has been limited to its drone campaign against Al-Qaeda militants. According to the state department, the US government does not want “the strategic Bab-el-Mandeb” strait. Divisions have begun to slightly affect US SOCOM; many have reportedly been in favor of the Houthis, “as they have been an effective force in rolling back al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Yemen”. However, this would be again in conflict seeing as the Houthi logo itself reads, “God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam”, modeled after the motto of revolutionary Iran.

### Iran

Iran plays a major role in the unfolding of Yemen presently. Many analysts have asserted that Yemen has become a proxy war, a battleground for Tehran and Riyadh. Iran is allegedly providing aid and supporting Houthi rebels, who share their Shi’a faith; rebels officially deny this affiliation. If proven to be correct, the combination of Saudi Arabian airstrikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels may escalate beyond control; fears have been raised about where this heavily militarized regional rivalry could go. From an analyst perspective, Iran has no vital economy or strategic interests in Yemen; hence, the only reasonable rationale would only stem from its desire to opportunistically create a political sphere of influence given the present collapse of Syria. However, one can easily understand Saudi Arabia’s concern with Iran. When the US occupation of Iraq began to fall part, Iran that time seized the chance to bring Iraq in to its sphere of influence by heavily investing and arming numerous militant forces and political parties, giving Iran free reign and horrifying Saudi Arabia. Moreover, like Saudi Arabia and the rest of the international community, Iran has a deep interest in the security of the Bab el-Mandeb strait.

## Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
1962	Imam Ahmad dies. At this point in time, it is important to understand that North Yemen has already gained independence from the Ottoman Empire, while South Yemen is currently under British colonial rule. Following Ahmad’s death, the North Yemen Civil War breaks out between royalist forces under Ahmad’s son and backed by Saudi Arabia and Jordan against republicans supported by

Egypt's Nasser.

1967-1969

Under de-colonization, Southern Yemen becomes independent as the People's Republic of South Yemen. Marxists take power and reorient the country's policies towards Soviet bloc.

1970

North Yemen Civil War ends. A new republican government is formed in North Yemen, incorporating members from the royalist faction but not the family. Yemen Arab Republic is formed.

1971

Thousands from South Yemen flee to the north following crackdown on dissidents. Armed militant groups in bid to overthrow the southern government.

1972

Border clashes break out between the two. After a short war, ceasefire is brokered by the Arab League.

1978

Ali Abdallah Saleh becomes president of North Yemen.

May 22, 1990

Following sporadic fighting between the two states, the two Yemens reach an agreement on the joint governing of Yemen, with Saleh as President. Soviet bloc implodes, but tensions between the two former states remain.

May 1994

Following political deadlock and fresh fighting, Saleh declares a state of emergency and dismisses southern government members. Former armies that failed to integrate face off at an old border. It should be understood that claims of the south being marginalized and attacked have been on the rise since 1993.

May-July 1994

Civil conflict breaks out between the two Yemeni forces (pro-union northern vs. socialist separatist southern). The conflict ends within a month in the defeat of southern armed forces and the reunification of Yemen. Food riots become ubiquitous and especially problematic.

October 2000

First foreign al-Qaeda attack: USS Cole damaged in suicide attack; 17 servicemen killed.

October 2002

Al-Qaeda attacks on the rise. The terrorist group attacks and badly damages oil supertanker MV Limburg, costing Yemen exorbitantly in lost port revenues.

June-August 2004

Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi launches uprising against Yemeni government. Estimates of the dead range from 500 to 1,000. On September 10, Yemeni forces kill al-Houthi.

March-May 2005

Resurgence of fighting emerges between government forces and those of the



slain clerk. Around 1,500 people are killed, as Houthi's father, Badr Eddin al-Houthi takes over as leader.

June 23, 2005	Militant commander of Houthi insurgency surrenders after tribal mediators work out a deal with the government. Official death toll stands at 552 deaths and \$270 million in economic damages.
August 2009- February 2010	Following a steady escalation of conflict each year, Yemeni troops launch a major offensive, Operation Scorched Earth. Results remained indecisive; ceasefire was barely reached after rebels accepted truce conditions.
2011 Yemeni Revolution	Saleh is removed from power. Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi elected and inaugurated. However, both al-Qaeda and Houthi militants have gained extensive control and occupation of Yemeni territory. (Houthis mainly in the Northwest while AQAP & Ansar al-Sharia box in from the south)
September 2014	Central Yemeni government remains weak. Anti-government Houthi forces invade and capture government headquarters, marking the fall of Sana'a. UN brokers ceasefire according to which Houthis agree to withdraw fighters once a new national unity government has been formed.
January 2015	Houthis reject new constitution drafted at National Dialogue Conference. They seize state TV and clash with troops in the capital, in what the central government describes as a coup attempt.
February 2015	Houthi rebels dissolve parliament and institute a Revolutionary Committee to replace the current government, acting as an interim authority in Yemen.
March 2015	Hadi flees to Aden, declaring it to be Yemen's de-facto and temporary capital. Simultaneously, Islamic State carries out its first attacks, beginning with suicide bombings. Houthi rebels begin to advance towards southern Yemen. Saudi Arabia spearheads Operation Decisive Storm, a coalition composed of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and nine other states, launching aerial attacks in response to requests for assistance by President Hadi.
May 2015	Five-day ceasefire to allow for humanitarian aid unravels, as fighting breaks out in multiple southern governorates
June 2015	Peace talks underway between both delegations
December 2015	Geneva talks on the conflict collapse, strained by repeated ceasefire violations but vow to meet again

January 2016	UN panel opens an inquiry into Saudi-led coalition, coming in from a leaked report in which the coalition has carried out 119 bombing raids that have violated humanitarian law, destroying refugee camps, medical facilities, schools.
March 2016	Islamic state gunmen engage in a mass shooting in an elderly home within Aden, signaling the extent of urban jihadist infiltration; Islamic state bombings kill at least 22 in Aden
April 10, 2016	Ceasefire agreement reached after months of negotiation
July 16, 2016	UN-sponsored talks resume in Kuwait

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2014, 21 October 2011 **(S/RES/2014)**
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2051, 12 June 2012 **(S/RES/2051)**
- **2012 February:** Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi inaugurated as president, marking end of Saleh regime
- **2013 July:** United States intensifies drone strikes against al-Qaeda as the group begins to take more strongholds and secure territory
- **2015 January:** Houthis completely take over capital Sanaa. President Hadi flees to Aden to establish de-facto capital. Houthis institute Revolutionary Council as interim authority of Yemen.
- **2015 March:** Islamic State begins to advance into Yemen. Saudi Arabia and coalition launch air strikes against Houthi rebel targets

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Unfortunately, not much has been done to address the conflict in Yemen, other than the naval blockade and the air campaign conducted by the Saudi-led coalition. Generally, each outside party's intervention has merely added to danger of outright sectarian violence. The Saudi-led intervention has been met with limited success, demonstrating the restraints of mere airstrikes. Most political analysts have generally agreed that a militaristic solution would be highly unfeasible in the case of Yemen due to the degree of complications and parties at play.

The May Truce marked the first official ceasefire agreed upon between the Houthis and their allies and Saudi Arabia. While the ceasefire was intended to allow for humanitarian aid delivery, the fragile peace fell apart on the fourth day, as fighting broke out in multiple regions. In June, a UN-brokered ceasefire intended to allow the delivery of relief supplies was also agreed upon after weeks of negotiating. In this instance, the ceasefire that was supposed to last a week was broken within hours. Both sides blamed on another for breaking the ceasefire.

## Possible Solutions

There are two general methods in which to resolve the conflict in Yemen: short-term and long-term situations. Given the multitude of opposing sides in Yemen, a ceasefire, a short-term solution will be extremely difficult to reach as highlighted by the failure of the first two ceasefires already. The most likely broker of a ceasefire would most likely be led by Oman, the only Middle Eastern monarchy that has not taken part in the coalition and shares a border with Yemen, who has presented a 7-point plan to both Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the past, Oman has “played a vital role as a bridge between Tehran and in the West” when it came to nuclear negotiations. A ceasefire between Houthi and Hadi-led forces will be instrumental in pushing back AQAP and IS. The US drone campaign is among the few effective forces in curbing Al-Qaeda advances. As for a militaristic solution, the current Saudi airstrikes has been met with limited success; while Houthi forces have not yet been able to advance further down south, forces loyal to Hadi have also not been able to move up north, forcing the two parties in a stalemate as millions of civilians suffer bereft of aid.

As for a long-term solution, a two-region federal state could be a solution to the crisis. Yemen’s insecurity and political instability is partly affected by relative deprivation and by conflicting identities, which include political and tribal allegiances. The institution of federalism in Yemen would allow for power sharing, offering a possibility of a political settlement, rather than by use of violence. This would also grant the Houthis and other Shi’a tribesmen a say and representation in government. Moreover, the mix of socio-economic problems, including the lack of food and high unemployment, has contributed to the growing sense of disenfranchisement from the government, hence, the growing strength of Houthis and AQAP. This issue could be addressed by the tackling of corruption and the building up of infrastructure, but the final say would obviously be up to whoever would be in power of a future Yemen. As for now, the main priority would obviously be focused upon reaching a ceasefire and focusing efforts to reconcile and tackle AQAP.

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