

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Addressing Ceasefire Negotiations and Peacebuilding in Yemen

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Introduction

The Yemeni Civil War began in September of 2014 when Houthi rebel forces attacked and captured the capital city of Sanaa. This followed from decades of political instability and turmoil in the country that led to the formation of their group in the first place. The Houthis, officially known as the Ansar Alla, are a Shia Islamist military and political organisation that control over 70% of Yemen's territory having overthrown the previous government led by President Hadi. They represent the sectarian conflict between the Sunni (majority) and Shia (minority) Muslim ethnic groups in the nation and rebel in order to gain fair recognition in a fragmented political system.

The conflict has had rippling economic effects on the whole world as the Houthis reserve control over the Bab el-Mandeb Strait through which 10% of all global trade passes. As a critical maritime choke point, the threats to the strait have forced companies to redirect their goods around the Horn of Africa leading to much higher costs in global shipping and trade. In addition to this, the gruesome civil war has been declared to be the world's worst humanitarian crises. Yemen's population constantly faces famine, disease, forced internal displacement along with a crumbling regional stability. Human Right Groups advocate tirelessly for a ceasefire as the common citizens die by the hundreds every single day but have yielded no success except the short period of peace in April of 2022. The Houthis have recently aligned their views with that of Palestine in the Israel-Palestine conflict in an aim to justify their actions and seek support from people around the world.

The solution to the conflict must begin to develop through peace talks and an immediate ceasefire. It extends way beyond Yemen itself as a multitude of actors and stakeholders influence the direction that the situation is heading towards at any given moment of time.

Definition of Key Terms

Houthis

The main focus of this conflict. An Islamist rebel group that declared war against the internationally recognized government of Yemen.

Shia Muslim

A minority branch of Islam that has a different view in relation to the Prophet Muhammad's family. The Houthi movement mainly aligns with this belief.

Sunni Muslim

The majority branch of Islam that believes leadership should be based on consensus and the Prophet's traditions.

Humanitarian Crisis

A generalized emergency situation that affects an entire community or a group of people in a specific region. The crisis in Yemen is considered to be the worst one ever.

Sectarian Conflict

Tensions or conflicts that stem from differences between religious sects.

Ceasefire

A temporary suspension of fighting agreed upon by all involved parties.

Peacebuilding

Activities that are aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict in order to ensure long lasting peace.

Humanitarian Corridor

An established route with the sole purpose of allowing the facilitation of humanitarian aid and safe passage for civilians.

Transitional Justice

A set of processes used to address past human right abuses or violations that have occurred in the past.

Sanctions

Penalties or restrictions imposed by countries or organizations upon a state in order to reprimand or influence their actions.

Arms Embargo

A complete restriction on the supply of weapons and ammunition to parties involved in the conflict

Arab Spring

Protests and revolutions in the Arab world in the 2010s

Imamate

A Shia Muslim belief in the leadership of Imams, the people who lead prayers in mosques

Background Information

The Houthi movement started in the 1990s in Yemen under the leadership of Hussein al-Houthi. Formally known as Ansar Allah, the Houthis started off as a peaceful group seeking economic and political reform in Yemen for prosperity and progress. They represent the Zaydi Shia sect of Islam which was constantly marginalized and discriminated against in Yemen due to being a minority. The conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims dates back centuries and stems from a core difference in the belief of the events that followed the Prophet Muhammed's passing. Following the reunification of Yemen by President Saleh, the northern Shia dominant regions were oppressed by the government which enraged the Houthis. The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States raised tensions in the region and caused the Houthis to turn towards violence. They began an insurgency against President Saleh, accusing his regime of marginalization and corruption, which lasted several years. Following Saleh's eventual downfall, President Hadi took control over Yemen and created the National Dialogue Conference to hear the voices of people. However, the Houthis still felt excluded and this led them to garner the support of Iran, a Shia dominant country. They were provided with aid and ammunition which helped uncover countless

instances of corruption and western values being present in the state due to President Hadi's involvement with the US and Saudi Arabia, a Sunni majority nation. which led them to start a civil war with the government.

The Houthis gained control of over 70% of the territory including the capital city of Sanaa in 2014 and placed President Hadi under house arrest. However, using internal connections, Hadi escaped to the South and declared himself to be the legitimate government of Yemen. The Houthis began to track him down which led the official government to retreat and set up their operations in Saudi Arabia, further enraging the Houthis. Saudi Arabia proceeded to conduct airstrikes on Yemen which fueled the start of its devastating humanitarian crisis. Widespread poverty, famine and disease spread to all corners of the nation causing international organizations to be alarmed. The United Nations helped set up various peace talks but none yielded in much sustenance as the conflict worsened. The recent invasion of Gaza by Israel has emboldened the Houthis and provoked them to attack ships in the Bab el-Mandeb strait, a crucial point for global trade and shipping. The Houthis have declared to be fighting in solidarity with the people of Palestine and will not stop until Israel and all western influence is eliminated from the region. They are considered by many as the de facto rulers of Yemen at this point of time which gives them their much wanted sense of legitimacy.

Causes

Religious Identity

The root cause of the issue that developed in Yemen was due to the sectarian age old conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The Shia Muslims, a minority sect, accused the government of discrimination and started a peaceful nonviolent protest movement which was named Ansar Allah. President Saleh in turn accused the group of attempting to overthrow the government and reestablish the rule of Imamate in Yemen. This quickly escalated into the Houthis becoming a violent group after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US and eventually led to the governments collapse in 2015

Weak Governance

The Houthis accused the Yemeni government of being corrupt and exposed President Saleh for trying to steal wealth for his own family. They blamed the government for the lack of development and infrastructure in Yemen and sought to bring change for the betterment of the people. However, widespread poverty, economic ruin

and a failing state intensified the Houthis' grievances, leading the rebellion to turn into a prolonged civil war that has had regional and international involvement. Furthermore, the transitional period following President Hadi's resignation left a power vacuum in the state that the Houthis were able to exploit.

Influence of Foreign Actors

The Houthis had an alarming concern over the rise of Saudi Arabia's influence in Yemen and their support for the corrupt government in charge. Saudi Arabia, a Sunni majority state, had its institutions in Yemen trying to convert Zaydi Shia Muslims into Sunni Muslims which exacerbated cultural and religious tensions. The Houthis perceived this to be a direct threat to Yemen's sovereignty.

Additionally, the growing involvement of the Western powers, mainly the US, in the Middle East directly contrasted with the Houthis core beliefs revolving around 'death to the USA'. This was accentuated by the fact that US run military operations in northern Yemen had a disproportionate impact on Zaydi Shia areas and brought some of them to ruin.

Israel - Palestine Conflict

The recent invasion of the Gaza Strip in Palestine has allowed the Houthis to reposition themselves and align with the plight of the Palestinians. They claim to be acting in the name of Palestine, fighting against Israel and the rest of the Western world. This has given the group some form of legitimacy within Yemen and even garnered support from many nations that view Israel's actions to be a cruel violation of Humanitarian Law and are opposed to the growing Western influence in the Middle East.

The Houthis have consistently portrayed themselves as being the saviors of Palestine and the alternate option to lead Yemen for Yemeni citizens that demand political reforms, hold strong anti-western beliefs, and want to hold the official government accountable for their actions.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Yemen

The officially recognized government of Yemen that is based in Saudi Arabia and portrays the Houthis as an

illegitimate group of rebels trying to overthrow a free democratic state. They argue that the Houthis act as a proxy of Iran and work towards furthering Iranian objectives in Yemen.

The Houthis

The Houthis

believe they are fighting against social, political and religious marginalization by a corrupt and inefficient Sunni dominated government that has failed to uphold its duty towards the citizens. They see themselves as protecting the rights of Shia Muslims in Yemen and resisting intervention from Saudi Arabia and Western influence, notably the US.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia

views the Houthis as an Iranian Proxy that is a significant threat towards regional stability and security. They have intervened in the conflict by providing aid to the Hadi led government of Yemen that aligns itself with Saudi Arabia's objectives.

The United States

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has played a key role in the recent escalation of the conflict in Yemen having launched several military attacks against the Houthis and President Donald Trump vowing to hold them responsible to the highest possible degree. They have openly designated the Houthis as a Terrorist Organisation. The US believes the Houthi movement is a struggle to embolden Iranian influence in the region. They also fear that Yemen could become the next base for extremist groups like al-Qaeda or ISIS that target western states in particular.

Iran

Iran denies direct involvement with the conflict but has indirectly provided the Houthis with aid in the past. They view their movement as a larger part of their 'Axis of Resistance' against Saudi and Western influence in the region. The Houthis act independently from Iran and are not controlled in any manner. It is the case that both Iran and the Houthis share an ideological affinity that resists foreign intervention.

The United Nations

The United Nations has played a pivotal role in containing the conflict to just Yemen. They advocate for a peaceful solution to be reached immediately and frame the conflict as a civil war with devastating consequences on none other than the common citizens. Their main concern revolves around the alarming humanitarian crisis that has developed due to famine, lack of supplies, poor hygiene and the destruction of infrastructure. It is becoming increasingly challenging for aid workers to establish human corridors or carry out their work in an effective and safe manner.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1990	North and South Yemen unified under a single state under President Ali Abdullah Saleh
May 1994	Civil war breaks out between the north and south due to political disputes and power struggles. The south was furious to be given a seemingly lower status in the country
July 1994	President Saleh prevents southern Yemen from breaking away from the north by leading the northern forces to victory, consolidating power.
2004 - 2010	The Houthi movement, a group from the Zaidi Shia community in the north, began an insurgency against Saleh's government accusing it of marginalization and corruption. This is known as the Sa'dah Wars and involved several rounds of fighting
2011	Influenced by the Arab Spring, widespread protests erupted against President Saleh's government, demanding political and economic reforms. Saleh was injured in an assassination attempt and agreed to step down as president
2012	Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi became the interim president. The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was initiated to create a new political framework, but many factions, including the Houthis and southern separatists, feel excluded Iran began its support for the Houthis
2014	The Houthis rebelled against the Yemen government causing it to step down and sparking a humanitarian crisis Hadi's government struggled to maintain control amid economic decline, rising fuel prices, and ongoing political instability. The Houthis gained more power and territory in the north
September 2014	The Houthis, allied with forces loyal to former President Saleh, seized the capital, Sanaa, and forced Hadi's government to negotiate a power-sharing agreement

January 2015	The Houthis dissolved the parliament and placed Hadi under house arrest. Hadi later escaped to Aden in the south, declared himself the legitimate president, and appealed for international intervention
March 2015	The Houthis, backed by Saleh's forces, advanced towards Aden. Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia. In response, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition with other Arab states and began a military intervention against the Houthis and pro-Saleh forces.
April 2015	The Saudi-led coalition conducted airstrikes against Houthi positions. The war caused a humanitarian crisis with massive civilian casualties and widespread famine
2016	Peace talks, brokered by the UN, failed to produce a lasting ceasefire. Fighting continues across multiple fronts, including in Taiz, Marib, and along the Saudi-Yemeni border.
2017	Ali Abdullah Saleh broke his alliance with the Houthis and sought a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. In December, Saleh was killed by the Houthis after clashes in Sanaa
2018	The coalition launched a major offensive to seize the port city of Hodeidah, a critical entry point for humanitarian aid. The Stockholm Agreement, brokered by the UN, resulted in a fragile ceasefire around Hodeidah
2019	Fighting continued despite the ceasefire, and Yemen's conflict became more fragmented. The Southern Transitional Council (STC), a separatist group in the south, clashed with Hadi's forces, leading to a power-sharing agreement in Riyadh
2020	The Houthis made gains in northern Yemen, particularly in Marib. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, with millions facing starvation
2021	Fighting intensified around Marib, the last stronghold of Hadi's government in the north. The conflict remained a stalemate, and peace talks failed to yield substantial progress.
2022	A UN-brokered truce in April brought a temporary reduction in hostilities, although sporadic clashes continued. Fighting in the Yemeni Civil War is between the Presidential Leadership Council that is recognized by the UN and the Supreme Political Council (political wing of the Houthis)
2023	Despite some diplomatic efforts and calls for peace, the conflict remained unresolved. Humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate, with millions in dire need of aid.
October 2023	Israel - Palestine conflict began. The Houthis position themselves to be defenders of Palestine in the name of Allah.
November 2023 - Present	The Houthis began attacking shipping in the Red Sea and Israel. They are using rockets and unmanned drones and missile attacks This is a major threat to maritime security and causes higher global shipping prices

January 2024 - Present	A US led coalition called 'Prosperity Guardian' (12 signatories) stations aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Aden They have launched military strikes in Yemen but failed to help solve the conflict
Present	Houthi forces continue to launch attacks and rebel against ships passing through the Bab El-Mandeb Strait and in the Red Sea disrupting global trade. They position themselves as the 'saviors' of Palestine by launching several attacks on Israel.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- [Resolution 2216](#), 14 April 2015
 - o Imposes an arms embargo on the Houthis forces loyal to former President Saleh
- [Resolution 2624](#), 28 February 2022
 - o Extends the arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze against individuals and entities that undermine the peace of Yemen
- [Resolution 2722](#), 10 January 2024
 - o Demands that the Houthis cease all violent actions in the Red Sea
- [Resolution 2739](#), 15 March 2024
 - o Reiterated that the Houthis must stop attacks on all maritime vessels effective immediately

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The Stockholm Agreement in 2018 was able to ease tensions in Hodeidah and prevented a full scale war in the region. However, broader peace could not be achieved as a result of this. This was followed by the Riyadh Agreement of 2019 which failed to address the broad scale of the conflict with the Houthis and as a result didn't achieve any resolution.

However, the UN has been persistent in leading peace talks such as in Geneva (2015), Kuwait (2016), Sweden (2018) and Muscat (2022-2023). They were able to implement a temporary truce in Yemen that began on the 1st of April 2022 and ended on the 2nd of October of the same year. UN organizations like UNICEF and WHO have also launched large scale humanitarian projects to help provide aid to affected populations. Saudi Arabia has it in its best interest to quickly negotiate another peacekeeping deal as the conflict has tarnished its reputation on the global stage particularly around

human rights violations. Even if Saudi Arabia and the Houthis were to agree to a peace deal, it would not necessarily aveliate the internalized conflict that remains in Yemen.

Possible Solutions

Ceasefire in Israel and Palestine

The first step to reaching a solution in Yemen requires an immediate ceasefire to occur in Gaza. This would take away the shield of legitimacy that the Houthis operate under and make them prone to scrutiny on the world stage. At the time of writing, a ceasefire deal has been negotiated to take effect from the 19th of January 2025 due to the help of American intervention. However, this does not guarantee that the Houthis will stop any of their activities in the region.

Increased Humanitarian Aid

There needs to be unhindered access for humanitarian aid to be delivered and a human corridor must be secured as the dire situation worsens day by day for millions of people. Almost 22 million people, including 12 million children, have been critically harmed by this conflict and are in immediate need of aid. Of those 22 million, 17 million face a serious risk of starvation and disease.

Proportionally Representative Parliament

It is imperative that Yemen's political system is rebuilt to reflect the voices of every group i.e. the Houthis are provided with proportional representation. Using military force has been ineffective in the past as demonstrated by the countless airstrikes conducted by western allies. The Houthis seek recognition and the official government of Yemen must acknowledge that to prevent more bloodshed. Currently, Saudi Arabia is trying to position itself as a mediator between the Houthis and government of Yemen, but the Houthis rightfully reject this proposition due to Saudi Arabia's intervention and involvement in Yemen. The United Nations, however, must intervene as an unbiased third party to negotiate and implement peace in Yemen.

Justice and Educational Reforms

Transitional justice must be delivered as no crime committed can go unpunished. Those who have committed acts against humanity, no matter the reason, must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Economic support will also need to be provided by the World Bank to help rebuild critical infrastructure. Furthermore, to ensure long lasting peace, religious harmony must be achieved by educating the youth on accepting and collaborating with different cultures and traditions. This can be achieved through a progressive school curriculum and higher education.

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Useful Links

It is highly recommended for all delegates to further their understanding of the topic using the useful resources hyperlinked below:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Houthi_movement
- [Empire- the History of the Houthis](#)
- [Disorder: Houthis](#)
- <https://www.cfr.org/video/sunni-shia-divide>
- <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/yemen/>
- <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/un-special-envoy-yemen-concludes-visit-sanaa>