

Committee: Security Council

Issue: The situation in Yemen

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Position: Deputy President

INTRODUCTION

Yemen and more specifically the Republic of Yemen is located in the Middle East at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, surrounded by the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. Despite its high strategical advantage of being close to the world's most important energy chokepoint namely the Strait of Hormuz, Yemen is the poorest country of the Middle East having covered a history of turbulence, numerous divisions and civil wars.

Currently, the country is facing one of the most catastrophic crises in its early history with the overthrow of its government by an insurgent movement led by the Houthis rebel group. Latest news on the issue includes the capture of the capital Sana'a by the Houthis and their advancement towards the Gulf of Aden. At the same time, there is frequent international involvement mainly by Saudi Arabia and Iran, which back the former government and the rebel forces accordingly. What brings even more tension in the issue is the growing expansion and establishment of the terrorist group al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) which is based in the eastern region of the country. Terrorist activity has attracted the United States, which has sent forces in the region fighting against AQAP and backing the government as well as Saudi Arabian forces against the Houthis.

On a humanitarian level the country is in an emergency as designated by the United Nations, which highlighted the severity and complexity of the situation in the country. Struck by epidemic diseases such as but not limited to malaria and hepatitis A, but also lacking food and water, Yemen has been plunged into a chaos of humanitarian distress, constant conflicts and arbitrary foreign interference.

Suggested video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuIFLvNBfcg>

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Sunni Muslims

“One of the two main branches of Islam, commonly described as orthodox, and differing from Shia in its understanding of the Sunna and in its acceptance of the first three caliphs.” *As defined in the Oxford Dictionary*

Shia Muslims

“One of the two main branches of Islam, followed by about a tenth of Muslims, especially in Iran, that rejects the first three Sunni caliphs and regards Ali, the fourth caliph, as Muhammad’s first true successor.” *As defined in the Oxford Dictionary*

Arab Spring

“A series of anti-government uprisings in various countries in North Africa and the Middle East, beginning in Tunisia in December 2010.” *As defined in the Oxford Dictionary*

Houthis

The Houthis constitute a Yemeni militant movement stemming from the country’s impoverished north-western region. Often characterized as Ansar Allah, or "Partisans of God", the Houthis adhere to a branch of Shia Islam known as Zaidism and fight for the protection of their religious and cultural beliefs. The group is responsible for the insurgency which emerged in 2004 and was led by the leader and founder of the movement, Hussein al-Houthi.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

“AQAP is a Sunni extremist group based in Yemen that has orchestrated numerous high-profile terrorist attacks. The group emerged in January 2009 following an announcement that Yemeni and Saudi terrorists were unifying under a common banner. The group has targeted local, US, and Western interests in the Arabian Peninsula, but is now pursuing a global strategy.” *As defined by the National Counterterrorism Center*

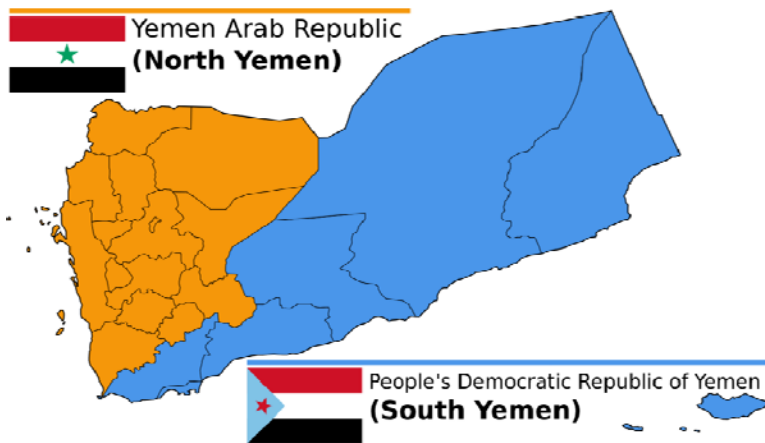
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History of the Republic of Yemen

Yemen’s early history is characterized by ongoing unrests and political instability. During the 1960’s the country was divided into two parts the northern part, which was

under the rule of a closed group of Imams, and the southern part, which at the time was a British colony. By 1962 however following a military coup the existing northern government was overthrown and soon after the Yemen Arab Republic was proclaimed. However the event was combined with a violent outbreak of civil unrest in which Egypt and Soviet Union (USSR) supported the revolutionaries whereas Saudi Arabia stood openly in favour of the country's royalists. In 1969 the war came to its end marking the defeat and decline of the royal class.

Meanwhile serving as a British colony the southern port of Aden turned into an area of great strategical and geopolitical importance, since it was located at the opening of the



Red Sea. Having expanded its borders in 1937 the region soon flourished on a financial level earning the title 'Aden Protectorate' on account of its increasing power. The 1960s was without a doubt a decade of

transitivity for the southern part of the country. Following the foundation of the Nationalist Liberation Front (NLF) a revolution of the native Yemen population broke out against the British rule. Its success in the next years led to a crucial event in the country's recent history namely the establishment of the People's Republic of Southern Yemen in 1967. The People's Republic of Southern Yemen was so deeply influenced by socialistic ideologies –unlike its neighbouring countries- that was often described as the only Marxist state in the entire Arab world.

Another consequential historical milestone for Yemen can be traced back 25 years ago when on 22 May of 1990, the northern and the southern governments decided upon the joint governing of Yemen and therefore the merging of the two countries with Ali Abdullah Salah serving as the first official Yemen President. The position of Vice-President was appointed to the former President of South Yemen, Ali Salim al-Beidh, while at same time a unified parliament was formed and a uniting constitution was agreed upon.

However, control over power remained a divisive issue between the North and the South with both claiming exclusive rule over Yemen. Strong administrative disagreements led by 1994 in a civil war. The North's military superiority was soon made clear despite the South's considerable attempts to stand out and attract public attention. Despite efforts made -in the name of political democracy and stability- to achieve reconciliation between the north and the south (signing of peace agreement in Amman, Jordan on 20 February 1994) the civil war was not to come to its end yet. Tension between the two sides resulted in an armed conflict of great magnitude. Ultimately the decisive battle between the two armed forces resulted in the defeat of the southern part which was subject to severe losses during the battle. Following the northern Yemen's final domination multiple Yemeni Socialist Party leaders and other political figures of the south fled into exile. The July 1994 civil war in Yemen has ended leaving the country financially feeble and politically but also socially divided.

Beginning of the Houthi insurgency



In June 2004 Yemen was struck by the Houthi insurgency which emerged as a result of the strong religious accusations targeting the country's government. Dissident cleric and Shia's firm supporter Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, was one of the main political figures responsible for the anti-governmental movement which was interpreted as an attempt to overthrow the existing government and implement Zaidi religious law. The rebellion took the form of a fight against discrimination and government aggression. Houthi was killed by Yemeni troops and one of his brothers became the new leader of the insurgency which took his name. Between 2004 and 2010 the rebellion continued in greater intensity resulting in a fierce armed conflict which led to numerous clashes between the two sides.

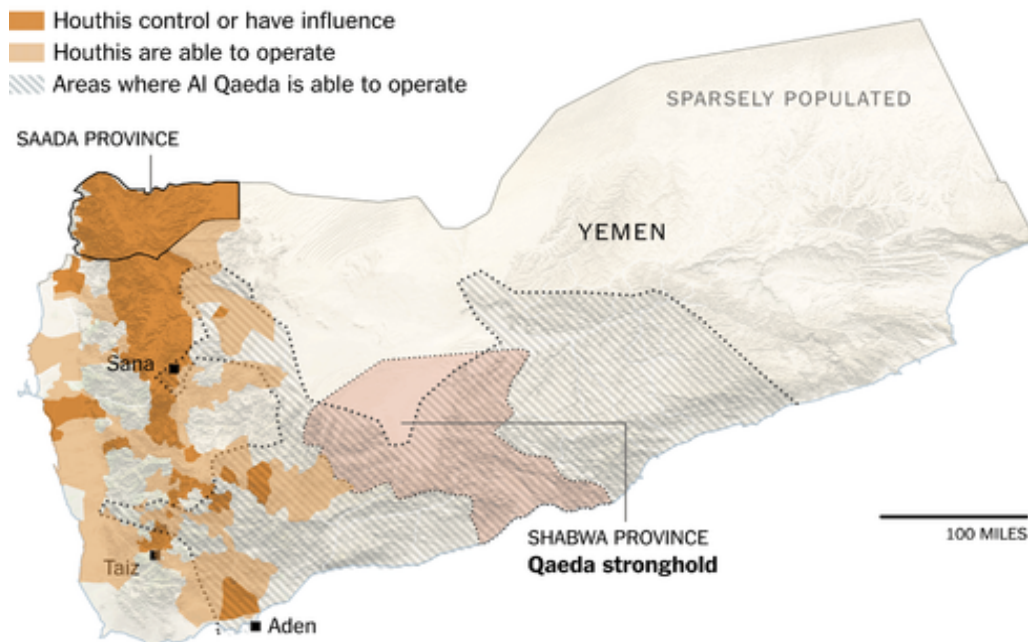
In 2011 the Arab spring also reached Yemen and the Houthis used the anti-government protests for their cause. The pressure exerted by the rebels made president Saleh resign after a 33-year rule. In February 2012 Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi was elected the new president, however the violence and conflict triggered by the insurgency has not yet reached an end, continuing till today.

The deterioration of the situation in Yemen

The frequent clashes between the rebel groups and the government forces were accompanied by a number of terrorist attacks such as but not limited to suicide attacks, a bomb explosion in front of the British embassy and several kidnappings whose hostages ranged from civilians to political figures.

It was even said that a large-scale terrorist attack was about to take place in the Arabian Peninsula. According to Yemeni officials, the plan was conceived as well as organized by al-Qaeda and was fortunately prevented by the government. Intercepted suspicious communications between the leader of al-Qaeda, and the head of the terrorist group in Yemen, in combination with the unexpected arrival of numerous militants to the capital Sana'a, alerted the Yemeni officials and triggered further investigations on the issue. Ultimately, the plan was foiled revealing the targets of the terrorist attack, which included multiple embassies and offices, the Yemeni military headquarters, as well as oil and gas pipelines.

It is however argued that the aforementioned anti-terrorism mission that the government claimed to have accomplished, was actually a product of the government itself in an attempt to prove that it could successfully maintain national security and limit the actions of AQAP in the region.



A considerable yet not decisive step towards securing stability in the country was made in March 2013 with the opening of the National Dialogue Conference. Its aim was to suggest ways to improve Yemen's economy, eliminate corruption, deal with the rebel groups

and recommend provisions for a new constitution. The members of the conference included 565 representatives from political parties, women's groups, youth movements, and other civil organizations. Despite the high expectations, the conference did not have the anticipated results, ending several months behind schedule. Nevertheless, there were some important decisions reached such as to found an anti-corruption board, bring an end to childhood marriage, take measures for the empowerment of women, establish a federal system of government, and make efforts to minimize the marginalization of southerner population. Responding to that conference, there was a plan laid out by a presidential committee in February for Yemen to become a federation of six regions.

Meanwhile Shia and Sunni groups of the country joined forces with the Houthis. Together they entered the capital Sana'a two months later and settled there for what was thought to be a temporary stay. The pressure exerted on the government by the rebel forces led the president Hadi to agree on the formation of a new government whose prime minister would be nominated by the Houthis. In his attempt to peacefully come to terms with the rebels Hadi promised to reduce the price of fuel, but still the Houthis considered the concessions insufficient. Inevitably a fight between the rebels and the security forces broke out in Sana'a, resulting to the Houthis domination. The Houthis gained control of the capital of Yemen; an incident viewed by the rebels as their greatest accomplishment and by the government as its most significant loss so far.

On 20th September the UN attempts to broker talks between the government and the rebels in order to sign a peace agreement, which called for the resignation of Mohammed Basindwa the country's Prime Minister, the withdrawal of the rebel forces from Sana'a, the establishment of a "technocratic national government" and the implementation of the provisions of the National Dialogue Conference, and allowed the Houthis to have more representation in parliament. The Houthis, however, refused to withdraw their forces from Sana'a and therefore rejected the peace agreement. In October, Khaled Bahah, Yemen's former ambassador to the UN, was named prime minister.

Recent Events (January 2015-present)

In January 2015 an intensification of the fighting between Houthi rebels and government in Sana'a was noticed. Under these circumstances a draft constitution was adopted that called for Yemen to become a federation of six regions, a concept that had emerged from the National Dialogue Conference. The Houthis however stated that they are firmly opposed to the country's six-region division.

The Houthis then surrounded the presidential palace complex taking his chief of staff hostage. On January 21 the Houthis and the government signed a cease-fire, which demanded the withdrawal of the rebel forces from the presidential palace, the cancellation of the proposed regional plan and the political empowerment of the Houthis in parliament. The Houthis, however, refused to abide by the ceasefire. One day later Hadi, the Prime Minister and the cabinet all resigned as a result of the pressure exerted by the Houthis.

In early February, the Houthis decided upon the Parliament's dissolution and announced its replacement by a national council that would then formulate a committee to name a new president. During this escalating situation Saudi Arabia withheld aid to Yemen on account of the Houthis' ties to Iran. At this point the UN attempted to intervene and broker talks between the rebels and rival political parties unfortunately with little success.



As tension continued to climax, on February 6, the Houthis announced that the newly created five-member “presidential council” will form a transitional government for two years. In addition to that, a transitional national council comprised of 551 members will be formed as a replacement of the former parliament. However, many Sunni governors in the provinces rejected these measures, as they are loyal to the overthrown former government, which leaves Yemen in a highly unstable situation without an effective central government.

What increases the tensions even more is that former president Hadi managed to escape his house arrest on February 21 and has since then withdrawn his resignation, stating that all actions taken by the Houthis were null and illegitimate.

At the same time Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continues to grow in strength and influence. AQAP embraces Sunni Islam in contrast with the Houthis who adhere to Shiite Islam. It is on the basis of such dogmatic differences that the two groups have been in conflict with each other taking toll on the civilians.

The involvement of foreign powers in the Yemen crisis has significantly exacerbated the situation making it even more complex and difficult to get it under control. Iran appears as a firm supporter of the Houthis insurgency while Saudi Arabia has made clear its opposition to the group and often taken action against them. United States is also one of the major countries involved and more specifically fighting al-Qaeda. Hence the numerous drone attacks which constitute a small part of what is called 'war against terrorism'.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Iran

Iran is considered to be the Houthis' firmest supporter on an international level and their greatest financial resource. Apart from the economic support that the country provides to the group, many claim that Iran has often reinforced the insurgent movement militarily. The strong ties that have been developed between the rebels and the Iranian government are a product of similar geopolitical goals that the two sides share. More specifically, Iran questions Saudi and U.S. dominance of the region and the Houthis seek to challenge Hadi's government which has always been backed by Saudi Arabia and the United States. On that basis it is clear that Houthis's alliance with Iran stems from a mutual opposition to Saudi Arabia's and US's involvement in the issue.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is one of the major countries involved in the Yemen crisis as a result of the firm support they have expressed towards the former Yemen government. With that being said, the Houthi insurgency has been seen with strong disapproval by Saudi Arabia, leading to unilateral military operations against the rebel forces. The insurgency is seen as a major threat to the oil-rich kingdom which regards Houthis as a hostile neighbour backed by

a regional rival, Iran. Moreover, since Saudi Arabia is primarily a Sunni country, the establishment of a Shia Muslim country ruled by the Houthis on its southern border is far from desirable for the Saudi leadership. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has formed an alliance of Sunni-majority Arab states including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia as the dominant party of the coalition has launched in cooperation with the United States a Saudi-led air campaign against the Houthi rebels in an attempt to limit the influence of Iran over Yemen. Following nearly month-long airstrikes the Saudi government announced in April 2015 that it would halt its attacks. Although it remains unknown whether this decision will open the way for peace talks between the rival parties in Yemen there is no doubt that Saudi Arabia will continue to play a major role in Yemen crisis on account of its abundant wealth and strong political influence.

United States of America (USA)

Over the last decade the United States' presence in Yemen has become more and more evident on account of the multiple US interests in the region. First of all, Yemen is considered as one of the key countries in regard to the safe transportation of oil from the Arabian Peninsula and more specifically from Yemen's neighbouring country Saudi Arabia. Sustaining security and stability in Yemen is viewed by the US as a crucial step towards ensuring the unthreatened traversal of oil through the country and the control of the international oil trade.

On that basis, the US is fully backing the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen which tries to prevent Iran from gaining power over the country through the Houthi uprising. US navy has recently made its presence clear in the area, since a strengthened armada of US warships has reached Yemen's coast in April 2015. Moreover, since Yemen is home to one of Al Qaeda's most active branches, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, it has attracted US attention in the context of counter-terrorism. Thus the US government seeks a Yemeni government which will collaborate with US counter-terrorism programs in order to limit the expansion of terrorist groups in the area.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

AQAP is an active terrorist group that has largely benefitted from the ongoing rivalry and whose base is in eastern Yemen. Coordinating multiple terrorist attacks not only in many of the biggest cities of Yemen but also out of the country's borders, AQAP is fighting

against both the Houthis, the government forces and American anti-terrorism troops which are currently based in the country.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1918	North Yemen becomes an independent state while southern Yemen remains a Protectorate under the British rule.
1962	A military coup takes place and the existing northern government is overthrown; the Yemen Arab Republic is proclaimed.
1963	An uprising against the British rule takes place in southern Yemen.
1967	British withdraw forces from Aden; establishment of the People's Republic of Southern Yemen.
1970	Marxist movement gains power in southern Yemen; establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.
22 May 1990	The northern and the southern governments decide upon the joint governing of Yemen and therefore the merging of the two countries; establishment of the Republic of Yemen.

1994	Civil war breaks out between the northern and southern part of Yemen; the northern forces take control of the southern capital, Aden.
2002	The US launches its first drone attack against Yemeni extremists.
June 2004	The Houthi insurgency begins in the northern part of the country; Hussein al Houthi himself is later killed in battle.
2005	Ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and the government; occasional clashes between the rebel and the government forces continue for five years.
2007	Fighting resumes between the government and the Houthi rebels.
2008	Terrorist attack organized by al-Qaeda takes place against the US embassy in the capital Sana'a.
2009	Founding of the 'al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula' (AQAP).
2010	Ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and the government; fighting resumes between the government and the Houthi rebels resulting into the death of 3000 people.
2011	Arab Spring protests in the capital Sana'a; the United States' drone attacks significantly grow in intensity and frequency; President Saleh promises to hand over power to his deputy Adbrabbuh Mansour Hadi.
2012	Ex-President Saleh flees the country and Deputy President Hadi is appointed President; an AQAP terrorist attack on the presidential palace takes toll on more than one hundred people; US continues its drone strikes against AQAP; government forces take over several AQAP strongholds.
2013	Opening of the National Dialogue Conference; heavy fighting continues between government forces and AQAP.

2014	The Houthis take over Amran, a city 45 miles north of the capital Sana'a; the UN attempts to broker talks between the government and the rebels in order to sign a peace agreement; Houthi rebels gain control over the capital Sana'a.
2015	President Hadi, Prime Minister Muhammad Salim Basindwah, and the cabinet resign; Houthis rise to power; Islamic State launches its first attacks against Yemen.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The United Nations and especially the Security Council have made some important efforts to stabilize the situation in Yemen. Below are the Security Council resolutions concentrating on the Yemen crisis:

- Security Council resolution 2014 (21 October 2011)

Approved the Gulf Cooperation Council's initiative for a peaceful transition of power according to which President Saleh promised to hand over his position to his deputy Adbrabbuh Mansour Hadi.

- Security Council resolution 2051 (12 June 2012)

Concentrated on the second phase of the transition.

- Security Council resolution 2140 (26 February 2014)

The resolution endorsed the next steps of the political transition and imposed sanctions on those considered to pose threat for the peace, security or stability of Yemen.

- Security Council resolution 2201 (15 February 2015)

Strongly disapproved of the Houthis' decision to dissolve parliament and expressed its opposition to the capture of government institutions by the rebels. Furthermore, it called upon the two rival sides to negotiate in order to bring an end to the political impasse.

- Security Council resolution 2204 (24 February 2015)

This was a resolution renewing the assets freeze and travel ban until 26 February 2016.

- Security Council resolution 2216 (14 April 2015)

The resolution demanded an arms embargo on the Houthis and the government forces.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS

The Gulf Cooperation Council's involvement in the Yemen crisis has decisively influenced the situation in the country. United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar, as the six members of the GCC, agreed on the launching of military operations in Yemen against the Iran-backed rebels. These operations included consecutive airstrikes and aerial as well as naval blockade aiming to hold back the Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The intervention began in 2015 in response to the former Yemeni government's requests for international assistance. Soon after that Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of nine Arab states namely Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain heralding a military campaign known as Operation Decisive Storm. The US has been a contributing factor to the campaign having provided background assistance to the coalition such as intelligence and logistical support as well as weapon equipment.

On 21 April 2015, following Saudi Arabia's official announcement, the Operation Decisive Storm was brought to its end. The coalition decided on a political rather than military approach to the Yemen crisis, which they called Operation Restoring Hope. Although the operation mainly concentrates on peace talks, the coalition did not exclude the chance of a new military intervention in the face of future threats posed by the rebels or their allies. Albeit the operation decisive storm had been a considerable attempt to limit the expansion of the rebel groups, blockade of the country as part of the campaign resulted into a humanitarian disaster which left 78% of the Yemeni population in urgent need of food, water and medical aid.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Yemen is currently facing a multiform crisis. Political instability, civil unrest and conflicts, terrorist activity, a dwindling economy and of course humanitarian problems are key elements of the Yemen crisis.

From a humanitarian viewpoint, it is incumbent upon the United Nations to contribute in alleviating the people's suffering. Financial and medical assistance in

combination with the provision of food and water supplies are consequential steps that need to be made and decided upon by the member states.

Politically the country is in a highly vulnerable position. In the context of the increased foreign intervention in Yemen, there are concerns that the civil conflict might give birth to a devastating sectarian war involving terrorist organizations, neighboring countries and even the US. More specifically, the fact that the former government has joined forces with the most powerful Sunni country in the region, namely Saudi Arabia while the Houthis have developed strained ties with the most powerful Shia country in the region, namely Iran, is bringing the two rival countries in an escalating fight for power and dominance. As the possibility of conflict intensification is looming, it is of paramount importance that the UN intervenes in order to promote peace talks and negotiations between the two sides. At the same time efforts must be made to limit military foreign interventions in the country that solely express unilateral interests of the third party. Bringing an end to the civil unrest, the hostilities against civil population, the terrorist activity in the area and establishing political stability are crucially fundamental goals that must be achieved in order to aspire to both financial and humanitarian relief.

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