



U.N. Security Council Briefing: The Yemen Conflict

International Youth Politics Forum

Introduction to the Yemen Conflict

The war in Yemen is widely considered the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Yemen imports 90% of its food, meaning Saudi-led blockades cause famine. Despite assistance, 15.9 million people (53% of the population) face hunger daily, and more than 1 million women and 2 million children face acute, potentially fatal, malnutrition. Many Yemenis have not received wages for multiple years, making food unaffordable. Humanitarian aid is critical to survival in Yemen, but its inability to access many regions prevents many Yemenis in need from getting assistance. Additionally, the Houthi movement allegedly steals aid and sells it elsewhere. The executive director of the World Food Program, David Beasley, said “At a time when children are dying in Yemen because they haven’t enough food to eat, that is an outrage. This criminal behavior must stop immediately.” However, the Houthis have denied all charges.

In addition to hunger, disease is also a major problem in Yemen, due to poor sanitation and medical facilities. In January 2019, cholera surged in the nation, a continuation of a long-lasting epidemic. Because basic hygiene and medical facilities were destroyed, the outbreak became even worse. From October 2016 to January 2020, the total number of suspected cases was 2,316,197, with war and disease going hand in hand. With the COVID-19 outbreak, the situation in Yemen has worsened, as its facilities are not equipped to handle the crisis, and poor living conditions cause rapid spread. The U.N. states that Yemen has only 675 intensive-care beds and 309 ventilators, and severely understaffed hospitals. COVID-19 has also forced many aid organizations to cut down, leaving Yemenis in an even more precarious position.

Civilians are also harmed by unlawful detainment, and abuse, from both sides. Airstrikes, especially from the Saudi coalition, have killed and injured thousands of civilians. The Houthis have used banned landmines, recruited children, and launched missiles into civilian areas. There are thousands of documented cases of unjust imprisonment by both sides of the conflict, with many victims being tortured and killed. Additionally, since the beginning of the conflict, women have faced significantly higher rates of domestic violence and abuse. According to the United Nations Population Fund, violence against women has increased 63% due to the conflict, and UNICEF states that child marriage rates have increased.

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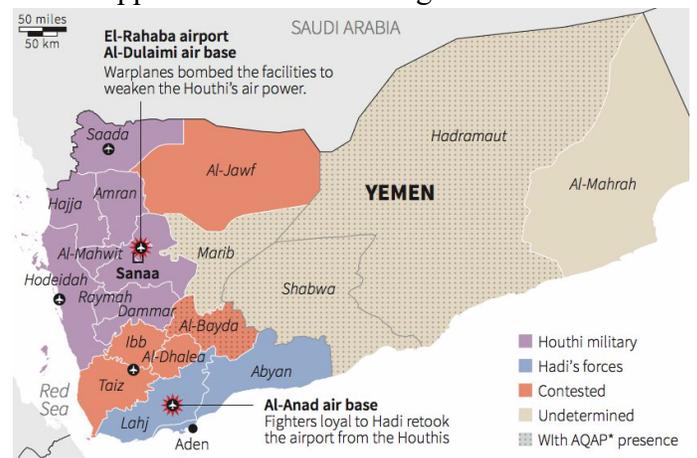


Historical Background on the Yemen Crisis

The Houthi movement (who fight for the rights of the Zaidi Shia Muslim minority) had long been in a state of rebellion against the Yemeni government when the longtime president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, stepped down, and Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi became president in 2011. Taking advantage of governmental instability, the Houthi movement grew, recruiting government dissenters, including Sunni Muslims. In 2014, they took over the capital, Sanaa, and joined forces with those loyal to the former president Saleh, forcing Hadi to flee. In 2015, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of Sunni states, supported by various Western powers, to fight the Houthis. The Houthis are supported by Iran, the major Shia power in the region. In addition to these two forces, a third force, the Southern Transitional Council more recently accused Hadi of mismanagement, throwing their hat into the ring, backed by the U.A.E. At the core of this conflict is a power struggle that has resulted in a very violent stalemate for the past years. However, the people facing the brunt of this crisis are not any of these powers, but rather, the people of Yemen.

The Houthis and their History

The Houthis are a group that practice the Zaydi form of Shi'ism (whose followers are known as Zaydiyyah). They are the minority community in both the Islamic and Shi'ite world. The name comes from their revered Zayd bin Ali, who led an uprising against the Umayyad Empire in 740 against a corrupt regime. He died in his pursuit, but his purpose resonated with the Houthis. Next, in 1962 a Zaydi Imamate who had ruled Yemen for 1,000 years was overthrown, removing Zaydi political power in the nation. In the same time period, a civil war was also in occurrence, during which Salafist Sunni ideals became quite popular further alienating the Zaydis. These events all angered the Houthis, who have since taken it upon themselves to reaffirm the Zaydi traditions and influence as well as rid corruption in the regime. The idea of fighting corruption quickly became the central goal of the Houthis, who are opposed to the Yemeni government's political, economic, and religious policies. The Houthi movement was founded in the 1990s by Hussein Badruddin al-Houthi. He was killed in 2004, and his brother Abdul Malik now leads the group. For over a decade, Houthi insurgents have clashed with Yemen's government and they had grown to a wider movement against President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was known for his corrupt and cruel practices. However, in 2012, Saleh was forced to resign due to protests and assassination attempts and the Houthis started to gain control of the northern territory. Soon after Saleh resigned,



Source: Reuters. *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
Inton, 26/03/2015

the Houthis pulled out of transition talks regarding moving towards a stable Yemeni government. Just two years later, they allied with their former enemy Saleh and overthrew President Abd Rabbu Mansour Halli in 2015.

Demographic Information

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Yemen’s population currently sits at an estimated 30.2 million people, with 46% of the population being under the age of 15 and 2.7% above the age of 65. Additionally, 23% of the population is counted as youth (in between the ages of 15 and 24). Thus, the population is skewed to be primarily composed of younger people- explaining the exacerbated need for aid. Yemen’s population is expected to increase exponentially, to an estimated 60 million in 2050.

In terms of ethnicity, the largest ethnic group in Yemen is the Arabs. This is because most minorities left the country after the former states of North and South Yemen joined together in 1991. However, Yemen is still a largely tribal society, with around 400 Zaidi tribes. These groups reside in the northern, mountainous parts of the country. Furthermore,

hereditary caste groups such as Al-Akdham are prevalent in urban areas.

Yemen is also home to around 160,000 refugees and asylum seekers from mostly Somalia, Iraq, Ethiopia and more recently, Syria with the ongoing nature of the Syrian Civil War. There is also a large community of Yemenite Jews, with origins dating back to the 1800’s. Some Asian cultures (such as Malaysians, Indonesians and Singaporeans) of Arab descent also make up a small part of Yemen’s population.

Government Structure & Action

Yemen’s government was created in 1990, and it’s 1991 constitution created a bicameral legislature, with an elected Assembly of Representatives, and the appointed Shura Council. The President (Abdrabbah Mansur Hadi) is the head of state, and the Prime Minister (Maen Abdulmalik Saeed) the head of government. However, this government is in shambles, as various groups currently claim to govern Yemen. The main forces “governing” Yemen are: Hadi’s government, the Houthi insurgency (formally Ansar Allah), and the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Hadi’s government is currently based in Aden, although Hadi himself fled to Saudi Arabia in 2015. This government has the backing of a regional Sunni Muslim coalition led by Saudi Arabia, with the support of the US, UK, and France.

The Houthi insurgency, which fights for the Zaidi Shia Muslim minority, received a boost after 2011, when authoritarian leader Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to pass on power to Hadi; Hadi was immediately plagued with numerous problems, like corruption and famine and Houthi ranks swelled with Saleh loyalists and Yemenis who disliked Hadi. With this, they were able to take over much of the nation, including the capital Sanaa and much of northwestern Yemen. The Saudi coalition suspects Iran, the only regional Shia power, of backing the Houthis.

The STC is a separate group that emerged later, accusing Hadi of mismanagement, and seizing control of Aden with the backing of the U.A.E. With this conflict, neither of these three competing powers are actually governing effectively, allowing terrorism to flourish, and the Yemeni people to face the world's largest human rights crisis with little help.

The Economic Perspective

Yemen is the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula, which is riddled with structural deficiencies and a current conflict that exacerbates the already-dire humanitarian situation. The war has eliminated all Yemeni exports, weakened its currency, damaged infrastructure, led to crippling inflation, and limited imports of both food and fuel. Moreover, the Yemeni economy shrunk by nearly 17% in 2015, and has only improved gradually since. The GDP grew by 0.8% in 2018, and by 2.1% in 2019. On April 14th 2020, the IMF forecasted a drop in Yemen's GDP by about -3% in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an expected increase to 6.1% in 2021, anticipating global economic recovery in a post-pandemic environment.

In essence, since the outbreak of the Yemen conflict, the country has lost almost 50% of its GDP, largely due to the suspension of hydrocarbon production, export, and investments. It's import capacities has been severely reduced, which has caused a shortage of food, medicine, and fuel.

The country also has a severe public deficit: 56.3% of GDP in 2020, which could be financed with inflationary methods in the absence of international donor contributions. The budget deficit has only increased from -6.9% in 2019 to -7.2% in 2020. Over the course of the year, however, revenue and tax collection have been increased, meaning it has been possible to fund the wages of civil servants and pensions, which increases overall household purchasing power. Inflation rates have also been fluctuating, from 10% in 2019, to 26.7% in 2020, with an estimated ease to 5% in 2021, as per the April 2020 World Economic Outlook, IMF.

Even since before the war started, the private sector has been stagnant, and the lack of a dynamic private sector catalysed chronic underemployment and the growth of an informal sector. Economic and social prospects for the future will depend on lasting peace to rebuild the economy, depending on rapid improvements to political and security fronts. The Riyadh Agreement of November 2019 did not lead to the formation of a joint government, leaving the situation shrouded in uncertainty. Rather, there have been continued military confrontations between the STC forces and the Saudi-backed, internationally recognised government.

According to the latest estimates from the ILO and the UN, about 80% of Yemen's population are 'at risk,' which totals to 24 million Yemenis, of which 14.3 million are in acute need. 17.8 million people lack access to safe water and sanitation, while the World Bank estimates that 19.7 million are without adequate healthcare.

Yemen ranks 177th out of 180 in the UNDP's Human Development Reports and scores 15/100 on Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Although the Yemeni economy has finally started growing again, it remains hindered by institutional fragmentation, the interruption of many public services, the country's relative isolation, and its violence. The aforementioned production of hydrocarbons is steadily increasing as of 2019, especially as the state-owned company Safer has resumed production, delivering around 5,000 barrels per day. However, the estimates for its continued growth are unclear, as state companies seem to be paying attention to smaller deposits. The depletion of reserves as a result of a stagnation in hydrocarbon exports and operating problems within its internal financing has continued to hinder vital imports. Moreover, the maritime blockade by Saudi Arabia has continued, as areas under rebel control see dwindling supplies. Once again, this has contributed to inflation.

Public finances improved in 2019, however. The technical framework and administrative capacity have been partially restored, in which, for the first time in five years, a detailed budget was released.

Past United Nations Action

UN Secretary-General António Guterres shared the following words during in the Pledging Conference for Yemen, held in Geneva on 26 February 2019:

“I stand in solidarity with millions of suffering Yemenis. And the United Nations and the wider international community are with you every step of the way. Together, inshallah, we can bring the suffering in Yemen to an end.”

80% of the population of Yemen, which is approximately 20 million people, are in need of aid resulting from the world's most serious humanitarian crisis. Since 2011, the United Nations has closely worked with the Yemeni population to help restore peace in the region. The offices of UN Secretary-General António Guterres have been playing a critical role in resolving the conflict.

One of the first steps taken by the offices of the Secretary-General was providing support in the negotiations between the Yemeni government and its Opposition, which resulted in the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism in Riyadh on 23 November 2011. Several Security Council resolutions have proven to promote stability through negotiations, such as the Security Council resolutions: 2014 (2011), 2051 (2012), 2140 (2014) and 2216 (2015).

Amongst his other efforts, in 2012, the Secretary-General established the “Office of the Special Envoy to the Secretary-General on Yemen” and by February 2018, a new Special Envoy had been appointed to further work on helping the population. Working closely with humanitarian

partners, such as international agencies and NGOs like Mercy Corps, Moas, Oxfam, Unicef and the government of Yemen, The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been able to help reach their goals in a more effective and efficient manner.

In terms of financial aid, since 2015, the UN has worked with several partners to provide support to the population of Yemen affected by this crisis. Through monthly schemes and programs like the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), the international organization distributes 100,000 metric tons of food commodities at more than 5,000 points, which helps more than 8 million Yemeni individuals affected by the crisis. To help cope with the needs of the women and young girls, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided sexual and reproductive health services to 250,000 girls and women. Moreover, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) have been able to provide 30,000 individuals with the cholera vaccine.

Negotiations were conducted under the aegis of Switzerland, Sweden and the UN, who were acting as representatives of 75 countries, international organizations and NGOs on the 26th of February 2019. This conference resulted in all participants pledging US\$ 2.6 Billion in the form of aid for the Yemeni population. This is an increase from the total pledges of 2018, which amounted to approximately US\$ 2.01 billion, 100 percent of which were fulfilled.

Despite these efforts, crisis still runs rampant within, affecting millions adversely. More intense and severe action is needed to help resolve the conflict and help the innocent individuals stuck in between the brutality and struggle.

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Goals

With the aim to combat the detrimental Yemen crisis, the UN has backed many peace negotiations, with which they believe the conflict can be lifted. The pressing agreement is the “three-pronged draft”, which was proposed in March. This draft includes the call for a nationwide ceasefire, the resumption of the peace process, as well as humanitarian and economic measures. The economic and humanitarian resources and especially pressing due to the mass outbreak of COVID-19. This draft has been proposed to the Government of Yemen and Ansar Allah and is being negotiated. Nonetheless, the military situation continues to worsen, with ceasefires being ignored in various regions, and more specifically in the port city of Hudaydah.

The five pillars of the UN humanitarian strategy continue to be called upon. These include protection of civilians; humanitarian access and delivery; funding; support for the economy; and

progress towards peace. With the rising threats posed by COVID-19, heavy emphasis is placed on the protection of civilians, as widespread loss of life is exceedingly present in Yemen. Furthermore, COVID-19 poses a threat against Yemen's reliance on imports as the ability to import the goods has become harder. The UN aims to ensure that Yemen is equipped with the necessary supplies to fight against the war at hand, whilst also combating the epidemic.

Many countries have also urged various goals and have stressed critical points. France, China, Belgium, the US, Vietnam, South Africa, and Saint Vincent and Grenadine have all expressed their rising concerns against the pressing issues which have arisen as a result of COVID-19 and show support in the three-pronged agreement.

Obstacles and Concerns

The Yemeni government has been unable to offer basic aid to the population because of the financial crisis caused by the war. The priority is helping people to survive, but the conditions have not been favorable. With more than 80% of the Yemeni people living in poverty, it becomes impossible for the government to administrate all of these people's needs while going through a civil war. The Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights claims that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person" - it is noticeable that none of these have been respected by the Yemeni government. Thousands of people face health problems, surrounding both famine and COVID-19, and are not sure about what tomorrow will bring to their lives. Articles 25 and 26, that talk about rights of well-being and education, are also broken by the current situation. The lack of government aid, led by a government unable to cope with the amount of contemporary interference, causes a huge gap in the Yemeni people's rights - even the basic ones. The lack of government aid is caused by the Saudi interference in the civil war, as a consequence of the Yemeni government's previous actions combined with a great example of interference in national sovereignty.

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