



## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### Improving Human Rights for Civilians in Yemen

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#### Introduction

The Republic of Yemen is a country at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen is the poorest state in the middle east, its development largely halted by the civil unrest and a political crisis since 2011, with the civil war blocking food imports resulting in a famine affecting 17 million people. The lack of safe drinking water has furthermore also resulted in the world's worst outbreak of cholera, with an estimated near 1 million cases. As of 2016, the United Nations reported that Yemen was the country with the most need for humanitarian aid, with 21.2 million people depending on or in need of it.



Image courtesy of the CIA World Factbook

#### Definition of Key Terms

## **Jihad**

A Jihad is commonly known as an Islamic war, from the Arabic word meaning struggling or striving. Jihads are often associated with extremism due to their aim to fight against enemies of Islam with the aim or goal of spiritual healing or fulfilment.

## **Humanitarian Aid**

Humanitarian aid is aid related to human welfare, usually in response to humanitarian crises. A humanitarian crisis can be man made, such as the effects of a war leaving many aid such as clean water and shelter would be needed.

## **Houthi**

The Houthi movement, officially called Ansar Allah (Helpers of god) is an Islamic movement of a religious, political, and violent nature that emerged in Saad'ah in the late 1990s. Their goals include development for Yemen and increasing autonomy for Houthi-majority regions of the country. They also claim to support democracy and fighting corruption as part of their political aims. In 2014-15 they took over the government in Sana'a with the help of the former president Ali Abdullah Salah, and have gained control of most of northern Yemen.

## **Proxy war**

A proxy war is a war between two or more major powers, in which neither are directly involved, and participate only through means such as financial, military, or resourceful aid. The main example of proxy war would be the Cold war, where America and the then-Soviet Union fought to maintain ideological control over areas. America supported any country who was attempting to withstand communism whereas the USSR supported communist takeovers. In the current day, these dynamics still exist, as in the Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflict the former is aided by Russia, the latter by America and expresses itself in the form of the Yemeni Civil War.

## **Shia and Sunni Muslims**

Shia Muslims are the Muslims of the branch of Islam comprising sects believing in Ali and the Imams as the only rightful successors of Muhammad and in the concealment and messianic return of the last recognized Imam. Sunni Muslims are the Muslims of the branch of Islam that adheres to the orthodox tradition and acknowledges the first four caliphs as rightful successors of Muhammad.

## **Background Information**

### **Origin of the Crisis in Yemen**

In 2011, the Yemeni authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, resigned his position to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in hopes of bringing stability to the country. Since the beginning of Hadi's presidency, there have been various issues for which he has struggled to deal with, such as but not limited to: jihadi attacks, a separatist movement in the south, the Houthi movement, continued loyalty of security personnel to Saleh, corruption, attacks, and food insecurity.

## The Houthi Movement

The Houthi movement was rooted in Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority called the Houthis, who have been fighting a series of rebellions since Saleh's presidency. The majority of Muslims in Yemen are Sunni Muslims, making up 80% of the country's Muslim population, according to United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). Taking advantage of the instability of Hadi's new presidency, the Houthis dominated Saad'ah during the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. In late 2014 to 2015, with the support from ordinary Yemenis including the Sunnis, who were said to be disillusioned with the transition of the presidency, the Houthis took over the capital, Sana'a, taking advantage of the new president's weakness. The Houthi rebels, supported by the Yemeni security forces loyal to Saleh, then had several attempts to take over the entire country, which forced Hadi to flee in March 2015.

To restore Hadi's internationally recognized authority, Saudi Arabia and eight other Arab states formed a coalition that began an air campaign against the rebels, which received support from countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and France. Saudi Arabia fears that the success of the Houthis would give the Shia majority state of Iran, power in Yemen, and they claim that Iran is backing the Houthis with military aid, despite Iran's continued denial. This claim is backed by Gulf Arab states who back president Hadi, and place a large importance on blocking the entry of aid from Tehran into Yemen.

## Humanitarian Crisis

In early 2018, the United Nations described the situation in Yemen as the world's worst man-made humanitarian disaster. Since the war broke out in March 2015, the casualties included more than 6,800 deaths and at least 10,700 injuries. Other factors such as malnutrition, disease, and poor health have led to thousands of deaths along with the Coalition airstrikes, which has been the main cause of casualties. In June 2018, Saudi backed forces began an assault on the key rebel-held port of Hudaydah. However, this was the entry for the vast majority of aid for 2/3 of the Yemeni population, and the offensive worsened the humanitarian crisis, blocking people's main or only access to food. The UN has also reported more than 22.2 million people in Yemen seeking humanitarian or protection assistance, 17.8 million struggling with food insecurity, 16 million lacking access to clean water and sanitation, and 16.4 million being deprived of adequate healthcare. The acute need for humanitarian assistance is accentuated in more than one million civilians.

The Yemen Report published by the Human Rights Council in 2017 "records violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law over three years, since September

2014.” According to the report, Coalition airstrikes have been responsible to most of the civilian casualties and have caused damages to both public and private infrastructures as well as attacked funeral gatherings and small civilian boats. As of Popular Committee affiliated with the Houthis and the military units loyal to Saleh, they were reportedly responsible for up to 67% of the 1,702 cases of children recruitment for hostile uses as well as for the widespread arbitrary or unlawful detentions. Human Rights monitors have reported observing children as young as the age of 10 recruited to be child soldiers—armed, uniformed, and assigned to checkpoints. The incidents listed above have been widespread and have caused the concerns of human rights violations.

## **Major Countries and Organisations Involved**

### **Yemen**

Yemen’s territorial divisions and controls became deeply entrenched as the armed conflict continued between the internationally recognised government of President Hadi, supported by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, and the Houthis and allied forces, which included army units loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Houthi-Saleh authorities continued to control large parts of the country including the capital, Sana’a, while President Hadi’s government officially controlled southern parts of Yemen including the governorates of Lahj and Aden. On 4 December 2017, Ali Abdullah Saleh was killed by Houthi forces consolidating their control over Sana’a.

### **United States of America**

The US is a major party to the conflict and could be complicit in unlawful coalition attacks in which they have taken part. Even though they have not released detailed information regarding the extent and scope of their involvement, the US continues to provide in-air refuelling and other support to the coalition. They have conducted at least two ground raids in Yemen since January, with alleged alignment with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), one of which saw at least 14 casualties, including nine children. American aid in Yemen has grown very unpopular with the American people, who point out that the conflict dramatically escalated after the Saudi-led coalition intervened in 2015, despite president Trump praising the UAE for pledging billions in aid. In late 2018, the United States voted to pull out of the Yemen conflict out of protest against Saudi Arabia’s murder of US citizen and Washington Post Contributor Jamal Khashoggi, concluded by the CIA to have been ordered by the crown prince. Furthermore, the humanitarian outcry and Saudi-led coalition’s recent offensive killing hundreds of Yemeni civilians has made it difficult to ignore the scale of the disaster, and the fact that America’s aid has not prevented or improved this.

### **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

Being alarmed by the rise of a group thought to be backed militarily by regional Shia power Iran, Saudi Arabia and eight other Sunni Arab states (mostly) began an air campaign aimed at

restoring Mr Hadi's government. This coalition received structural support from the US, UK and France. The Saudi-led coalition is formed by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan, with Qatar withdrawing in June.

### Islamic Republic of Iran

The war in Yemen is just one site of the larger Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflict. The ongoing struggle for influence in the Middle east and surrounding regions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Other areas where the rivalry extends to includes disputes in Qatar, Pakistan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Morocco. The dynamics are similar to the of the Cold War era, with Russia Supporting Iran and its allies, and America aiding Saudi Arabia. In 2015 a UN report stated that Iran was providing the Houthi rebels with money, training and arms since 2009, however the degree of support is ambiguous, and Iran denies any accusations of greater involvement.

### Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Being an international non-governmental organisation conducting research and advocacy on human rights issues and topics, the Human Rights Watch has a major role in providing reports regarding the extent of involvement of different parties involved in the Yemen humanitarian crisis.

### UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Among multiple efforts to lessen the severity of the crisis and search for a solution, the Human Rights Council formulated a resolution requesting the High Commissioner to "establish a Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen". In the efforts to bring peace to Yemen and all parties involved, the Human Rights Council has put forward many measures including the adoption of 8 new resolutions as of the 39th session during September 2018, extending mandates on Yemen, Central African Republic, Sudan and Somalia. Through interactive dialogues and active sessions, the Human Rights Council has been a key contributor to resolving the crisis.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
2010	Yemen declares war on AQAP
2011	Begin of the Arab spring
November 2011	Ali Abdullah Saleh resigns his position to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi

2014	Houthis take Sal'aa with aid from Yemeni Sunni civilians
March 2015	Houthi rebels, make several attempts to take over the entire country forcing Hadi to flee
2015	Military intervention by Saudi Arabia and a coalition of 8 Arab states launches air campaign
January 2018	STC demand the removal of the prime minister, taking control of Aden
June 2018	Saudi-led forces begin assault on Hudaydah, cutting of supplies for 2/3 of the country

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, 17 August 2018 (A/HRC/39/43)

Human rights situation in Yemen, 5 October 2018, (A/HRC/RES/39/16)

Security Council resolution 2402, 26 February 2018 (S/RES/2402)

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Several NGOs have attempted to send humanitarian aid, however since the attack on Hudaydah much of this aid and supplies has not been able to reach those in need, pushing millions to the brink of starvation. Several countries have pledged millions of dollars for the humanitarian crisis, and in April 2018 over \$2 billion was raised in Geneva.

In February 2018, a resolution was drafted on the Yemen sanctions regime, however it was vetoed in the Security council by Russia, objecting to the statement that Iran was in non-compliance with the arms embargo. Russia continues to support Iran's claim that they have Iran has not participated in this war and that they have therefore not broken the international arms embargo placed on Yemen. With both sides on the proxy war, Russia and the USA having veto power, allowing resolutions to pass in the Security council is increasingly difficult.

In December of 2018 the UN security council agreed to deploy a team to Hudaydah to oversee a ceasefire, the result of the first UN resolution on Yemen in 3 years, drafted by Britain. The US wanted the deal to condemn Iran for breaking an arms embargo on Yemen, however Russia objected, saying they had denied sending any aid. The ceasefire will allow aid to enter into Yemen once again, hopefully minimising casualties from cholera, famine, or disease.

## Possible Solutions

The main issue with the conflict is the fact that it not only plays between many sides rather than just two, but that as a proxy war it mimics the dynamics of the Cold War, with the main parties being Saudi Arabia and Iran, who are further backed by America and Russia respectively. All solutions must be made taking this into account, and this is the reason why there has been such slow progress in this issue, with both sides having veto power in the Security Council.

To allow access to food, water, and medical supplies, not only Hudaydah but the port of Salef, some 60km north, should remain open and free from conflict. Averting a humanitarian catastrophe largely lays within the hands of the Houthi militia who control the port and nearby areas. A possible solution would be to return the port to a third party monitor, to maintain steady flow of resources.

Another main issue is the fact that Saudi Arabia and its coalition is unlikely to pull out of the conflict if they believe Iran is involved. A possibility to decrease tensions throughout the middle east would be for a UN sanctioned thorough investigation to be conducted into the alleged supplies from Iran, so ensure the sanctions agreements are not being broken and to prevent Saudi Arabia's fear of an ideological war over Yemen.

There is also a dire need for all the parties involved in the party to be able to conduct negotiations and discuss the conditions of a possible ceasefire. This could be mediated by the UN or any observant member state with representatives from all the necessary UN bodies present, such as the UNHCR and the UNHRC. The terms of the ceasefire could be achieved through proposals of a temporary ceasefire in order to allow for more humanitarian aid and further negotiations.

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## Appendix or Appendices

- I. [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/YE/A\\_HRC\\_39\\_43\\_EN.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/YE/A_HRC_39_43_EN.docx)
- II. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44466574>