



Southern China International MUN

Official Background Guide

Security Council: On measures to suppress rising tensions in the Houthi-Saudi Arabian conflict in Yemen.

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1. Description of the Issue.

1.1 History of the Issue

To understand the tensions caused by the **Houthi-Saudi Arabian conflict**, it is important to examine the history behind its origins. The “Houthi” group, otherwise known as **the Houthi rebels**, originated as a militant movement in northern Yemen, led by Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi. Al-Houthi was a Yemeni politician rooted in the Zaydī sect of Islam/Zaydī revivalism. The movement refers to itself as Ansār Allāh, translated to “Defenders of God.” They were eventually coined as the “Houthis,” referring to their leader. Since 2004, it has persistently engaged in armed rebellion against **Yemen’s internationally recognized government**.⁵

In 2004, the first president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, called for the arrest of Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi and placed a generous bounty on his head. The president had accused the Houthis of attempting to overthrow the government and the republican system it had implemented, seeking to impose Zaidi religious law instead. Supporters of al-Houthi rejected these accusations, stating that they were “defending their community against discrimination” and aggression from the government.² Houthis accused the Yemeni president Saleh of financial corruption, and siding with **Saudi Arabia** and the **United States** whilst disregarding the interest of the Yemeni people. Meanwhile, the government accused the Houthis of being backed by **Iran**. Thus, this conflict escalated internationally, roping Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United States into the many military skirmishes to follow.

On September 10, Yemeni forces killed al-Houthi. However, this did not stop the conflict—his brother, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi took over as the leader of the rebellion. On November 4th of 2009, the conflict transcended Yemeni borders. The Houthi rebels attacked the Saudi Arabian border and killed a border guard. In doing so, they also seized Al Khubah Village along with several other villages.⁹ This was done because the Houthis believed that Saudi Arabia supported the Yemeni government in the attacks against them. The Saudi Arabian government denied this. On November 5th, the government retaliated by launching air strikes on rebels in northern Yemen, and moved military troops close to the border. The air strike enabled the Yemeni government to recapture rebels who had seized a border area within the kingdom. This kickstarted years of violent exchanges between the Houthi rebels, the Yemeni government-troops, and the Saudi government troops.

Since the conflict's escalation, civilian populations in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen have been devastated by air raids, territory disputes, and shootings. In Yemen alone, there have been 25,054 coalition air raids. 8,121 of them were military issued, 7,055 of these were non-military, and the 9,878 were unknown. These air raids racked up to a total of 19,226 civilian casualties—10,243 of them being injuries, and 8,983 of them being deaths. These air raids have frequently targeted civilian gatherings (such as weddings, marketplaces, mosques, factories, hospitals), which are in direct violation of the International Humanitarian War.¹ Millions more have been affected through direct armed conflict and the humanitarian crisis caused by the war.

A “**humanitarian crisis**” is officially defined by the United Nations as “any circumstance where humanitarian needs are sufficiently large and complex to require significant external assistance and resources, and where a multi-sectoral response is needed, with the engagement of a wide range of international humanitarian actors.” Since 2011, Yemen has been plagued with what has been called the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis.”⁸ More than 10 percent of the population has been displaced, and there is extremely high risk of a large-scale famine—tens of thousands are already living in such conditions. Women and children have been bearing the brunt of the crisis. Over three quarters of all displaced people are women and children, or female-headed households (often under the age of 18).⁸ The healthcare system in Yemen has largely collapsed due to frequent bombings and the obstruction of necessary materials. As of 2021, only 50% of health facilities in Yemen were fully functional.¹ Those still standing have difficulties in obtaining essential medicines and supplies due to barriers such as the Saudi-led blockade.¹ Populations have found become increasingly reliant on aid provided by non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and the United Nations. With the violent casualties of the war, limited access to basic needs for survival, and the rapid deterioration of civil society, the people of Yemen find themselves in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

The Houthi-Saudi conflict has resulted in over thousands of people in the region becoming displaced, and it is a dispute that severely threatens not only the safety of innocent civilians, but also the economic and political stability within Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other minor neighboring nations involved.

1.2 Recent Developments

Since the six-month UN-brokered cease-fire relapse in October of 2022, attacks from all warring parties have largely subsided.⁷ However, peace negotiations between the official Yemen government and the Houthis/Saudi Arabian government and the Houthis are still far from being finalized. The current status of affairs is unsustainable, as war could resume regardless and threaten the livelihoods of the Yemeni people at any time.

As of 2023, peace talks have been ongoing between Saudi and Houthi officials, mediated by Oman. The UN has also consistently provided mediation efforts—but progress seems to be “elusive.”⁷ The negotiations have mainly been centered around the re-openings of Houthi-controlled ports and Sanaa airport, reconstruction efforts, and a timeline for involving foreign forces to withdraw from Yemen.

There have also been peace talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran, who have been “backing” Houthi forces through engaging in the warfare. Talks were mediated by China and led to a

breakthrough agreement to re-establish diplomatic relations and re-open embassies on both sides after years of conflict. Iran also released a positive UN mission statement, stating that they would increase efforts in renewing a lapsed cease-fire.

During the recent Biden administration, President Joe Biden of the United States have withdrawn US support from Saudi Arabian forces in Yemen. He has also removed the designation from the Houthis that state they are an officially recognized terrorist organization. However, the United States has still continued to sell weapons in the region regardless.⁷

But while violent exchanges have ceased for the most part within the countries of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the Houthis have been nonetheless engaging in activities that threaten international security. Their most recent attack targeted ships in the **Red Sea**, which effectively disrupted global supply chains. This was done apparently to show support for the Hamas in the ongoing **Israeli-Palestinian war**, as the group targeted Israel-bound ships and other merchant tankers.⁷ The Red Sea is a major body of water for global trade, responsible for the routes of approximately 30% of the world's container shipping⁷. Economically, the Red Sea is important for multiple key world players—such as the United States, Canada, France, Italy, and China. Notably, it is also useful for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and various other African countries. As a result of the recent ship attacks, multiple shipping companies have either halted or delayed shipping—resulting in massive economic losses (adding more than 1 million dollars in transportation costs and two weeks to shipping time). In response to the attack, the United States shot down Houthi missile drones and announced a multinational naval taskforce, named “**Operation Prosperity Guardian**,” which exists to address security challenges through regular patrolling.

A permanent ceasefire between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis is hopeful on the horizon, but experts state it would still not be enough. While Saudi Arabia may permanently end air strikes, this will not simply dissolve the conflict, especially within Yemen. The Houthi occupation in Yemen and clashes with the official Yemeni government still poses as a significant problem even after international conflicts end, and there remains the humanitarian crisis to be addressed. Issues such as **Southern Yemen independence**, sharing of natural and financial resources, and a compromise on political systems as well as territorial commute will need to be discussed within the nation.

Key Terms

Insurgency – “the quality or state of being insurgent. Specifically: a condition of revolt against a recognized government that does not reach the proportions of an organized revolutionary government and is not recognized as belligerency.”⁶

Humanitarian Crisis – “any circumstance where humanitarian needs are sufficiently large and complex to require significant external assistance and resources, and where a multi-sectoral response is needed, with the engagement of a wide range of international humanitarian actors.” (United Nations)

Protracted conflicts – “Episodic, Cyclical, ‘frozen’ or long-lived insurgencies. They can be longstanding occupations or wars at low simmer, oscillating between resolution and relapse. Their defining characteristic is gradual devastation.”³

Truce / Armistice – “Situations in which conflict parties enter an informal or formal ceasefire or agree to halt military operations.” (United Nations)

Ceasefire – “Often used interchangeably with ‘cessation of hostilities’, ‘normalization’ ‘stabilization’ ‘standstill’ ‘stand-down’ and ‘suspension of military offensive. This choice of terms is guided by preferences, as well as political, cultural, and contextual sensitivities related to the conflict. For ease of reference, the UN’s official guide uses ‘ceasefire’ to capture the spectrum of such agreements. The term itself typically features detailed provisions on objectives, timelines, security arrangements, and monitoring and verification mechanisms.” (United Nations)

Armed conflicts – “Typically involve two or more conflict parties, which may comprise armed (or military) and political components.” (United Nations)

2. Emphasis on the Discourse

2.1 Stance of Developed Countries

Developed countries can be defined as states that have a high quality of life, developed economic systems, and advanced technological development. The extent to which a country is developed can often be measured in a multitude of scales, including the use of gross domestic product (GDP) and indexes such as the human development index (HDI) or the GNI (Gross National Income). Developed countries broadly include Northern America and most of Western Europe, Israel, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. Due to Saudi Arabia’s possession of large reserves in oil, developed countries generally have an interest in investing in the state so that oil supply chains are maintained consistently for them. These countries also generally support the internationally recognized government of Yemen, which opposes the Houthis. This explains the interests of France, the United Kingdom and the United States in their support for Saudi Arabia through arms sales and technical assistance.⁴ However, this does not represent the interests of all developed nations, as there are also other developed countries calling for peace and overall ceasefire in Yemen for the sake of innocent civilians.

2.2 Stance of Developing Countries.

Developing countries are defined as states that have a lower quality of life, are less economically developed as a whole, and still have room to grow in technological development. Developing countries often have economies in the secondary or tertiary sectors, whilst attempting to uplevel into the quaternary sector. Similarly, the extent to which a country is developed (or not) can be measured with the methods mentioned in the above section. Developing nations around the world include much of Eastern Europe, nearly all of Africa, much of Southern and Central America, much of the Middle East, And nearly all of Asia (even including major nations such as India, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and China). When it comes to the Houthi-Saudi conflict, developing nations’ interests vary depending on the state. For example, Iran is accused of militarily and financially supporting the Houthis, presumably due to religious and political reasons. Other countries such as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea) and Libya have faced numerous allegations of their interventions in aiding the Houthis. As for their motives, it is mostly politically based.

3. Possible Solutions

3.1 In favor of Developed Countries

With the political difficulties Yemen's official government is facing, it is unlikely for Yemeni leadership to be able to improve the current state of affairs within the nation on their own. Thus, international cooperation is crucial in this aspect.

Developed countries have the privilege of possessing the adequate land, capital, and labor that can be utilized **towards developmental assistance** for Yemen. As such, they can help by focusing on efforts to **rebuild physical infrastructure** in the cities of Sana, Taiz, Aden, and Hodeida, which are some of the most affected cities in the conflict. Healthcare, water, and sanitation-related infrastructures come as a priority. Countries can do this by donating monetary funds, or physical supplies required for the construction processes.

Another way developed countries can help with short-term relief on the humanitarian crisis is by directly sending **humanitarian aid packages**. Humanitarian aid packages can include money, food, healthcare, nutrition programs, emergency education, water, hygiene products, and shelter interventions. Such resources would be immensely helpful in the numerous **displacement sites** across Yemen and ensure that these sites are functional for the populations living within them. Developed nations can also help by providing such services and protection for migrants vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

3.2 In favor of Developing Countries

For developing countries, it may not be as easy to help Yemen with great relief packages due to limitations in financial capabilities and overall capital. However, developing nations that are especially close geographically to the main nations involved in the conflict could pose as key players towards helping innocent civilians receive aid and mitigating the violence.

One way developing countries can help is by acting as **mediators of conflict**. Countries like China have mediated peace talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis before, and such actions can help **promote progressivity in negotiations** towards a non-violent future.

Other specific developing nations, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, arguably hold a **moral accountability** towards contributing **financial aid** towards Yemen, as their direct involvement in the conflict is responsible for the dire humanitarian conditions there today. Such nations can take pledges and set timelines with goals, so that aid agencies are able to act on delivering relief packages without delay.

Neighboring nations not directly involved with the conflict are able to help by accepting refugees from Yemen and Saudi Arabia. These countries are the most accessible havens for these sufferers of conflict and will be able to better the livelihoods of thousands if they open up borders with empathy.

4. Keep in Mind the Following:

When researching your country's stance on this topic, make sure to properly investigate the actions your country has taken in the past, and which "side" these actions support. Research the extent to which your country is directly involved in this conflict—and the extent of accountability they should hold for the humanitarian consequences. Consider your country's

motives for supporting either party, or their motives for the actions they have taken in the past. Some questions to guide you through your research are the following:

1. *Which party does your country support in the conflict? Why?*
2. *What has your country done to “suppress” the tensions of this war?*
3. *How can your country help to mitigate rising tensions whilst also achieving their primary motives?*
4. *Consider your country’s motives. Does it make sense for your country to mitigate this conflict? Or will the consequences of the extremes benefit them?*
5. *How does your country consider the less economically developed nations impacted by this conflict?*
6. *How does your country consider the disadvantaged citizens at need for humanitarian aid in the countries involved?*

5. Evaluation

This war between the Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia, as well as Yemen’s own internal Civil War, has been haunting the people of both nations with violence, displacement, and loss of life. There has been no sustainable progress made towards a permanent ceasefire, which is why it is more important than ever to increase international cooperation on this front and ease the suffering of millions. However, this situation is multifaceted, with many political, humanitarian, and economic aspects to it. This topic will not be the easiest to tackle and will require flexible thinking and strong stances from delegates. Tread wisely, and good luck.

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