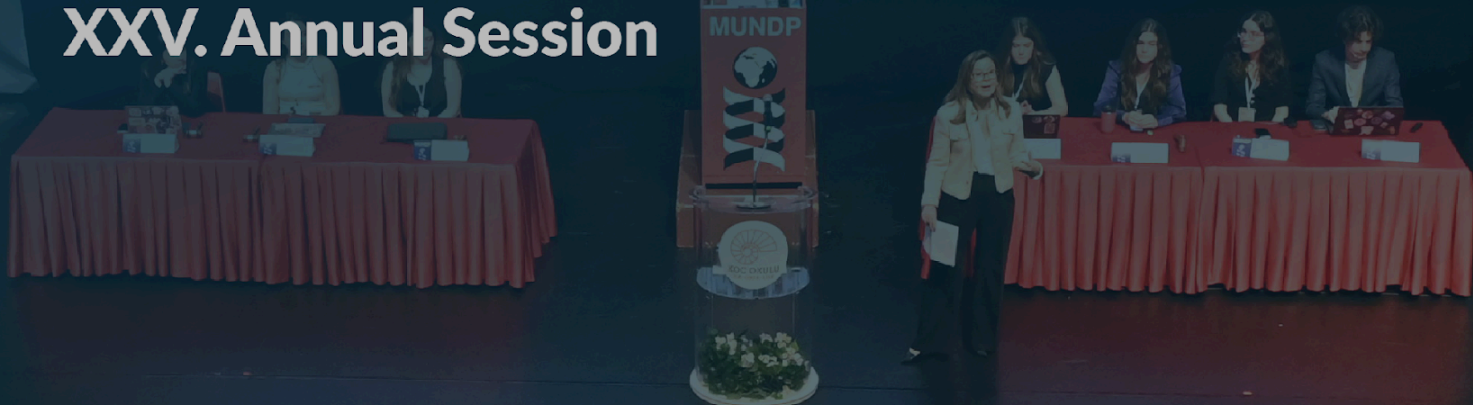


Research Report
Model United Nations
Development Programme
XXV. Annual Session



**UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR
DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS
(UNODA)**

**IMPEDING THE HOUTHIS' WEAPONS
TRANSFER IN YEMEN**

METE CEM UTKU





Basic Overview of the Issue

Since the start of the Yemeni Civil War in 2014, it has been a complicated topic involving a multipolar field consisting of direct and proxy wars supported and fought by various state and non-state actors. The ongoing conflict's impact on the population residing within Yemen's geopolitical borders is of extreme importance. The level of complexity and the scale of atrocities born from this issue led the United Nations (UN) to label it as “the worst humanitarian crisis of our time” during the launch of the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan on February 18, 2019. This designation reflects not only the devastating loss of life and the suffering of millions but also the collapse of essential infrastructure, including healthcare, water supplies, and education systems.

More than 24 million Yemenis, or nearly 80% of the population, have been left in dire need of humanitarian assistance (United Nations). Chronic food insecurity and widespread famine have plagued the country, exacerbated by deliberate blockades of vital supplies and ongoing violence that targets civilians. Thus, the situation caused by the conflict has attracted a plethora of parties deep into the conflict, most notably Saudi Arabia, which has directly intervened to assist the Yemeni government against the Houthi rebel group, while Iran, on the other hand, has been accused of supporting the Houthis, further escalating the conflict into a dangerous proxy war



Image 1: A pro-Saleh protest in Sanaa against the Saudi-led intervention, March 2016



between regional powers.

Every dynamic of this war centers around the flow of weapons to the Houthis. This transfer of war equipment has assisted the Houthis in their transformation from a localized insurgency group rebelling against the Yemeni government in the northern regions of the country with small attacks to an international threat to security about which the United Nations (UN) has published whole resolutions. These weapons, allegedly supplied by Iran, include advanced technology such as drones, small arms, and ballistic missiles, which have allowed the Houthis to sustain their military campaigns and extend their influence across Yemen and onto the international stage.

Despite The United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2216 (2015), arms continue to flow, facilitated by covert operations and gaps in enforcement mechanisms. These ongoing violations not only prolong the war and undermine ceasefire efforts by involved or neutral third parties (such as the United Nations), but also establish ground for further escalation of the conflict through the use of weapons, which are often deployed in densely populated areas, violating international conventions and agreements.

Explanation of Important Terms

Arms Embargo

Prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer, to these [the listed] individuals, groups, undertakings and entities from their territories or by their nationals outside their territories, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, of arms and related materiel of all types including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment, and spare parts for the aforementioned and technical advice, assistance, or training related to military activities. [United Nations Security Council (UNSC)]

Proxy War

Proxy war, a military conflict in which one or more third parties directly or indirectly support one or more state or non-state combatants in an effort to influence the conflict's outcome and thereby to advance their own strategic interests or to undermine those of their opponents. Third parties in a proxy war do not participate in the actual fighting to any significant extent, if at all. Proxy wars enable major powers to



avoid direct confrontation with each other as they compete for influence and resources. Direct means of support by third parties consist of military aid and training, economic assistance, and sometimes limited military operations with surrogate forces. Indirect means of support have included blockades, sanctions, trade embargoes, and other strategies designed to thwart a rival's ambitions. (Britannica)

Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance is aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters. [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)]

Zaidi Shia

Zaidiyyah, sect of Shi'i Muslims owing allegiance to Zayd ibn 'Alī, grandson of al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī. Zayd was a son of the fourth Shi'i imam, 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn, and a brother of Muḥammad al-Bāqir. At a time when the designation and role of the Shi'i imam was being defined, the followers of Zayd contended that the imam should be the descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (see Ahl al-Bayt) who was most knowledgeable in religious learning. The followers of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, however, tended to emphasize that religious knowledge was transmitted through lineage to a divinely designated imam, and these followers accepted Muḥammad as the fifth imam and later became the Twelver and Ismā'īliyyah Shi'is. While Muḥammad had a higher pedigree than Zayd, Zayd had achieved a higher level of religious learning and was accepted as imam by a minority of Shi'is. Though the Zaydīs have had numerous imams throughout their history, some outsiders have referred to them as "Fivers" because Zayd was the fifth imam of the sect. (Britannica)

Humanitarian Crisis

A humanitarian crisis is defined 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 (IASC). This may include smaller-scale emergencies; in countries with limited capacities, the threshold will be lower than in countries with strong capacities. An emergency is a situation that threatens the lives and well-being of large numbers of a population and requires extraordinary action to



ensure their survival, care and protection. [United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)]

Detailed Background of the Issue

The illicit traffic in weapons to the Houthis has long been a key area of contention in the Yemeni Civil War, enabling the group to maintain its military operations and extend the conflict. In spite of international arms embargoes, the Houthis have acquired sophisticated weaponry, including drones and ballistic missiles, which Arab security officials believe was smuggled into Yemen through complex networks, possibly backed by Iran.

The Rise of the Houthis

The Houthis, known formally as Ansar Allah, emerged in Yemen's northern Saada province in the 1990s as a socio-religious movement. The group, which at first called itself the Believing Youth, was the leadership's attempt to cling to the Zaidi Shia identity, a sect that had historically held power in northern Yemen but increasingly found itself in the back seat under Yemen's Sunni-majority government. The movement's founder, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, was a Zaidi cleric and former parliamentarian who sought to restore the cultural and political importance of the Zaidi community and whom the Saudi military had accused of dispossessing Wahhabism, a fundamentalist Sunni doctrine promoted by Saudi Arabia that emphasizes strict religious orthodoxy and rejects many Shia beliefs, fueling sectarian tensions in Yemen. The Houthis began to take shape as a militant group in the early 2000s, when tensions with Yemen's central government, led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, spiked. Saleh's government blamed the group for stirring up rebellion and creating resentment against his government. In 2004, government forces broke against the group, killing Hussein al-Houthi in the fighting. It was a pivotal moment for the movement, which saw Abdul-Malik al-Houthi take over its leadership and the group emerge as a battle-hardened shock troop capable of launching long-running insurgencies against the Yemeni state.

The Yemeni Civil War

The Yemeni Civil War is one of the most intractable and devastating conflicts of the 21st century, with deep roots in decades of political, economic, and social instability. It is at once a civil war, shaped by deep historical and internal divisions, and a proxy war, shaped



by powerful regional and international actors. To understand this conflict, one needs to see its roots in Yemen's systemic failures, the power struggles that have shaped its modern history, and the wider geopolitical rivalries that have deepened the war. Seeds of the conflict were planted after Yemen unified in 1990, bringing together the northern Yemen Arab Republic and the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. This unification was filled with tensions because of the differences in political systems and economic conditions between the two regions. That fragile power balance shattered in a civil war in 1994, which established northern control after President Ali Abdullah Saleh's victory. Over Saleh's decades in power, those in charge practiced patronage politics that bred swaths of corruption and concentrated power in the hands of a few. Meanwhile, broad sectors of the population — especially in the south and marginalized parts of the north — were denied a voice and excluded from real political and economic engagement. These systemic inequalities, especially the disenfranchisement of Zaidi Shia minority in north of the country created an idealism for the Houthis to garner popularization.

Political and Economic Instability Under Hadi

Hadi inherited a country in turmoil, with Yemen's economy in shatters, decaying infrastructure, and mounting security threats. His administration was instantly besieged by accusations of corruption and ineptitude, unable to govern a country riven by tribal, regional and sectarian disputes. The National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a United Nations-backed initiative aiming to build a new federal structure, tried to give more voice to historically underrepresented groups, including the Houthis and southern separatists. But the NDC's results were broadly rejected, notably by the Houthis, who felt the proposed federal divisions would diminish their power in northern Yemen. These grievances, together with widespread poverty, unemployment and rapid decline of public services, further eroded confidence in Hadi's leadership. The Houthis took advantage of this growing discontent, and formed a powerful anti-government coalition. That conviction was joined in turn by a growing popular anger that helped to fuel their campaign that ended with their capture of the capital, Sana'a, in 2014, effectively toppling the central government and cementing their grip over northern Yemen.



The Arab Spring and Saleh's Resignation

The Arab Spring protests of 2011 were a watershed moment throughout the Middle East and North Africa: Authoritarian regimes were challenged by widespread demands for political freedoms and economic reforms. Yemen was no exception. There were protests nationwide demanding the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in power for more than three decades. Saleh's government was deeply criticized for corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement of Yemen's economy—problems that continued to leave a large part of the population in poverty. After months of unrest and violent clashes between protesters and government forces and mounting international pressure, Saleh agreed in November 2011 to cede power. This transition was formalized in a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-brokered deal that granted Saleh immunity from prosecution and transferred power to his vice president, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, in 2012. This agreement was meant to mark the dawn of a new era of stability, yet it neglected the root grievances that fueled the protests, leaving Yemen's long-festered problems unaddressed. This negligence in addressing political and economic instability was an opening for the Houthis, who took advantage of public anger to grow their influence. The group's territorial control and access to external support sources, notably in the form of illicit arms transfers, in turn, further equipped them to contest the state of the developing civil war.

The Houthis' Capture of Sana'a

The Houthis proved to be the most opportunistic, taking advantage of the surging unrest and rampant discontent with Hadi's government in 2014. Starting from their original base in northwest Saada, the group carried out a military offensive that sped southward. In September 2014, they took over Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, which proved to be a defining moment in the country's recent history. The central government disintegrated, as Hadi fled to Aden and then to Saudi Arabia, creating a power vacuum across much of Yemen. The Houthis forged a strategic but uneasy alliance with their former foe, the ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Drawing on Saleh's political and military networks, they entrenched their grip over northern and western Yemen, as well as important infrastructure and resources. But the alliance was complicated by bitter tensions between the partners. As Saleh sought to reclaim



a political stake, the Houthis kept pushing ideological and territorial goals. In 2017, those differences became irreconcilable when Saleh sought to mend ties with Saudi Arabia, leading the Houthis to kill him and doomed their alliance.

Regional and International Escalation

The Houthis' takeover of Sana'a, and their subsequent territorial advance, alarmed Saudi Arabia, which saw the group as an Iranian proxy. In 2015, Saudi Arabia created a coalition of Arab nations to carry out a military intervention in Yemen. The coalition's main objective was to re-establish Hadi's government and stop Yemen from becoming a Houthi-run state with Iran's alignment. This intervention included massive airstrikes, naval blockades and ground operations. In contrast, Iran was accused of arming, training, and funding the Houthis.

Humanitarian Catastrophe

The civil war has ravaged Yemen, and the United Nations calls it "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time." More than 24 million people — almost 80 percent of the population — need humanitarian assistance. The war has created mass famine, displacement and failure of basic services. Airstrikes, blockades and attacks on civilian infrastructure have pushed millions to the verge of starvation. The Saudi-led coalition's blockades, especially on the port of Al Hudaydah, have drastically limited the inflow of food, medicine and fuel into Yemen. The Houthis, meanwhile, have been accused of diverting humanitarian aid and targeting civilians in their campaigns. These cumulative problems have created a crisis situation with no immediate hope of a way out.

Arms Transfers to the Houthis

Highlighting the urgent and contentious topic of arms transfers to the Houthis was the United Nations' Special Session on the situation in Yemen, specifically on the Houthis and arms transfers. These arms transfers have intensified the ongoing conflict further complicating international attempts to bring peace. Under 2015 UN Security Council Resolution 2216, an arms embargo was imposed on Yemen; yet the Houthis have successfully smuggled their way with advanced weaponry such as drones, ballistic missiles, and small arms through widespread and well-funded smuggling and trafficking networks. Such arms have strengthened the Houthis' military capabilities, carried out aerial assaults on



Image 2: THE KREMLIN, MOSCOW. With the President of the Republic of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

the Saudi infrastructure, and fortified their grip on vital Yemeni territories. The smuggling networks show extraordinary sophistication, taking advantage of Yemen's porous coastline, unguarded desert roads and secret sea routes. Smugglers routinely hide weapons inside legitimate cargo, letting shipments slip past even alert naval forces. The arms transfer question remains inextricably intertwined with Iran's alleged support of the Houthis. Tehran denies any direct role, but several United Nations reports and independent investigations have found Iranian-manufactured weapons in Houthi-controlled areas. These encompass sophisticated drones such as the Qasef series, employed in assaults on Saudi oil infrastructure, and also ballistic rockets potent enough to reach deeply within

Saudi Arabian territory. In answering their demand, Iran has heightened the conflict, turning what started as a domestic insurgency into a regional proxy war. The application of Resolution 2216 has revealed major weaknesses in international arrangements to stem the flow of weapons into armed conflict areas. The resolution bans arms transfers to the Houthis and requires inspections of cargo going into Yemen. But enforcement efforts have been uneven, hampered by logistical challenges, limited intelligence sharing, and deliberate tactics used by smuggling networks. The Houthis have adjusted by using speedboats, dhows and other small vessels to freelance detection. And even when interceptions occur — for example, when U.S. Navy or coalition forces seize shipments — the volume of such operations comes nowhere close to that of arms that have been successfully smuggled through less literal back alleys. This continuing arms influx sheds light on the larger problem of arms proliferation throughout the region in which weak state authority and porous borders have allowed for the free movement of arms. International actors, especially Western ones, have been accused of hypocrisy. While the Houthis' arms transfers receive considerable scrutiny, comparatively little attention has been paid to the devastating impact of arms provided to the Saudi-led coalition. This disparity has called into question the integrity of global initiatives to regulate weapon transfers and promote peace, offering grounds for accusations of bias and regional exploitation. Ballistic missile strikes into Saudi Arabian



cities, drone attacks on key infrastructure, and the targeting of military personnel in the Persian Gulf have fueled the conflict and increased regional tensions. They have also been used to target heavily populated zones, exacerbating civilian death rates and contravening international humanitarian law. The persistent influx of arms has allowed the Houthis to hold onto critical territories, complicating efforts to address the conflict and derailing potential peace talks. The deeply complex dynamics of the Yemeni Civil War and entrenched positions of in the country only make the challenges of addressing arms transfers all the more complex. The international community cannot unilaterally stop the war, but it should redouble monitoring and enforcement of existing arms embargoes. Increased maritime patrols, an expanded approach to intelligence sharing and the deployment of advanced surveillance technologies could cut the flow of weapons to the Houthis to a significant degree. Such steps can be a part of a wider political strategy that addresses Yemen's underlying grievances and provides a roadmap to lasting peace. Without such coordinated action, the continuing, unimpeded flow of arms to the Houthis will remain a significant obstacle to resolving the conflict, with millions more suffering and the wider region destabilized.

Involvement of Regional and International Powers

Even the thinly veiled propaganda of some of the actors in the war had to report on the rapid escalation of what was a Yemeni Civil War in its infancy from an internal conflict to sprawling, complex proxy wars generating catastrophe throughout the Middle East with regional and international powers vying for dominance. At the forefront of this dynamic, a Saudi-led coalition formed in 2015 to unstintingly restore President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's internationally recognized government and counter the Houthi rebels, whom Saudi Arabia sees as Iranian proxies. Including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Egypt and Sudan, the coalition has conducted thousands of airstrikes, blockades and ground operations to try to degrade the Houthis. Those actions have drawn widespread condemnation for their humanitarian consequences, including civilian casualties, damage to infrastructure, and exacerbation of hunger and disease. The Houthis have, in turn, received advanced weaponry, including ballistic missiles and drones, as well as financial and logistical support from Iran, its critics say. While Tehran denies direct involvement, reports by the United Nations and independent investigators have also traced Iranian arms into Yemen. As a backer of the Houthis, Iran is seeking to push back against Saudi Arabia's



regional supremacy and to project power into the Arabian Peninsula. Iranian leaders like General Qasem Soleimani and Quds Force commanders are renowned for leveraging asymmetric warfare strategies to combat Saudi and regional interests. Western powers including the United States and the United Kingdom have also contributed significantly to the conflict by providing weapons, intelligence and logistical support to the Saudi-led coalition. Framed as initiatives to stabilize the region and secure critical trade routes, these actions have been criticized for facilitating controversial military tactics and exacerbating Yemen's humanitarian crisis. International organizations have tried to broker peace and help with the humanitarian catastrophe, including at the United Nations.

UN Resolution 2216

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216 is a pivotal measure addressing the Yemeni Civil War by imposing a targeted arms embargo on the Houthi rebels and their allies, including forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, prohibiting: the supply, sale, or transfer of weapons to these groups and mandates states to inspect cargo entering Yemen if there are reasonable grounds to suspect it contains prohibited items. Adopted on April 14, 2015, the resolution not only imposes travel bans and asset freezes on certain individuals because of their human rights violations and uncollaborative attitude with the international community but also calls for the Houthis to withdraw from seized territories, including Sana'a, and emphasizes the need for dialogue to restore Yemen's legitimate government under President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. However, it has been criticized for disproportionately targeting the Houthis, overlooking alleged violations by the Saudi-led coalition, and failing to adequately address the severe humanitarian crisis affecting millions of civilians in Yemen.

Humanitarian Costs of the War

The Yemeni Civil War has wrought one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in modern history, imprisoning millions in a cycle of endless violence, starvation and disease. Over 24 million people — nearly 80 percent of Yemen's population (United Nations) — are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and that blockades, especially at key ports like Al Hudaydah, have deepened shortages of food, fuel and medicine. While intended to block arms from reaching the Houthis, these blockades have left millions starving. The Houthis



have worsened the crisis by siphoning humanitarian assistance, placing steep taxes on residents and using hunger as a weapon.

Recent Developments

In recent years, the Yemeni Civil War has seen brief periods of de-escalation followed by renewed violence. In 2022, a United Nations-brokered truce temporarily reduced hostilities, reopened Sana'a International Airport for commercial flights, and allowed fuel ships to dock at Al Hudaydah. However, the truce failed to address critical political and territorial issues, and by late 2022, hostilities had resumed. In 2023 and 2024, the Houthis launched high-profile drone and missile strikes on Saudi oil facilities and border regions, causing widespread devastation. In response, the Saudi-led coalition intensified airstrikes on Houthi strongholds, further destabilizing the region and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Simultaneously, Western-led airstrikes, primarily carried out by the United States and the United Kingdom, targeted suspected Iranian weapon transfer hubs in the region. These



Image 3: Houthi attacked British-linked tanker Marlin Luanda in Gulf of Aden

strikes aimed to disrupt smuggling networks supplying advanced arms to the Houthis, including drones and missile components. These actions escalated tensions further, with both sides of the conflict blaming foreign intervention for perpetuating instability. International efforts to curb arms transfers to the Houthis have continued, with naval forces intercepting shipments of

Iranian-made weapons, including drones and missile components. These interceptions have heightened calls for stricter enforcement of arms embargoes and greater international coordination. Despite these measures, smuggling networks remain highly active, enabling the Houthis to sustain their military operations. The Houthis have demanded the lifting of blockades and recognition of their authority, while the Yemeni government and Saudi-led coalition insist on disarmament and territorial withdrawals. Divisions within the coalition, particularly growing collaboration between the UAE and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), have further complicated the effort to present a united front against the Houthis. Meanwhile, Yemen's humanitarian crisis continues to worsen. Food insecurity and disease outbreaks are increasing, and logistical challenges and ongoing violence have hindered relief efforts. Calls for greater international assistance have largely gone unanswered. The



evolving dynamics of the conflict underscore the urgent need for sustained global engagement to address the root causes of the war and alleviate the suffering of millions.

Major Parties Involved

The Houthis (Ansar Allah)

The Houthis are actually a Zaidi Shia political and militant group, also known as Ansar Allah, based in northern Yemen, where they're the demographic majority of the Saada province, and they have emerged as one of the key forces of the Yemeni Civil War. The group was founded in the 1990s as a socio-religious movement to protect the Zaidi Shia identity and oppose what it perceived as violent ethnic cleansing efforts against their community, but became heavily militarized after the death of its founder, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, in 2004. Today, led by his brother, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, the group holds a number of powerful positions and exerts significant influence after a number of armed uprisings, culminating in the takeover of Sana'a, Yemen's capital, in 2014. Backed by an Iranian mix of direct financing and semi-legal arms transfers, the Houthis now have advanced missile and drone arsenals that allow them to continue their military operations, posing a huge threat to Yemeni stability and an ongoing risk to regional security.

The Government of Yemen

The Government of Yemen Under Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi (February 27, 2012 - April 7, 2022)

Yemen's internationally recognized government, led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, could not exercise authority in a country where armed factions had become more powerful than the government, and where the Houthis had gradually advanced. Hadi's government had depended heavily on international support — and, in particular, support from the Saudi-led coalition — to wage a military campaign against the Houthis. However, its limited control on the ground throughout the Yemeni territory and accusations of corruption greatly weakened the government's ability to implement resolutions, for example, that of Security Council Resolution 2216, which placed an arms embargo on the Houthis. Though internationally recognized, the government had so little power in Houthi-controlled territories that it had little way to



stop the flow of weapons into northern Yemen. Hadi's government relied on intelligence and logistical support from allies like the United States and the United Kingdom, and on naval blockades run by the coalition to intercept smuggled arms. Still, the Houthis continued to receive advanced arms, including ballistic missiles and drones that they said had been supplied by Iran.

Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) (April 7, 2022 - Present)

The Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) was established as an umbrella leadership entity to unify anti-Houthi forces under one umbrella entity, and also importantly, improve governance in areas of the country that the government controlled. Its diversity — uniting southern separatists, tribal groups and anti-Houthi fighters — can also lead to differences, unlike the Hadi administration, which did not include these disparate factions. The PLC has a broad coalition but shares the same challenges as the GNA in stopping weaponry from reaching the Houthis. It is still too disjointed, and dependent on foreign powers — the Saudi-led coalition in particular — to successfully enforce arms embargoes and break up smuggling networks. While the PLC has inherited enforcement powers for UNSC Resolution 2216, implementation has been patchy due to Yemen's lengthy coastline, complex smuggling routes, and limited resources. And it has also tried to strengthen ties with the United Nations and Western powers to improve maritime and border control. But continuing reports of arms transfers to the Houthis, facilitated by both sea routes and Iranian support, demonstrate the PLC's continued failure to stem the tide of weaponry.

Saudi-Led Coalition

The Saudi-led coalition is a military alliance formed in 2015. The Saudi-led coalition includes Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco, Senegal, and initially Qatar (withdrew in 2017), along with logistical and arms support from the United States, United Kingdom, and France. Led by Saudi Arabia with significant support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Arab states, it aims at restoring the internationally recognized government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi while countering the Houthi rebels and, by extension, the state of Iran, with whom Saudi Arabia has extremely poor relations. Saudi involvement began shortly after the Houthis' takeover of Sana'a in 2014 but became more aggressive after the Houthis started



threatening and bombing the southern border of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's primary objectives in leading the coalition are to prevent the establishment of a Houthi-controlled state aligned with Iran, secure its border regions, and maintain its dominance in the Arabian Peninsula. The coalition has conducted extensive airstrikes targeting Houthi-held territories, ports, and infrastructure, aiming to weaken their military capabilities and reclaim lost ground for Hadi's government; however, these airstrikes have been heavily criticized for causing widespread civilian casualties, destroying vital infrastructure, and exacerbating Yemen's humanitarian crisis, or, as the United Nations calls it, "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time." Over time, tensions within the coalition escalated, with the most severe case being the divergence in strategic goals between the UAE and Saudi Arabia. While Saudi Arabia remains focused on reinstating Hadi's government, the UAE has shifted its support to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which seeks independence for southern Yemen, creating further fragmentation in the coalition's efforts. Qatar, although no longer part of the coalition, has been accused of indirectly supporting the Houthis by fostering diplomatic ties and aiding certain networks, complicating its relationship with former coalition members and adding another layer of complexity to the conflict. In the end, both the STC and the coalition resumed working together. Despite these internal disputes and international criticism stemming from the coalition's questionable war efforts, unnecessary aggression, and the committing of various war crimes and human rights violations, the coalition continues to play a dominant role in the conflict, enforcing blockades and conducting military operations while drawing on logistical and intelligence support from Western powers, including the United States and the United Kingdom. The coalition's actions have significantly shaped the trajectory of the Yemeni Civil War, intensifying the conflict's regional and international dimensions and complicating efforts for a peaceful resolution.

Iran

Iran plays a significant and controversial role in the Yemeni Civil War by providing support to the Houthi rebels (Ansar Allah). Iran's actions have turned the conflict into a regional proxy war. Iran's role, while quite important, is not highly apparent and remains unofficial in the international community due to constant denial by the respective government. Iran's involvement is rooted in its broader strategy of countering Saudi Arabia's influence in the Middle East and expanding its own regional reach. The state allegedly



supplies the rebels (Houthis) with weapons such as ballistic missiles, drones, and small arms, while also providing training and financial assistance. This support has enabled the Houthis to launch cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia, target vital infrastructure such as oil facilities, and resist the Saudi-led coalition's military advances. Iran, as stated before, firmly denies any support to the Houthis or any involvement in the given conflict. In contrast, multiple reports and investigations, including by the United Nations, suggest the presence of Iranian-made weapons in Houthi-controlled areas, smuggled through clandestine maritime and land routes. These reports are supported by the presidents of the state of Yemen. The United States of America has also stated in various reports that they suspect Iranian involvement throughout the conflict. By aiding the Houthis, Iran seeks to destabilize Saudi Arabia and its allies, disrupt vital trade routes like the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and project power in the Arabian Peninsula without direct military engagement. Furthermore, in doing so, Iran violates international law, particularly the arms embargo imposed on the Houthis under UN Resolution 2216. By undermining the jurisdiction of the United Nations Security Council and committing human rights violations, Iran and its actions are heavily criticized by the international community.

Southern Transitional Council (STC)

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) is a military and political organization supported by the UAE since its establishment in 2017. Its goal is to create an independent state in southern Yemen. An independent state in the southern regions of Yemen existed before 1990, which was abolished with the unification of the state. The council, although being established comparatively late into the conflict, works as a representation of the southern factions' and tribal leaders' dissatisfaction with the central government in Sana'a. Its relationship with President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's internationally recognized government has been tense, marked by clashes over control of key territories like Aden, which the STC seized in 2019. The phrase "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" was not embraced by the STC, as they were not only at war with the government of Yemen but were also anti-Houthi. Although the Riyadh Agreement (2019) attempted to reconcile the STC with Hadi's government, its implementation has been inconsistent, and the council remains focused on southern independence rather than national unity. Over time, the United Nations stepped in to facilitate the agreement and make it more effective. After that, the STC mostly



fought alongside the central government of Yemen against the Houthis, although never in perfect terms. The STC's control over southern Yemen complicates the conflict, as it creates fragmented priorities within the Saudi-led coalition, weakening efforts to counter the Houthis and prolonging the war. Like all parties in this conflict, the STC has been criticized for complicating peace efforts. Despite this, the council has been remarkably consistent and successful in governing the regions under its control. This further highlights how unsuccessful the central government is at maintaining order and unity among its people.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

AQAP, formed in 2009, is one of Al-Qaeda's most dangerous branches, exploiting Yemen's instability to expand its operations. It was established through the merger of Al-Qaeda's Saudi Arabia and Yemen branches, driven by the Saudi branch being forced out of its country after increased pressure from the Saudi government, particularly following Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen as a foreign power. Known for regional and international terrorist attacks, including the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack and the 2009 Christmas Day bombing attempt, AQAP has entrenched itself in Yemen's southern and eastern regions, such as Abyan and Hadramawt, by leveraging local grievances and weak governance. Yemen, being in an extremely complex situation, was unable to combat the organization effectively and accepted foreign support from the United States government. This support primarily included direct drone strikes and bombings targeting AQAP leadership and infrastructure. Despite efforts from the US, Houthis, and the Saudi-led coalition, all parties have been inherently unsuccessful in fully neutralizing this branch of terror, and AQAP continues its operations in Yemen, maintaining control over significant territories in the country.

The United States and Other Western Powers

The United States and other Western powers, including the United Kingdom and France, play a significant role in the Yemeni Civil War through their support of the Saudi-led coalition and counterterrorism operations. The US supplied the coalition, mostly Saudi Arabia, with billions of dollars of weapons, planes, tanks and even weapons that are banned in most of the world for how dangerous they are for civilians like cluster munitions. Similarly, the UK and France have supplied weapons and technical support, aligning with their broader



strategic alliances in the region. However, this support has drawn criticism for enabling the coalition's actions, including airstrikes that have caused significant civilian casualties and exacerbated Yemen's humanitarian crisis.

Islamic State in Yemen (ISIS-Y)

The Islamic State in Yemen (ISIS-Y), established in 2015, is a smaller affiliate of the broader ISIS organization, operating primarily through fragmented cells. Like AQAP, ISIS-Y saw the situation in Yemen as a ground fit for growth of their organization, and the lack of central governance allowed it. While less influential than AQAP, ISIS-Y conducts suicide bombings, assassinations, and ambushes, targeting both the Houthis and rival Sunni groups like AQAP. The group is more decentralized and less organized than AQAP which makes it harder to hit with any attacks like US 's drone strikes, which were not that effective against ISIS-Y.

Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
May 22, 1990	North and South Yemen unify under President Ali Abdullah Saleh.
May–July 1994	Southern forces attempt to secede but are defeated by Saleh's government.
September 10, 2004	Founder of the Houthi movement killed during clashes with government forces.
January 26, 2009	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is formed by merging Saudi and Yemeni



	branches.
February 27, 2011	Protests force Saleh to resign; Hadi becomes president.
September 21, 2014	The Houthis capture Sana'a, forcing President Hadi to flee.
March 26, 2015	Saudi-led coalition begins airstrikes to restore Hadi's government.
April 2, 2015	AQAP seizes Mukalla during the chaos in southern Yemen.
November 13, 2015	ISIS establishes a Yemen branch and begins violent attacks.
December 4, 2017	Saleh is killed by the Houthis after reconciling with Saudi Arabia.
May 11, 2017	STC is formed, advocating for independence with UAE support.
December 13, 2018	The UN-brokered ceasefire focuses on Al Hudaydah violence.
November 5, 2019	Saudi Arabia mediates a deal between Hadi's government and STC.



February 6, 2020	U.S. drone strike kills AQAP leader Qasim al-Raymi.
February 7, 2021	The Houthis launch an offensive to capture Marib.
April 2, 2022	Truce reduces violence, allowing more humanitarian aid access.
October 20, 2023	Truce collapses, leading to renewed fighting in Yemen.
January 12, 2024	U.S. and U.K. launch strikes after Red Sea ship attacks.
March 19, 2024	Houthi bombing kills 12 civilians in Radda.
July–October 2024	Houthis attack ships in the Red Sea, disrupting maritime traffic.
November 12, 2024	Houthis fire missiles and drones at U.S. warships off Yemen's coast.
December 21, 2024	The U.S. strikes Houthi targets in Yemen's capital amid rising tensions.
December 26, 2024	Israel strikes Houthi infrastructure after missile attacks towards Israel.



Relevant International Documents

[- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216, April 14th, 2015 \(S/RES/2216\).](#)

Imposes an arms embargo on the Houthis and calls for their withdrawal from seized territories.

[- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2140, February 26th, 2014 \(S/RES/2140\).](#)

Establishes a sanctions regime targeting individuals threatening peace, security, and stability in Yemen.

[- Arms Trade Treaty, April 2nd, 2013](#)

Adopted by the UN General Assembly, this treaty regulates the international trade in conventional arms to prevent their diversion to unauthorized users or conflict zones.

[- Stockholm Agreement, December 13th, 2018](#)

Brokered by the United Nations, this agreement focuses on de-escalating violence in Al Hudaydah, prisoner exchanges, and improving humanitarian access in Yemen.

[- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2451, December 21st, 2018 \(S/RES/2451\)](#)

Adopted by the Security Council to endorse the Stockholm Agreement and monitor its implementation.

[- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2511, February 25th, 2020 \(S/RES/2511\)](#)

Renewed the Yemen sanctions regime and extended the arms embargo on certain individuals threatening peace in Yemen.

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Efforts to address arms transfers to the Houthis have achieved limited success due to enforcement challenges, regional dynamics, and geopolitical complexities. The UN Security Council Resolution 2216 imposed an arms embargo on the Houthis and their respective allies but failed to be implemented in its entirety due to clandestine smuggling networks, particularly via maritime and land routes, allowing weapons to continue flowing into Yemen without the supervision or oversight of the international community. While the UN Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (UNMVM) intended to inspect cargo entering Yemeni ports to prevent the smuggling of arms and did intercept some shipments, the vastness of Yemen's coastline, controlled by the Houthis, who are supported by alleged Iranian involvement, has



rendered enforcement inconsistent and insufficient.

Regional actors, such as the Saudi-led coalition, have actively sought to intercept arms shipments through naval blockades and airstrikes. Though the intention behind these actions was ultimately good, after a while the international involvement and its level received criticism due to contributing to Yemen's humanitarian crisis by restricting access to food and medical supplies. Furthermore, the coalition's internal issues and divides, such as the UAE leaving the coalition at the height of the war, did not help the coalition's effectiveness and trustability.

The United States has also supported these efforts by providing intelligence and logistical assistance. The U.S. also coordinated drone strikes and military operations against key smuggling networks, and escorted many ships through Houthi attack zones to protect them while also searching for the rebel group to figure out their smuggling networks' details, but these actions received backlash due to their collateral damage, long-term impact, and excessive foreign influence on the Yemeni state. The United Kingdom has played a similar role, providing arms, training, and intelligence support to the Saudi-led coalition while backing international enforcement efforts. The UK's involvement has also faced criticism, particularly for its arms sales to the coalition, which have been linked to airstrikes causing civilian casualties and worsening Yemen's humanitarian crisis. Additionally, Iran's constant denial of the allegations that it supplies or has supplied weapons and war equipment to the Houthis has complicated the issue further. Iran has still not accepted any connections to the war despite evidence from the UN and other independent organizations linking Iranian-made weapons to the conflict.

As it can be understood, international arms embargoes and enforcement mechanisms have brought attention to the issue, but they have largely failed to achieve sustained results due to ineffective supervision and an unwillingness to cooperate from each side of the conflict. Furthermore, many measures aimed at curbing arms flows have inadvertently worsened Yemen's humanitarian crisis, reducing global support for enforcement actions.

Solution Alternatives

To address the issue of arms transfers to the Houthis, a multifaceted approach is necessary. One's first approach to the issue will most likely include some kind of



strengthening of maritime and border controls. While an effective solution to the issue, one should be aware of the fact that the waterway at hand is also considered “the most important waterway in the world.” So, any additional security measures that might disrupt the flow of vessels may not look good in the eyes of the international community. While addressing these issues, one must also keep in mind that the Houthis are not a peaceful tribe waiting to be naturalized; they will probably retaliate. Solutions regarding this issue must always prioritize the security and well-being of the personnel and equipment sent to the operations. For those wishing to establish a more diplomatic approach, it is important to note that the groups at hand are not collaborative with the UN. Force will most likely need to be used to get them to comply. However, they have shown that, in various environments and times, they will use force. The Houthis are a well-armed group, “allegedly” backed by one of the strongest militaries in the world, and any use of force can cause irreparable damage to anything involved. Incentivizing ceasefires and peace talks are encouraged, but the use of a neutral third party will probably be required to reach a realistic neutral ground. To navigate these stormy waters, one must balance strength with diplomacy, ensuring their solutions are as resilient as the challenges they face, and as bold as the peace they seek to achieve.

Useful Links

- [All UNSC documents on the topic of Yemen.](#)
- [Comprehensive and unbiased reporting on the Yemeni Civil War and the Middle East.](#)
- [In-depth reporting on the issue of the Yemen civil war.](#)
- [Detailed reports on human rights abuses, including arms violations and civilian impacts in Yemen.](#)
- [Investigative reports on violations in the Yemeni conflict, including the transfer of arms to conflict zones.](#)

Bibliography

Al Jazeera. “Yemen Conflict Explained.” Al Jazeera, 20 Dec. 2024, www.aljazeera.com/where/yemen/. Accessed 25 Dec. 2024.



Amnesty International. "Yemen." Amnesty International, 21 Dec. 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/yemen/. Accessed 21 Dec. 2024.

Associated Press. "Iran's Help Has Transformed Yemen's Houthi Rebels into a Potent Military Force, UN Experts Say." Associated Press, 26 Sept. 2024, apnews.com/article/2368b285b8872d08008998cbb8453a2a. Accessed 12 Jan. 2025.

BBC News. "Yemen Crisis: Why is There a War?" BBC News, 23 Dec. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423. Accessed 23 Dec. 2024.

Baraa Shiban. "The Houthi Attacks Stem from a Failed Policy of Appeasement and Containment." Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 20 Dec. 2023, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/houthi-attacks-stem-failed-policy-appeasement-and-containment>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.

Brookings Institution. "An Inflection Point for the Houthis." Brookings Institution, 20 Sept. 2024, www.brookings.edu/articles/an-inflection-point-for-the-houthis/. Accessed 15 Jan. 2025.

Brookings Institution. "The Danger of Calling the Houthis an Iranian Proxy." Brookings Institution, 20 Sept. 2024, www.brookings.edu/articles/the-danger-of-calling-the-houthis-an-iranian-proxy/. Accessed 15 Jan. 2025.

Business Insider. "The Russian Arms Dealer Who Was Exchanged for Brittney Griner Is Trying to Sell Weapons to the Houthis: Report." Business Insider, 7 Oct. 2024, www.businessinsider.com/russian-arms-dealer-viktor-bout-sell-weapons-to-houthis-wsj-2024-10. Accessed 14 Jan. 2025.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Red Sea Hostilities: Local, Regional, and



International Implications.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 Jan. 2024, carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/01/red-sea-hostilities-local-regional-and-international-implications?lang=en. Accessed 16 Jan. 2025.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “Why the Kremlin Is Drifting Closer to Houthi Rebels in Yemen.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 Sept. 2024, carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/09/yemen-russia-middle-east-cooperation?lang=en. Accessed 12 Jan. 2025.

Global Conflict Tracker. “War in Yemen.” Council on Foreign Relations, Dec. 2024, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen. Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.

Harris, Johnny. “How Yemen Became a Proxy War.” YouTube, 14 Apr. 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsO-rULEfrk. Accessed 25 Dec. 2024.

Human Rights Watch. “Yemen: War in the Shadows.” Human Rights Watch, 22 Dec. 2024, www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/yemen. Accessed 22 Dec. 2024.

International Crisis Group. “Avoiding the Worst in Yemen.” International Crisis Group, 23 Dec. 2024, www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen. Accessed 23 Dec. 2024.

Reuters. “Iran, Hezbollah Enabled Houthis’ Rise, Says UN Report.” Reuters, 26 Sept. 2024, www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-hezbollah-enabled-houthis-rise-says-un-report-2024-09-26/. Accessed 14 Jan. 2025.

Reuters. “Iran’s Support for Houthis in Yemen: Evidence and Implications.” Reuters, 27 Dec. 2024, www.reuters.com/world/iran-houthi-support-yemen-conflict. Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.

Security Council Report. “UN Documents for Yemen.” Security Council Report, 24 Dec. 2024, www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/yemen/. Accessed 24 Dec. 2024.



The Arms Trade Treaty. "Treaty Status." Adopted by the UN General Assembly, 2 Apr. 2013, thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-status.html. Accessed 24 Dec. 2024.

The Guardian. "Saudi-Led Coalition's Role in Yemen." The Guardian, 25 Dec. 2024, www.theguardian.com/world/saudi-yemen-conflict. Accessed 25 Dec. 2024.

The New York Post. "'Merchant of Death' Who Was Released in Brittney Griner Prisoner Swap Is Back to Selling Arms to the Houthis: Report." The New York Post, 7 Oct. 2024, nypost.com/2024/10/07/world-news/merchant-of-death-in-us-prisoner-swap-is-selling-arms-to-houthis-report/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2025.

The Sun. "Russian Arms Dealer 'Merchant of Death' Freed by US Now 'Selling Weapons to Houthis Trying to Blow Up Brit Ships'." The Sun, 7 Oct. 2024, www.thesun.co.uk/news/30912208/houthis-viktor-bout-russia-weapons/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2025.

The Wall Street Journal. "How the Houthis Went From Ragtag Rebels to Global Threat." The Wall Street Journal, 2 Nov. 2024, www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/how-the-houthis-went-from-ragtag-rebels-to-global-threat-5a268d0. Accessed 14 Jan. 2025.

United Nations. "About the UN in Yemen." United Nations Yemen, <https://yemen.un.org/en/about/about-the-un>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.

United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2140 (2014). United Nations Security Council, 26 Feb. 2014, [www.undocs.org/S/RES/2140\(2014\)](http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2140(2014)). Accessed 23 Dec. 2024.

United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015). United Nations Security Council, 14 Apr. 2015, [www.undocs.org/S/RES/2216\(2015\)](http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2216(2015)). Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.



United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2451 (2018). United Nations Security Council, 21 Dec. 2018, documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n18/461/15/pdf/n1846115.pdf. Accessed 22 Dec. 2024.

United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2511 (2020). United Nations Security Council, 25 Feb. 2020, [undocs.org/en/S/RES/2511\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2511(2020)). Accessed 21 Dec. 2024.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2024." United Nations, 2024, reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-2024. Accessed 22 Dec. 2024.

UNMHA. "Stockholm Agreement." UNMHA, 13 Dec. 2018, unmha.unmissions.org/stockholm-agreement. Accessed 26 Dec. 2024.

UN News. "Yemen's Warring Parties Agree to Extend Ceasefire." UN News, 2 Oct. 2022, news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129532. Accessed 20 Dec. 2024.

United States Navy. "Intercepting Arms Smuggling to Yemen." U.S. Navy, 2023, www.navy.mil/intercept-arms-smuggling-yemen. Accessed 26 Dec. 2024.

Wikimedia Commons Contributors. "File:President Ali Abdullah Saleh.jpg." Wikimedia Commons, 24 Apr. 2023, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:President_Ali_Abdullah_Saleh.jpg&oldid=753711337. Accessed 18 Jan. 2025.