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**Dealing with the threat posed by the Houthi militant group to global stability
and assessing ways to end the conflict in Yemen**

Forum: United Nations Security Council



INTRODUCTION

Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011, longtime President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned and former vice-president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi succeeded him. However, the government failed to deliver economic and political stability and was thus overtaken by the Houthi movement, a Shia-led rebel group from northern Yemen. The conflict escalated in 2015 when the Saudi-led coalition backed by the US initiated Operation Decisive Storm in support of the ousted president. This conflict has caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis, millions of Yemenis face famine. The Houthi paramilitary and terror group has become a major global nuisance by targeting trade, undersea cables, and other critical infrastructure in and around the Arabian peninsular. Their attacks on ships supplying Israel have emerged as a new dimension of their multifaceted presence in the region.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The Houthi movement

The Houthi movement is a Shia-led rebel group formed in northern Yemen. The movement emerged in the 1990s, in part, as a reaction to rising Saudi financial and religious influence (Sunni influence). Yemeni officials and Sunni states have repeatedly alleged that Iran and its proxy Hezbollah have provided arms, training, and financial support to the Houthis. But Iranian and Hezbollah officials have denied or downplayed the claims, despite the presented evidence by the

US.¹ Today, the group has become a major destabilizing factor in the Arabian peninsula and,

especially in Yemen, which has been ravaged by civil war and true peace is nowhere in sight.

The Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) is the executive body of Yemen's internationally recognized government, formed on 7 April 2022. It is chaired by Rashad Muhammad Al-Alimi, currently the highest official in Yemen, and has a membership of eight representatives. The former president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi has transferred all the executive authority to the council.

Supreme Political Council (SPC)

Supreme Political Council is an executive body formed by the Houthi movement.

Currently, the SPC carries out the functions of the head of state in Yemen and is to manage Yemen's state affairs in a bid to fill in the political vacuum. The SPC remains internationally unrecognized and is acknowledged only by Iran, with the Houthis placing an ambassador to Iran in August 2019. United Nations officially described the act as "a clear violation of the Yemeni constitution" and denounced the council for sabotaging the Yemeni peace process.

Saudi-led Coalition

Saudi Arabia and a coalition of other Arab allies (currently including Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, and Jordan, previously also Sudan, Qatar, and Morocco) launched a military intervention to restore the authority of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who the Houthis earlier ousted.

Arab Spring

A series of popular protests and uprisings that took place across the Arab world in 2011, leading to the ousting of several long-standing leaders.

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State

Sunni Islamist extremist groups which have established a presence in Yemen and carry out attacks in the country.

CURRENT OVERVIEW AND HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

Roots of the conflict

Yemen has a long history of political and economic instability, which has contributed to the current conflict. The country was divided into two states for much of the 20th century, with the north being ruled by the Imams and the south being a British protectorate and later an independent country. Ali Abdullah Saleh became president of North Yemen in 1978. He sought to unify the country after the discovery of oil and natural gas in the region around the city of Marib,

which was located on the border of North and South Yemen. The two states were reunited in 1990, but the country remained politically unstable with Saleh as its president.

For years Saleh's government had failed to placate the demands of an unsettled Zaydī Shi'ī population, whose opposition to the military regime laid the foundation for the Houthi movement established in the early 2000s. Saleh also struggled to maintain support from southern factions as well as Sunni Islamists.

The Arab Spring

Following the popular uprising in Tunisia, many other Arab countries saw a series of popular protests and uprisings that took place in 2011, leading to the ousting of several long-standing leaders. Yet unlike the protests in Egypt and Tunisia, the Yemeni uprisings appeared to have been organized and directed by a diverse coalition of Yemeni opposition groups, including the Houthi rebels and Sunni Islamists who would later fight for their separate interests.

After months of unrest, Saleh finally stepped down as the president and the only candidate, former vice president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, succeeded him. Yet, even without Saleh, Yemen remained deeply divided and economically weak. Much of the country faced shortages of food, water, and basic goods.

The rise of the rebels

The Houthis, who had long been marginalized and oppressed by the central government, saw the opportunity to assert their power and launched a rebellion against Hadi's government. In July 2014 Hadi's administration enacted deep cuts in fuel subsidies, leading to renewed protests in Sanaa. The rebels capitalized on the distress to gain support from the public and in late September, the Houthi fighters seized power over key government buildings.

President Hadi submitted his resignation to the parliament on January 23, leaving the country without a president. The Houthi movement formalized their power on February 6, as they dissolved the parliament and announced a five-member presidential council that would form a transitional government. The UN Security Council later issued a resolution condemning the actions of the Houthi rebels and called upon the movement to return to the transition process that began in 2013. President Hadi flees to the presidential palace in Sanaa and escapes to Aden, where he later

rescinded his resignation, declaring himself the legitimate president, and deems the Houthi takeover a “coup.” Later, he flees to Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, the Islamic State claims its first terroristic attacks on Shia mosques in Sanaa.

Intervention by Saudi-led coalition

A coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia decided to intervene in the takeover in late March by imposing a naval blockade and successfully pushing back Houthi advancement towards Aden by launching air strikes. Surprisingly, the Houthi rebels were supported by Saleh, the former president, who was ousted, in part, by the Houthi movement.

Despite Saudi achievements, dislodging the Houthi fighters from northern Yemen, including Sanaa, proved far more difficult for the coalition. Saudi-led bombing raids caused a disastrous humanitarian crisis, with several thousand civilians killed, and Yemen's infrastructure damaged. By 2016 more than three-quarters of the population lacked access to water. The UN attempted to establish peace talks and initiated a cease-fire that, while often violated, did achieve some success. The talks were suspended without an agreement in August 2016.

While the war worsened, the country began to face the worst outbreak of cholera in history. In 2017, Saleh broke with the Houthis and decided to seek peace. The Houthi rebels pushed pro-Saleh forces out of Sanaa, and on December 4 they killed Saleh near his home in Sanaa. The Houthi rebellion remained impactful in part by its control of the port city of Hodeidah, which provided it with access to imports and revenue through taxing cargo. The Saudi-led coalition attempted to gain control over the city, yet was found with disapproval from the UN. The UN implemented a cease-fire in the city in December, seeing as the port also served as one of the key lifelines for humanitarian aid. The cease-fire remained fragile, as the different parties accused one another of breaching the terms of the agreement. Saudi-led forces obstructed the distribution of international aid while the Houthi rebels were found to mishandle it.

The conflict slowly turned into a stalemate and important members of the coalition, such as the UAE, quietly began to disengage their forces.

Fighting initially broke out again in early 2020, yet with the COVID-19 outbreak, Saudi Arabia faced economic uncertainty and thus decided to announce a unilateral cease-fire. Later that month southern secessionists declared self-rule under a body known as the Southern Transitional Council (STC). In June the council took over the island of Socotra. After months of negotiations,

the members of STC were incorporated into the cabinet of Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed.

The focal point of upcoming clashes was the city of Marib, where the discovery of large petroleum deposits in the 1980s had been a key factor in the country's unification in 1990. In April 2022 the main belligerents in the conflict declared a two-month cease-fire. A few days later Hadi announced his resignation and handed power over to the Presidential Leadership Council.

In 2023 Saudi Arabia began negotiating more directly with the Houthi rebels. The allocation of Yemen's oil revenue remains the main sticking point in finding a consensus between the sides.

Current situation

Progress was disrupted on October 7, 2023, when Hamas orchestrated the deadliest attack on Israel since that country ever existed. The Houthi Rebels support, along with Iran and other Arab countries, Hamas by launching missiles and drones toward Israel, especially on ships passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The attacks also prompted the US to take action by launching dozens of strikes against the Houthi rebels in January 2024 in coalition with the United Kingdom and designating the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization.

The international community has become increasingly concerned about the situation in Yemen, and there have been efforts to solve the conflict on an international level. However, these efforts have been destroyed by the complex web of interests and influences involved in the conflict, as well as the ongoing violence and instability. Despite this, there remains hope that a lasting solution can be found and that the people of Yemen can be rescued from the devastating humanitarian crisis.

MAJOR PARTIES AND THEIR VIEWS

USA



The USA views the Houthi movements as a major threat to world's stability and has taken numerous steps to prevent further escalation. They actively part-take in peace talks and are pushing for a durable cease-fire alongside a long-term peaceful solution to the conflict. Moreover, they have also taken military action alongside other nations (United Kingdom, Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands) in order to not only limit the spread of Houthi influence into other countries but also to set clear boundaries and limitations for the terrorist group. (Clark) the USA has also been rumored to provide weapons and logistical support to the Yemeni government. In addition, they gave aid to Saudi-led interventions in the Yemeni Civil war during the presidency of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, however in February 2021 the American president, Joe Biden announced the end of this support. Nevertheless, Houthis still claim that US military influence is present in the region.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has stayed out of the Yemeni conflict militarily, however, is still present diplomatically. They are calling for an internal resolution and are offering to take the role of the mediator. That being said, many are concerned with their objectiveness especially regarding their close ties with Iran, who strongly support the Houthi movement. Moreover, Russia has also refused to label the Houthi movement as “rebel” or “terrorist”. In the past, Russian Federation has both abstained from and vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that called for an arms embargo against the Houthis. However, they later proposed a resolution with the same goal but without the criticism of Iran for supporting them, unlike the other resolution. So far, the Russian Federation seems more set on protecting Iran than helping the Houthis. (Katz)

France

France has condemned the actions of the Houthi government on multiple occasions and calls for an immediate cease-fire in the region. They openly support Israel and are committed to preserving maritime safety in accordance with international agreements. They have also promised to help the elected Yemeni government restore itself and reclaim its position.

Moreover, France has also voiced concerns about the worsening humanitarian condition in Yemen and continues to support projects dealing with this issue.

United Kingdom

The UK has also condemned the Houthi actions on multiple occasions and is set to bring the elected government back into power. Moreover, they have also acted alongside the USA in the form of naval and air strikes as a response to the Houthi attack on shipments in the Red Sea. The UK is very vocal about the need to reach a political and peaceful solution amongst the parties involved as soon as possible however is also a supporter of sanctions against the Houthis whether that is the arms embargo or any other type. They also recognize the need to maintain stable humanitarian aid within the region and condemn all Houthi actions taken against these efforts.

China

China had stayed quite silent about the situation in Yemen until the Houthis started to attack shipments in the Red Sea. Although no Chinese ships were attacked, the attacks still had a significant impact on the Chinese economy. That being said, unlike the US or the UK, they have not launched any counterattacks on the Houthis. Furthermore, rather than taking a clear stance and action with or against the Houthis, China is using the situation to shame Western powers for further destabilizing the region. They are also one of the countries that have not labeled the Houthi movement as terroristic.

Iran

Iran openly supports the Houthi movement. It is up to debate when this support exactly started, however it became very apparent after the start of the Yemeni Civil war in 2014. Unlike in other cases of Iran supporting rebel groups, the Houthis are more like their partners, because they are very aligned with their both ideological and geopolitical motivations. While Iran denies supporting the Houthis militarily, there have been numerous UN reports with contradicting claims. According to these reports Iran has supplied drones, arms, missiles and more which were later used against Saudi Arabia and other targets. There is also cooperation between the two in the Red Sea. Houthis protect Iranian ships, which helps Iran avoid sanctions on oil shipping. This specific cooperation also extends to attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities.

Saudi Arabia



Saudi Arabia is very much in support of the previously elected governments and is in a military conflict with the Houthi movement. After Houthi's takeover Saudi Arabia became very concerned about their safety especially knowing that the movement is backed by their rival Iran. As mentioned above, they started a Saudi-led coalition to push back the Houthis, which still remain active. To this day they remain the targets of frequent Houthi attacks on their borders and crucial facilities with thousands of casualties. However, the Saudi-led coalition has also carried out hundreds of strikes with just as many deaths. It has proved to be difficult to carry out diplomatic talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi movement as the threat if Iran still lingers above Saudi Arabia.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

- September 2004 - al'Houthi is killed (the original religious leader of the Houthi rebellion), the group is now led by his brother Abdul Malik al-Houthi
- March-June 2005 - Houthis and the government start fighting, however it shortly ends after they find an agreement
- 2009-2010 - Operation Scorched Earth (aimed to crash Houthis) and Operation Blow to the Head (to crash all other rebels in al-Qaeda)
- January 2011 - demonstrations to end Saleh's rule (200-2000 people dead)
- November 2011 - Saleh signs his power over to his deputy Abdraabbuh Mansour Hadi to form a unity government
- February 2014 - President Hadi dissolves his cabinets following anti-government protests
- September-November 2014 - Houthis take over most of the capital Sanaa and Red Sea port city Hodeida
- January 2015 - Hadi resigns as president after being held captive by the Houthis.
- February 2015 - The Houthis takeover the Yemeni government, Hadi flees and declares himself the legitimate president
- March 2015 - first attacks by The Islamic State, Houthis start an offensive against government forces, Hadi flees to Saudi Arabia, Houthi advance into south Yemen and Taiz, Operation Decisive Storm (Saudi-led coalition against Houthis)

- April 2015 - Operation Restoring Hope (end of Operation Decisive Storm, still continues to bomb), Houthis advance into Ataq
- May 2015 - Saleh and Yemeni forces loyal to him join Houthis, “humanitarian ceasefire”, failed GCC meeting
- August 2015 - Houthis take control over Shabwah governorate
- September 2015 - Saudi-backed forces get back Aden, Hadi returns
- December 2017 - Saleh joins the Saudi side and later dies, Hadi calls for an uprising against the Houthis
- December 2018 - US ends participation in the conflict, Yemeni government and the Houthis sign the Stockholm agreement (overall a failure)
- August 2019 - The UAE withdraws its forces, STC is in control of Aden, launch of Operation Victory of God
- July 2019 - STC renounces its claim to self-rule and goes back to power-sharing structure with the Hadi government
- October 2019 - largest prisoner swap, Saudi announces willingness to a cease-fire, the Houthis attack Jeddah
- April-May 2021 - continued attacks from both parties on both tactical and civilian targets, UN and Iran's Foreign Minister call for a ceasefire amongst all the actors, Houthis refuse peace talks
- September 2021 - Houthi renew their offensive in the Marib Governorate, 3 people killed during protest - triggers another wave protests, Houthis execute 9 people for siding with the Saudi-led coalition, US delegation with the goal of peace talks
- January-February 2022 - Houthi launches attack against UAE and Saudi Arabia, Saudi-led coalition bombs Sanaa, Security council renews the arms embargo
- April 2022 - UN two-month cease-fire, Houthis resume attacks on Marib
- April 2023 - Saudi and Omani delegations in Sanaa for peace talks, Yemeni government and Houthis freed 869 detainees
- November 2023 - Houthis declare war on Israel, start of attack on ships in the Red Sea
- December 2023 - US alongside 20 other countries launch Operation Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea, Houthi agrees on key terms to a ceasefire

- March 2024 - first Houthi attacks on ships in the Indian Ocean, more threats coming from Houthis

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (April 2015) This resolution imposed an arms embargo on the Houthis and forces loyal to President Saleh. Moreover, it also introduced sanctions against individuals aiding the Houthis. It further called for the Houthis to release all the areas they had seized. However, Most of these solutions were not effective. Countries like Iran ignored the embargo and continued to supply weapons, the sanctions did not deter the Houthis, and they didn't release any land.

UN Security Council Resolution 2722 (January 2024)

Stresses the importance of safe shipment in the Red Sea. Calls for an immediate cease of attacks and demands that the Houthis return a ship they are holding captive. The resolution also reaffirms the right to self-defense of different countries. However, Houthis ignored the council's demands and continues the attacks in Red Sea. They also kept the ship in their possession.

Stockholm agreement (2018)

Saudi Arabia and the Houthis agreed to three key factors in this agreement. Firstly, they settled on a ceasefire in Hudaydah that was to be overseen by the UN to maintain the flow of humanitarian aid. Secondly, they agreed on a large-scale prisoner swap. Lastly, they decided to allow access of humanitarian aid into the city of Taiz that had been under siege. Sadly, this agreement did not bare as much success as some had hoped. While there was some initial action with the ceasefire and attacks decreased, the ceasefire was not reached. The flow of humanitarian aid into problematic regions slightly improved, however complications persevered. What was successful though, was the prisoner swap, where hundreds of prisoners were exchanged.

Peace talks

As can be seen in the timeline, there were many attempts to reach a peaceful and diplomatic solution, however those proved to be challenging and fruitless. Whether we consider the GCC meeting by USA or any other peace talk attempt, none of them proved to bring any long-term solution. Either representatives refused to attend the meeting, or they failed to reach an agreement on the terms of the ceasefire, or one of the parties went against their word. In other words, it is difficult to organize successful peace talks between actors who aren't willing to negotiate. Even if they were, due to the length and intricacy of the conflict it would be difficult to arrive at a compromise that satisfies both parties.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION SHOULD ANSWER

How to reach a long-term peaceful solution?

The need to establish a long-term ceasefire

Who will be in power if the Houthis get taken down? Is it going to be the old elected government or should a new one be elected?

How to ensure and maintain a safe and consistent flow of humanitarian aid into the region?

How to solve the situation in the Red Sea?

APPENDIX

A very detailed timeline: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/a-timeline-of-the-yemen-crisis-from-the-1990s-to-the-present/>

UN security council Resolution 2722:

<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2722>

UN Security Council Resolution 2216:

<https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/s/res/2216-%282015%29-0>

Stockholm Agreement:

<https://unmha.unmissions.org/stockholm-agreement>

Nice overview of the entire topic:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Houthi-movement>

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