



BATHMUN

Conference 2025

UNSC Study Guide
The Situation in Yemen: the Rise of Proxy
Wars and Non-State Actors

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Message from the Chairs

Greetings and welcome to the United Nations Security Council at this year's edition of BathMUN!

It is our shared and distinguished privilege to be presiding over this committee over the course of the weekend, chairing what we trust will be a captivating debate, hopefully replete with productive solutions and intricate diplomatic discourse.

Our collective experience of this era is one of pronounced insecurity. Preconceived global norms, established rules, and ideas of geopolitical order are now regrettably out of favour at best, or anachronistic at worst. As a result, we have chosen an often overlooked topic which illustrates this geopolitical inflection point; we will see how regional conflicts are internationalised, how non-state actors frustrate global systems clinging on to traditional ideas of sovereignty, and how these new influences transform the idea of a proxy war.

To many UN members and external observers, the Security Council is a powerless, inert relic of the rules-based international order. It is easily criticised as irresponsible to global shifts in power, unrepresentative, or failing in its duty to promote global security and peace. These critiques are easy to level against this UN organ, but there exists no other international institution with the same tools at its disposal, defined mandate, or ability to make binding decisions. Despite its imperfections, the Security Council has proven itself to be a lifeline to international security in the 70 years since World War Two. Intrinsic to it is a dual obligation of promoting fair and peaceful relations between governments, while respecting their sovereignty in making decisions without external interference.

Illustrated above is precisely why the Security Council is an advanced committee and the exciting challenge that is unique to it. It is a choice between writing off this committee as an effective forum to tackle unprecedented global issues (at the time it is needed most) or seizing that challenge. As a delegate, you have already chosen the latter option.



In selecting this complex topic for you to debate, the Dais hopes you will discover innovative solutions through thorough research and careful consideration of the realities of this long-running conflict. Moreover, sharp diplomatic ability will be crucial in constructively engaging with your fellow delegates, however the Dais will also stress that compromise is an encouraged result rather than an encouraged foreign policy.

BathMUN 2025's theme of 'World Heritage Diplomacy' is one we hope will ultimately triumph in the anticipated deep deliberations and nuanced negotiations, adapting an essential skill steeped in rich history for a swiftly evolving world. All it takes is not just to see the other side, but reach out your hand to it.

We look forward to meeting you in November for a fruitful conference and a thrilling weekend.

Best regards,
Oban Mackie, Petar Ognyanov, and Uditanshi Kumar.



Chair Introduction

Oban Mackie
Head Chair

Hello delegates! My name is Oban and it is an absolute pleasure to be your Head Chair for BathMUN 2025's UNSC.

I grew up in West Somerset (not too far from here) and I am currently a final year BA History and Political Economy student at King's College London, managing this degree alongside an arguably more important MUN passion that dates far back to 2021. As much as I adore London as a bustling, fast-paced metropolis, the peace and tranquility of the West Country will always be my home!

The four years I have found myself enthralled by MUN have spanned many a delegating, chairing, and even secretariat(ing?) experience. Right now, I am the Training Officer of KCLUNA and was USG-Chairing of ULMUN this year, however as I find myself in my final year of my degree I feel it only right to return to the committee I fell in love with from my first conference - UNSC.

This is the committee I am both most experienced with and where distinctive memories have been created, such as a visual tally of failed attempts to grant an observer state voting rights and hours spent on renaming an oceanic body as "The Sea of the Dragon King" (please don't get any ideas, I beg). UNSC has a penchant for creating these memories, but also driving the most energetic debate and innovative forms of diplomatic compromise that I trust you will each strive for.

Outside of MUN, you'll continue to find me politically nerding out (as I have from the age of nine) in Chatham House's Common Futures Conversations or reading age-old political philosophy. Perhaps more so, you will find me being an avid coffee connoisseur, trying to beat personal bests at the gym, working on my video editing skills, going for long hikes at home in the countryside, or attending (yet another) Taylor Swift or Lorde concert.

Above all, I am excited and eager to meet you all in November! I await your position papers and GSL speeches with baited breath.



Peter Ognyanov
Deputy Chair

My warmest greetings to you, Delegates! My name's Petar and it is my great pleasure to be chairing for you at this year's BathMUN UNSC.

I was born and raised in Sofia, Bulgaria, but showed up to London 3 years ago for a change in scenery, and probably slightly more importantly, my degree. After graduating from a PPE course, I am now doing an MA in Comparative Economics and Policy, at UCL's School of Slavonic and East European Studies. I guess some things never change. Anyway, aside from my academic focus on stacking as many disciplines as possible on my degree, I have also been thoroughly involved in the arguably less important, but inarguably much more enthralling world of MUN.

Over the past 6 or 7 years I've had a blast delegating, chairing and organising conferences in Europe and especially around the UK circuit in recent times. Though the call of retirement is strong, I am as happy as ever to be chairing (yet another) UNSC committee. Because what else is there to do in life except chair MUN?

Well, actually, it is also possible to find me outside of MUN (despite what vicious rumours claim), oftentimes finding lost trails somewhere out on a hike, speedrunning an Escape Room, or travelling to someplace with more vitamin D. Or, for a lower energy alternative, improving my attempts at writing (you tell me if that one is going well) and discussing UK politics with Oban, though if that is outside of the scope of MUN or not, I shall let you decide.

I truly hope you adore this committee we have prepared for you, because it certainly was fun to research about and create. As always, I am both excited and scared of what you will all come up with in order to solve the crisis at hand. As both my colleagues will surely attest, UNSC resolutions can range from ingenious to unhinged, but I am cautiously optimistic that your expertise and creativity will swing us into the former.

Godspeed, and see you all in November!



Uditanshi Kumar
Deputy Chair

Dear Delegates, it is a great honor to welcome you to BathMUN 2025's Security Council. My name is Uditanshi Kumar, though most people call me Udi, and I am delighted to be one of your chairs for this committee.

I am originally from India but moved to London a year ago to pursue a Bachelor in Business Administration with specialisations in Finance and Economics, at Hult International Business School. Alongside my studies, I keep myself busy as a board member of my university's Strategic Consulting Club, Banking Society, Women in Business Club; and USG Academics for this year's HultMUN Conference. I also intern at a consulting company in London and have just started writing my thesis. Somewhere along the way, "studying" turned into simulating a 49-hour work-week, and I love it.

As for MUNs, my journey began in 2018, and over nearly eight years, I have had the privilege of participating in MUNs from every angle. The UNSC is my all-time favorite committee for the sheer impact, intensity and depth of debates it brings. This year alone, I've chaired three Security Councils across London, as well as one each in Amsterdam and Madrid.

Outside MUNs, I enjoy hitting the gym, drinking copious amounts of coffee, reading books, travelling, watching Formula One, and praying for Manchester United. Unfortunately, both Ferrari and Manchester United have made "heartbreak" their main strategy for years now, which means I'm well trained in resilience, a quality that I'm sure will come in handy chairing this committee (just kidding, I understand we have a complex agenda this year, but if anyone can handle it, it's you, the delegates of the Security Council!).

Feel free to reach out with any questions, doubts, or just to chat. I look forward to seeing you at the conference!



Introduction to the Committee

History of the Committee

The history of the Security Council is inseparably tied to the development of the UN as a legitimate international propagator of peace and stability. At the tail end of 1945, when the UN was being founded, one of the most important questions being asked was, "How do we prevent a second failure of the League of Nations?" After all, a similar international community had already failed once mere years ago. One commonly cited flaw of the League was that it was effectively powerless to stop the actions of expansionist leaders beyond issuing mere condemnations. The inclusion of a Security Council in the newly established UN was one of the ways this was meant to be mitigated. The UNSC, functioning as the one of six main organs of the UN, is tasked with the "maintenance of international peace and security".(Center, 2023) To that end, it is the only UN body which can:

1. Issue binding resolutions (more on that later),
2. Threaten with and impose collective economic sanctions,
3. Authorise the use of other enforcement measures, such as sending military observers, deploying peacekeepers, or in extreme cases, calling for collective military action;

To counterbalance the power of what is, effectively, a worldwide policing organ, the committee also introduced veto powers. (United Nations, 2024b) These were given to the five permanent members of the council, often referred to as the P5. Currently, those 5 are France, Russia, China, the UK and the USA. The power to single-handedly block any resolution in the UNSC meant that it was nigh impossible for any resolution which opposed the interests of the P5 to ever pass.(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019)



Despite that, the UNSC has seen its fair share of executive powers used, with 2 notable military interventions (Korea, 1950 and Libya, 2011) as well as dozens of sanction regimes and peacekeeping operations (PKOs). (Nations, n.d.) To what extent these have been successful varies a lot by operation, even according to the UNSC itself, and some are even more divisive on the international stage, with calls for both more and less power being handed to the council growing ever louder.

Despite all this, the UNSC remains as one of, if not the most, vital organ the UN possesses in order to combat real-time crises of security. It is up to you to navigate its complicated mandate in order to restore some semblance of stability to the region at hand.

Structure and Function of the Committee

The present-day Security Council is made up of 15 members, 5 of which are the permanent members outlined above. The other 10 are elected for a term of 2 years from 5 subgroups: 3 members are present from the African Group, currently Somalia, Sierra Leone and Algeria; 2 are from the Asia-Pacific group, currently South Korea and Pakistan; 2 others are from the Latin American and Caribbean group, currently Panama and Guyana, 1 is from the Eastern European group, currently Slovenia, and 2 more are from the Western and Others group, currently Denmark and Greece. (United Nations, 2024a) 5 of these seats changed owners as of June this year, however their official terms don't start until January 2026, meaning the above list is still accurate. (Security Council Report, 2025)

Historically, the UNSC has also invited other states as observers when an issue being discussed affects them directly. For our topic of The Situation in Yemen: The Rise of Proxy Wars and Non-State Actors, we have invited Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iran as relevant to the discussion. Those three will be able to participate in the debate and writing of resolutions; however, they may not vote during committee and will not be considered for quorum.



As the topic at hand is extremely relevant to all of them, they will be valued voices at the committee; remember: not being able to vote does not mean having no influence in committee. Although they will possess no vote in the actual committee, the way UNSC enforcement works, we strongly encourage their voices be heard, as attempting to solve a regional conflict without consulting the regional actors has historically not gone well for the Security Council, or the UN in general.

As mentioned above, the Security Council is, arguably, the most influential UN body, due to its power of not just suggesting, but imposing rules on the international community. This means that resolutions passed by the UNSC are binding to the UN, and the states affected by them are expected to comply, or face further repercussions, usually imposed on them by the Security Council as well. (United Nations, 2016b) For the purposes of resolution writing, this means that the documents you create can use stronger language than those written in GAs. Condemnations are common and you may write clauses beginning with words like Demands. This doesn't mean that some clauses don't require the standard soft language of Urges, Requests, etc. but what's important is that effective resolutions usually make some use of the binding forces of the UNSC.



Specialised Rules of Procedure

The Security Council runs in a manner similar to most other committees of the UN. Debate, amendments and resolution writing will follow standard MUN procedure. The major differences in the UNSC are relevant when it comes to voting procedures. (United Nations, 2016a)

Firstly, the majority needed for resolution to pass is set at 60% as opposed to the usual 50% + 1. This does not include observer states.

The second major difference in voting is the inclusion of a veto power. As mentioned previously, any one of the P5 may block a resolution single handedly by utilising their veto. Although powerful, this has hardly been used more than once or twice per year since the 1990s. As such, delegates are reminded that the veto is only to be used when a motion by the UNSC explicitly violates the representative's national interest. Abstentions however do not affect the outcome. Because of this, we recommend that delegates of the P5 declare themselves "Present" as opposed to "Present and Voting" at the beginning of session. If any delegate does not do this, they will be forced to either support a resolution or veto it when time for voting comes.



Houthi rebel fighters march against US strikes on Yemen outside Sanaa, 22nd January 2024. [China Daily, 2024]



*The Situation in Yemen:
The Rise of Proxy Wars
and Non-State Actors*



Topic Introduction

Timeline

1967-1990

PRE-UNIFICATION

- ◆ North Yemen and South Yemen developed with divergent systems (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025).
- ◆ South Yemen gained independence from the British Empire 1967 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025), North Yemen faced a coup in 1962 which saw overthrow of monarchy (Orkaby, 2014).

1990

REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

- ◆ Following brief border wars in 1972 and 1979, the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) united.
- ◆ North Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, becomes President of the Unified Republic (Montgomery, 2021).

1994

CIVIL WAR

- ◆ The Zaidi-Shia group Ansar Allah (otherwise known as the Houthis) begin gaining prominence.
- ◆ Pro-Union Northern and socialist separatist Southern armies conflict, currently un-unified. Southern forces defeated, exiled (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025).

2000

TREATY OF JEDAH

- ◆ President Saleh signs this border demarcation agreement with Saudi Arabia.
- ◆ Now seeks to disarm the Houthis (Montgomery, 2021)



2004-2010

HOUTHI INSURGENCY

- ◆ Mass arrests of Houthi members, leader Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi killed in September 2004 (BBC News, 2004).
- ◆ Continuous fighting in Sa'Dah Governorate, separated by ceasefires during this time (Montgomery, 2021).
- ◆ Operation Scorched Earth in 2009 is combined with Houthis fighting in border clashes with Saudi Arabia (Reuters, 2010)

2011

ARAB SPRING

- ◆ Protest calling for the toppling of President Salah begin, security forces crackdown.
- ◆ Salah refuses to sign Gulf-Cooperation-Council-brokered (GCC) deal to hand over power.
- ◆ Eventually signs deal for Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi to assume power in November (The Washington Post, 2011)

2014

UNITY GOVERNMENT FAILURE

- ◆ Document for new constitution created, however unity government of Hadi is unpopular. Cabinet dissolved with weeks of anti-government protests (Reuters, 2014).
- ◆ Houthis take control of the capital (Sanaa) and Hodeydah.

2015

CIVIL WAR

- ◆ Houthis take control of the Yemeni government, President Hadi escapes to Aden, declares himself legitimate president.
- ◆ Launch of Saudi-led coalition (Operation Decisive Storm), passively aided by the United States.
- ◆ Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) stage attacks, the latter defends territory (ACLED, 2020).

2016-2017

PEACE ATTEMPTS

- ◆ UN sponsors talks between the Hadi Yemeni government, the Houthis, and the General People's Congress.
- ◆ Repeated alleged ceasefire breaches.
- ◆ Humanitarian agencies warn of potential catastrophe, famine, and tackle cholera outbreak (WHO, 2017).



2018-2020

COALITION CRITICISM

- ◆ The Saudi-led coalition launches a major offensive on the port of Hodayah, despite the high risk of civilian casualties and famine.
- ◆ Stockholm Agreement signed failing to achieve goals.
- ◆ Separatist Southern Transitional Council makes gains, later demanding self-rule.
- ◆ Saudi/Houthi fighting intensity picks up.

2022-2024

PROGRESS, RED SEA SHOCK

- ◆ April 2022 saw the first UN-brokered truce implemented since 2016, two-month ceasefire.
- ◆ Reconstruction plans, troop withdrawal, and general roadmap discussed between Houthis and Saudi Arabia in 2023.
- ◆ November 2023 sees Houthis declaring war on Israel, attacking commercial vessels indiscriminately in Red Sea.
- ◆ US-led coalition provoked in response.

2025

CURRENT STATE

- ◆ Humanitarian emergency ongoing, acute malnutrition and displacement (UN, 2024).
- ◆ Houthis hold most of northwest, coalition hold much of south and east.
- ◆ Continued lack of a comprehensive deal, despite calmer conditions.

We have put this timeline together to provide a surface-level overview of the history of the conflict and how it has developed into the situation today. While this does provide a roadmap, the Dais encourages you to read into the nuances and forces at play in each of the steps above, both through reading a more thorough history of the modern Yemeni state below and pursuing this in your own research.



History of the Conflict

Pre-Unfication

The territory, which is currently identified with the Republic of Yemen, was for a long time split between the Ottoman Empire in the north and the British Empire¹ in the south. As such, the modern history of Yemen as a state begins in 1918 with the withdrawal of the Ottomans from the northern territories. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025)

At this point in time the first Yemeni state, known as the Kingdom of Yemen emerged from the ailings of the, now former, Ottoman state. This state would also, often, be referred to as "North Yemen". Religiously, the state was entirely made up of Muslims, with the Shia Zayidi making up just over 50% of the population, and the Sunni muslims making up just under 50%. The kingdom lasted until the early 1960s, when Imam Muhammad-al-Badr was overthrown by revolutionary forces. The 8 years afterwards were marked by bloody civil war, eventually ending in 1970 with an official establishment of the Republic of Yemen, hereafterwards referred to as the ROY. (BBC, 2019)

The south in the meantime, remained under increasingly waning British control up until late in the 1960s. There were multiple attempts to establish a functional federation which would be aligned with Britain and the West even after independence on part of the British. However, due to a number of home-grown resistance movements (some of which embracing some sort of Marxist alignment) as well as increased pressure from a now hostile Egypt, the British eventually retreated from Port Aden and their colony as a whole in 1967 after a temporary closure of the Suez Canal made sustaining the territory no longer viable.(Imperial War Museum) Thus came about South Yemen. Two years later, the state was renamed to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. (PDROY)

Though there were always calls for unification, the two Yemens often faced challenges of conflict for a long period of time. Between 1969 and 1990 tensions were often high, with two minor wars occurring in 1972 and 1978, as well as reports of leftist insurgencies in the North being supported by the Communist Party in the South.

¹ First, as part of the East India company in the port of Aden, later as a crown colony in its own right.



Despite all this, unification was indeed eventually reached. After some turbulent internal affairs in both states during the 80s, their newly recognised leaders both adopted a more conciliatory approach towards each other than in previous years. This led to a series of peace talks in the late 1980s eventually culminating in the unification of Yemen in the year 1990. (BBC, 2019)

Unified Yemen

Unification seemed hopeful, however tensions remained at hand. The newly formed government remained inefficient in many of its duties, and it inherited the legacy of a politically divided country. The former ROY was home to many of the state's more conservative religious leaders, whereas the south was home of the revolutionary marxist groups which had been fighting the colonial regime for decades. There were, and still are, much more than 2 interest groups in the country, however the divergent historical developments were having their say.

The first major breakout of this issue would come during the short civil war in 1994. It saw a number of southern separatist groups fighting against a government led by the former president of South Yemen, but also backed by a number of northern tribes, a recently formed Al-Islah fundamentalist party, as well as a Zaydi-Shia group (which will eventually be known as the Houthis) gaining prominence. (BBC, 2019)

Although the civil war itself ended quickly in favour of the government, the next decade and a half saw a slow decline of the efficacy of the government. Despite multiple attempts at reform, what seemed to be the only consistent change was that presidential terms kept getting longer and longer. (UNHCR, 2001) Aside from a rapidly deteriorating economic situation, the government also began fighting a Houthi incursion from 2004 onwards, after the group was no longer useful and harmless to the state. The first few years mostly saw skirmishes between the government and the rebels, resulting in primarily increased tensions and instability in the country. Despite that, the militants were growing in numbers, with the government seemingly not doing enough to successfully defeat them. It was only by 2010 that the government managed to launch two separate successful operations that dealt a serious blow to the insurgents in the form of Operation Blow to the Head and Operation Scorched Earth². (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025)

² This was the first inclusion of the Saudi Arabian government into the conflict, as they actively helped the Yemeni government to stage multiple attacks and air raids into rebel-controlled territory.



The Arab Spring

In 2011, Yemen faced a series of protests and social unrest, not dissimilar to that in other Arab states, known now as the Arab Spring. The movement culminated in the resignation of President Saleh, followed by a two year term concluded by his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and a wide-spanning coalition. (ReliefWeb, 2011)

Two years later, at the tail-end of Hadi's term in 2014, a National Conference finally agreed on a basis for a new constitution. Despite that, in August of 2014 Hadi instead dissolved his cabinet amidst massive protests. Weeks later the Houthis had taken over the capital and put him under house arrest, forcing his resignation. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025a)



Past Attempts to Solve the Issue

The conflict in Yemen has now raged for over a decade, beginning with President Hadi's initial resignation and the Houthi takeover in 2014, then through multiple attempts at securing sustained ceasefires and peace.

These following efforts form part of the chronology leading up to the current situation in Yemen, however this is intended to primarily sketch an overview.

As a Dais, we have chosen to nominate a couple of attempted solutions as case studies (see Case Studies), namely the 2018 Stockholm Agreement and the 2019 Riyadh Agreement. These case studies are intended as a deep dive into the context each accord was struck in, as well as being an explainer of the notable points of success and failure.

S/RES/2216 (2015)

As the crisis in Yemen began to unfold and the Saudi-led coalition staged its intervention, the UNSC passed Resolution 2216. At its core, this imposed a targeted arms embargo on the Houthis (certain individuals and entities specified by the Security Council committee on Yemen), implemented targeted asset freezes and travel bans (including on forces loyal to former President Saleh), and demanded immediate Houthi withdrawal from its seized territory. The sanctions facet of this resolution operated within the already existing Yemen sanctions regime, however this ramped up action against the Houthis economically. While this action was strikingly determined, Iran's support of the Houthis militarily has allowed the continuation of their military campaign.



The following table summarises certain key draft resolutions passed by the United Nations Security Council in the past decade (not all DRs proposed in the UNSC). Please note that this list is not exhaustive but an attempt to give you a snapshot of a list of Yemen related Security Council documents. Delegates, as you read through different resolutions, you might notice certain patterns - maybe in reasons why different countries abstained or voted against certain draft resolutions, statements put forward by member nations while discussing time-bound responses and how the council operates the extensions of niche entities present on ground in Yemen. Let that be one of the key factors to help you understand the international sentiment and problem solving mechanisms regarding the situation in Yemen, what different member nations believe is imperative and why, and most importantly, how can consensus be reached in the Security Council; for Yemen is running out of time.

Resolution	Date	In Favour	Abstentions	Against	Summary
2014	21 st Oct, 2021	15	-	-	Condemned violence against protestors in Yemen, urged implementation of GCC Initiative.
2015	12 th Jun, 2012	15	-	-	Supported the GCC Initiative and highlights the second phase of Yemen's political transition, mentions Article 41 of the United Nations Charter.
2140	26 th Feb, 2014	15	-	-	Established sanctions regime (asset freeze, travel ban) on individuals undermining Yemen's transition.
2201	15 th Feb, 2015	15	1 (Russia)	-	Condemned the Houthi takeover of institutions, called for the release of President Hadi and other ministers.
2216	14 th April, 2015	14	-	-	Imposed arms embargo on Houthis, demanded withdrawal from seized areas. Russia abstained; all others in favour.
2451	21 st Dec, 2018	15	-	-	Endorsed the Stockholm Agreement (Hodeidah ceasefire, prisoner exchange, Taiz statement). Authorized a UN monitoring mission.
2481	15 th July, 2019	15	-	-	Extended UN Mission to support Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) until Jan 2020.



Resolution	Date	In Favour	Abstentions	Against	Summary
2624	28th Feb, 2022	11	4 (Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, Norway)	-	Condemned Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia & UAE, labelled Houthis a "terrorist group" for the first time, extended sanctions.
2722	10th Jan, 2024	11	4 (Algeria, China, Mozambique, Russia)	-	Condemned Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping (Galaxy Leader incident), demanded release of crew. Abstention urged focus towards de-escalation.
2758	13th Nov, 2024	15	-	-	Renewed sanctions and mandate of Panel of Experts on Yemen until Dec 2025.

UN Mediation of Talks & Brief Ceasefires (2016)

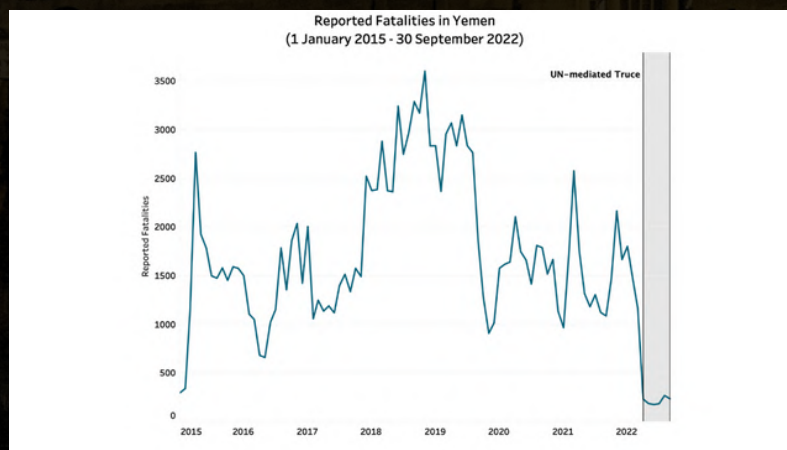
Saudi-led coalition intervention pushed the Houthis back in their steady advance, briefly bringing the two sides together (along with former President Saleh's General People's Congress) in negotiation in Kuwait In April 2016. The UN's brokering of these talks a year into the war was notable, yet yielded no progress. Ultimately, neither side could agree on basic confidence-building measures that could be gradually implemented owing to neither blinking first. The Houthis and loyalists to Hadi entered and left with the unrealistic ambitions of a halt to airstrikes and a withdrawal from main cities, respectively. (Al Jazeera, 2016)

Multiple UN-brokered truces, each designed to last a few days, were struck in April (Al Jazeera, 2016), October (The Guardian, 2016), and November. (BBC News, 2016) Their ephemeral existence was compounded by continuous allegations of these ceasefires being broken, complicating any further efforts to build trust. (Montgomery, 2021) Escalation ensued by 2017, with the Houthis claiming responsibility for firing missiles at the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh. (Montgomery, 2021)



Longer UN-brokered Truce (2022)

April 2022 saw the successful breakthrough of a two-month truce across Yemen, between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition, the first since the previous ceasefire(s) in 2016. The momentum for this ceasefire was a year in the making, designed to revive the push towards the 2018 Stockholm Agreement. (Al Jazeera, 2022)



Reported Fatalities in Yemen during UN-Mediated Truce, 2022. (ACLED, 2025)

Key success here was seen in confidence-building measures, especially with the release of prisoners, the reopening of airports, and the Saudi-led coalition allowing fuel vessels into Hodaydah port (as Saudi vessels are present in Yemeni waters).

Although this truce could only be extended by two month intervals twice (ending in October), this has left the lasting effect of communication channels remaining open between Saudi coalition officials and the Houthis, which has opened the door for backchannel discussions ever since. (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2024)



Examples of internationally-led military initiatives (2022-Present)

While this has been elaborated upon in the Points of Discussion section of this study guide, it is important to highlight specific military initiatives as examples of international attempts to respond to the Yemeni crisis.

Operation Prosperity Guardian was launched to protect international shipping and merchant vessels from Houthi attacks by maintaining a multinational naval presence in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Led by the United States, this defensive initiative deployed warships to intercept missiles and drones while escorting commercial vessels through vulnerable waters. (The National Security Institute, 2024) Its focus was on ensuring freedom of navigation in one of the world's most vital maritime corridors. (Center for Maritime Strategy, 2024)

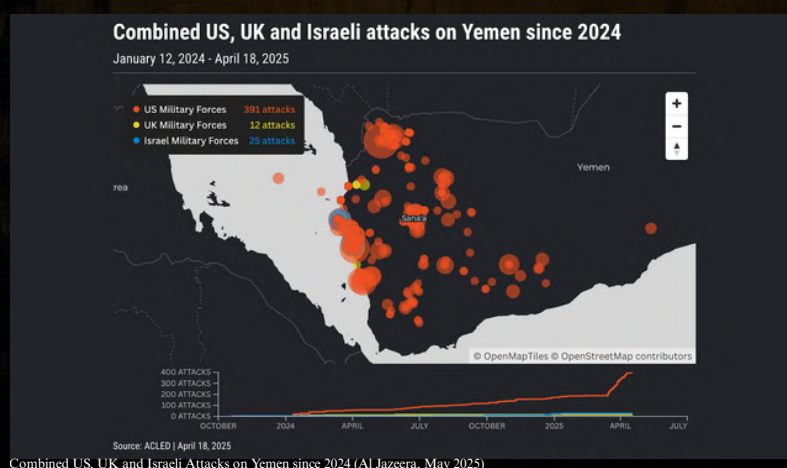


Closely linked to this was Operation Poseidon Archer, a joint campaign by the United States and United Kingdom, which began in January 2024. Unlike the purely defensive Prosperity Guardian, this operation pursued an offensive strategy, using air and missile strikes to dismantle Houthi infrastructure on land. Radar systems, missile launch sites, storage facilities, and drone capabilities were systematically targeted in an effort to degrade the Houthis' ability to disrupt maritime trade. (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 2025)



On 19 February 2024, the European Union also expanded its role by launching EUNAVFOR ASPIDES. Operating under the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), ASPIDES focused on providing escorts and protective measures for commercial shipping. (European External Action Service, 2025) This demonstrated Europe's willingness to step beyond political condemnation and commit military assets to safeguarding Red Sea trade.

Under the Trump administration, the United States adopted an even more aggressive stance. In March 2025, it initiated Operation Rough Rider, explicitly aimed at targeting "Houthi infrastructure and leadership" with the stated objective of "detering and disintegrating" the group. (USNI News, April 2025) The operation resulted in over 250 casualties and more than 1,000 strikes on Houthi positions before a ceasefire was declared on 6 May 2025.



Taken together, these initiatives reveal a recurring pattern: the international community rallying forces to curb Houthi violence on land, at sea, and in the air. They demonstrate the capacity of external actors to temporarily weaken Houthi capabilities and protect international trade routes. Yet, they also highlight a persistent shortcoming; that military campaigns may suppress immediate threats, but they have consistently failed to resolve the underlying political divisions driving Yemen's conflict. As such, these operations underscore one of the central dilemmas for the Council: Whether force can ever substitute for inclusive diplomacy in bringing about lasting peace?

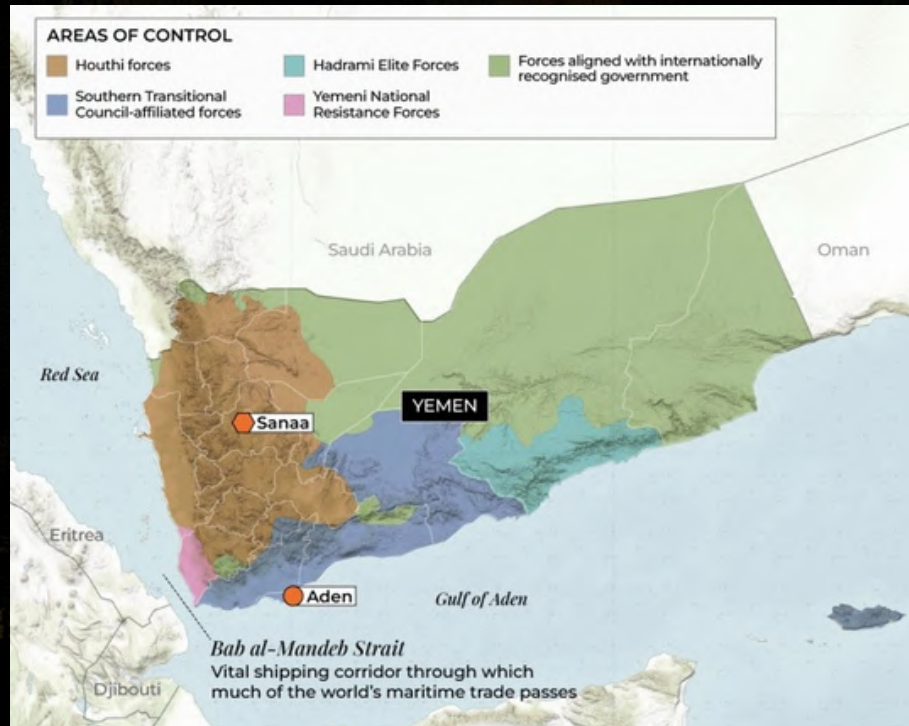


Current Situation

Security Situation/Front Lines of Conflict

While this has been elaborated upon in the Points of Discussion section of this study guide, it is important to highlight specific military initiatives as examples of international attempts to respond to the Yemeni crisis.

Operation Prosperity Guardian was launched to protect international shipping and merchant vessels from Houthi attacks by maintaining a multinational naval presence in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Led by the United States, this defensive initiative deployed warships to intercept missiles and drones while escorting commercial vessels through vulnerable waters. (The National Security Institute, 2024) Its focus was on ensuring freedom of navigation in one of the world's most vital maritime corridors. (Center for Maritime Strategy, 2024)



Map A: Current areas of control in Yemen as of May 2025. Southern Transitional Council forces aligned with internationally recognised government, as well as Hadrami Elite and Yemeni National Resistance. | (Al Jazeera, 2025).





Map B. Simplified map showing areas of control by general alignment as of 2025, specifically Houthi forces (red), Hadi-government (Presidential Leadership Council) control (blue), and areas Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) are present. | (Institute for National Security Studies, 2025).

Maps A and B above provide two illustrations of what has reached a de facto partition. Overall, Houthi forces hold most of the Northwest of Yemen, holding much of the former territory of Northern Yemen prior to unification. Crucially, this includes Sanaa (the previous capital city before the Hadi Government's relocation to Aden post-2015), as well as the essential port of Hudaydah which Saudi-led forces withdrew from in 2021. Despite the Presidential Leadership Council and its aligned forces (including the Southern Transitional Council) holding much of the country's south and east, they lack the main strategic holds that Houthi forces continuously hold. This is epitomised by the Red Sea Crisis (see Case Studies), providing access to a chokepoint comparable to Iran's Strait of Hormuz.

What makes both of the maps above indispensable is that they are both necessary to create a complete perception of the multi-dimensional nature the conflict has become. Growing unity on the side of the Presidential Leadership Council, perceived through the integration of the Southern Transitional Council into leadership structures, does not eliminate the historical looming elephant in the room - Southern separatism. Above all, there exists an axiomatic competition of interests beneath facades of cohesion.

A further complication is the internal insecurity that is exploited by additional non-state actors. Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) currently operates in the south and central regions of Yemen, primarily rural areas (see Map B). While they experienced a brief resurgence during the UN-mediated truce of April to October 2022, they have been significantly weakened by internal divides and operations conducted by the United States, notably eliminating two senior leaders in early 2023 (ACLED, 2023).



Regardless, they still hold a presence, rivalling the severely weakened Islamic State in Yemen (IS-Y), the latter lacking any notable territorial influence (Australian National Security, 2025).

Since 2021, breakthroughs on either side have been few and far between. The 2022 United Nations-facilitated truce has informally held, bar occasional confrontations, allowing for backchannel negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, catalysed by Oman (AP News, 2023). Houthi Red Sea operations and its deepening role within Iran's 'Axis Of Resistance' have obstructed these talks however, so far leading to no sustainable progress.

Humanitarian Emergency

Yemen's humanitarian, poverty, and food crises are the most pronounced of any country globally. Sustained civil war since 2015 has brought Yemen to the precipice of official definitions of famine numerous times (some regarding the country to already be in this state). A starting point of ranking 153rd on the Human Development Index (HDI), 138th in extreme poverty, and 147th in life expectancy in 2015 set feeble foundations for a country that was about to be plunged further into destructive conflict (UNDP, 2024).

Currently, over two-thirds of the population (21.6 million people) are in immediate need of humanitarian aid (IRC, 2025). Food insecurity and hunger are incredibly pervasive and widespread, as 17 million people (49% of the population) are faced with "severe" food insecurity, 5 million of whom are deemed in emergency-level conditions (House of Commons Library, 2025). In the case of children, malnutrition is a rampant force, as 540,000 severely malnourished children face a high risk of death (UN News, 2025).

Essential resources for life, including clean water, sanitation, and access to healthcare, are inaccessible for many, resulting from destruction of already weak civilian infrastructure. This enabled a vast outbreak of cholera in 2016, leading to over 2,000 reported deaths in 2017 alone (WHO, 2017). While a successful vaccination programme helped end the outbreak in 2021, over 2.5 million cases had been reported in the country by then (WHO Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, 2020) and Yemen remains the nation with the highest share of cholera cases at 35% and 249,000 suspected cases at the end of 2024 (WHO, 2024).



Altogether, most of Yemen's population is mired in multidimensional poverty, indicating poverty of basic needs (including health, education, and living standards) alongside measurement of income deprivation. This is the case for 82.7% of Yemen's population, finding themselves in poverty in more than one area alone (UNDP, 2024). Education and sanitation saw the most extreme rates of hardship, with over 70% of the population deprived in these essential areas (UNDP, 2024).



Case Studies

The Stockholm Agreement and UNMHA (2018-2019)



Head of Houthi delegation Mohammed Abdul-Salem and Yemeni Foreign Minister Khaled al-Yaman shake hands alongside UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, 13th December 2018. (Middle East Institute, 2020)

2015 saw the Houthi group take control of the strategically located Hudaydah Port, on the west Red Sea coast of Yemen as part of their wider takeover of the country (Middle East Monitor, 2017).

Houthi control of the port gave it a substantial strategic advantage, with significant consequences for humanitarian aid distribution. Essential cargo deliveries had reduced by more than half by 2017, leaving 3.3 million Yemenis (as well as 2.1 million children) malnourished according to UN reports (Middle East Monitor, 2017). The Saudi-led coalition continuously accused the Houthis of using the port to receive smuggled weapons, funds, and ballistic missiles from its Iranian backers, a charge denied by both Iran and Houthi leaders (Al Jazeera, 2018).

On 13th June 2018 Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and its coalition allies launched their assault on Al Hudaydah, aiming to recapture the port and the wider city. The battle unfolded over three phases, each separated by UN-brokered peace talks (Reuters, 2018). Neither the Houthis nor the Saudi-led coalition were seen as viable governors of the port by the UN, making numerous attempts to bring the port under international jurisdiction (Wall Street Journal, 2018).



It warned that the violence of the battle would result in grave humanitarian consequences, endangering 300,000 children living in the city's vicinity (UN News, 2018) and more than 11 million children who require humanitarian assistance that can enter the country through the port (UNICEF, 2018).

Despite numerous failed attempts, a UN-brokered ceasefire agreement was eventually reached between the internationally recognised Yemeni Government (backed by the Saudi-led coalition) and the Houthi representation on 13th December 2018 in Stockholm. The Agreement was threefold:

- ◆ An immediate ceasefire in the city of Hudaydah and ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa. Supplemented by withdrawal and redeployment of forces.
- ◆ The opening of humanitarian corridors to facilitate the movement of humanitarian aid.
- ◆ A prisoner exchange between the two parties to allow for the release of over 15,000 prisoners (Dijkstal, 2019).

Both parties were given 21 days to fully withdraw troops, the UN then proceeding to set up the 'UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement' (UNMHA), authorised by the Security Council unanimously passing Resolution 2451 to support the Agreement (UN, 2018). This is a UN observer programme consisting of civil authority personnel to work on the ground to support the Agreement's implementation.

The Agreement succeeded in preventing a humanitarian tipping point, averting famine for the 12 million Yemenis at risk of it and allowing the flow of aid to those in desperate need (Al Jazeera, 2018). A joint operations centre to bring the parties together collectively to work on maintaining the ceasefire was established, with representations from each party present 24/7. Moreover, five joint observation posts to reaffirm security in the city and reduce violence were established under UNMHA's supervision (OESGY, 2019).

Regrettably, the steps taken by UNMHA to encourage the next step of full withdrawal of forces never came to fruition. The failure of its full implementation culminated in the Houthis refusing to withdraw troops the next year, culminating in Yemeni Government forces eventually withdrawing from Hudaydah in 2021 and leaving the city to total Houthi occupation (The Guardian, 2021).



Numerous rationale have been proposed as to why the ceasefire and wider agreement collapsed. Parties' lack of adherence to the ceasefire is seen by observers as compounded by the absence of details on how to manage defined breaches, with a full-scale UN monitoring team for the agreement not included within the mandate of Resolution 2451 (International Crisis Group, 2019). Little UN infrastructure to support the agreement or hold parties accountable meant its fate rested upon confidence-building mechanisms, the centrepiece of which being the prisoner exchanges that were subsequently reneged upon. The initial target for this was to achieve the release of 15,000 people within a month, however the 'all-for-all' approach that was proposed to release prisoners on all sides failed to materialise. (UN Press, 2019)

There are successes here that can be built upon, although questions remain on how effective UN agencies can practically or even conceptually be on monitoring ceasefire commitments, as well as catalysing confidence-building mechanisms. Do innovations need to be made on handling a non-state actor as a party to a peace covenant?

The Riyadh Agreement (2019-2020)



Southern Transitional Council and internationally-recognised Yemeni government representatives sign the Riyadh Agreement, 5th November 2019. (Sanaa Center, 2019)



Lessons in handling the fragmented nature, even of coalition forces, to this conflict are ubiquitous in the case of the 2019 Riyadh Agreement, struck between Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (of the Saudi Arabia-backed Yemeni government), Muhammad bin Zayid Al Nahyan (of the United Arab Emirates), and Aydarus az-Zubaydi (of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council).

Saudi Arabia and the UAE entered the Yemeni war in 2015, united under a coalition with West Asian and North African allies in support of the internationally recognised Republic of Yemen Government (ACLED, 2023). This is intended to be a unified force against the Houthis and other non-state actors (including Al Qaeda³ in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This coalition has received substantial arms support from NATO powers, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, primarily through the sale of materiel⁴. In 2016, the US Government had sold US\$1.3 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia (Reuters, 2016), along with the the United Kingdom's sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE increasing by £1 billion in 2019 compared to the year prior (The Guardian, 2019).

While this unified front held, the UAE has further provided strong military assistance to the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Following President Hadi's firing of the heavily critical UAE-aligned officials he had appointed, former Governor of the city of Aden Aydrous al-Zubaidi announced the formation of the STC as an alternative authority for southern Yemen (International Crisis Group, 2021). This new movement has historical connections to Yemen's southern independence movement, (See History Section). In addition, providing succour to the new STC can be seen as the UAE's way of expressing distaste for the Yemeni Islah political party being a constituent of the anti-Houthi bloc, a non-state actor seen as affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. UAE officials consider this movement a major threat to their national security (Washington Institute, 2018).

The ascendancy of the STC was noticed in key clashes in the city of Aden , following accusations by the STC against the Hadi Government and Islah members of being behind missile strikes against their troops and leading commanders (Sanaa Center, 2019). By the end of August 2019, the STC had seized control of the cities of Aden and Zinjibar from the government, resisting Saudi coalition retaliation efforts (Middle East Monitor, 2019).

³ The lack of stability in Yemen has led to it becoming one of the major hotspots left of the terrorist organisation.

⁴ Military materials and equipment.



Disunity amongst the anti-Houthi front was, however, temporarily assuaged through the signing of the Riyadh Agreement on 5th November 2019. Brokered by Saudi Arabia, this saw the Hadi-led Yemeni government recognise the legitimacy of the STC, bringing them into government through an equally balanced cabinet and integrating the STC into the Yemeni Government's Ministries of Interior and Defence (Sanaa Center, 2019). In return, the STC would withdraw from Aden so the Yemeni government could fully re-establish state institutions (Sanaa Center, 2019).

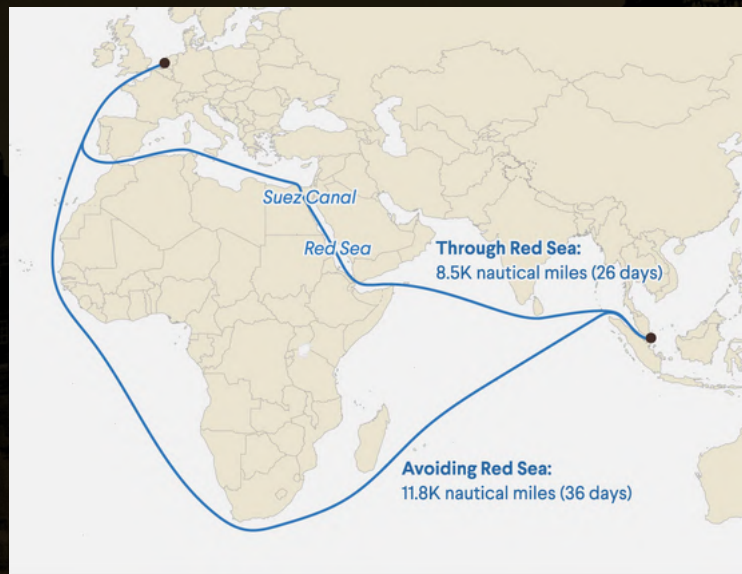
This was, however, short-lived. Less than two months later, the STC withdrew from committees designed to implement the agreement, using the reason of violence in the province of Shabwa it blamed on the UAE-opposed Islah party (Reuters, 2020). Its eventual full withdrawal from the accord in August 2020, pre-empted by a declaration of 'self-rule' across the south in April 2020, accusing the government of 'irresponsible behaviour' (Al Jazeera, 2020).

From this example, we see key considerations for both external dynamics and how non-state actors are approached. An underlying tension between Saudi Arabia and the UAE is seen, the former attempting to integrate the authority the latter had provided support to under its umbrella, with the UAE-backed side choosing instead to reassert itself. Can this regional approach towards non-state actors be made to function? Should these smaller actors be treated with the same legitimacy as national governments? How can the southern question truly be solved?

Red Sea Crisis (2023-Present)

In response to the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas War, the Houthis sought to act in Iran's "axis of resistance" against Israel by firing missiles against Israeli targets in October 2023 (International Crisis Group, 2025). Seeing an opportunity to disrupt a critical shipping route in the Red Sea, the Houthis moved to expand their attacks into the maritime sphere in mid-November 2023, attacking commercial ships indiscriminately. Up to March 2024, the Houthis attacked over 60 ships in the Red Sea (Congressional Research Service, 2024).





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While the Houthis claimed their attacks were solely focused on ships originating or heading to Israel, their missile and drone attacks have affected vessels with no connection to Israel (BBC News, 2025). This has created deep fears of violence, forcing large shipping companies to divert routes away from the Red Sea and Suez Canal.(CNBC, 2024) By March 2024, over 2,000 ships had abandoned the Red Sea as their preferred routes (The Business Standard, 2024).

The Red Sea is a critical artery for global trade. Disruption here importantly raises costs for consumers, especially in terms of energy as about 12% of total global seaborne oil and around 8% of global LNG (liquefied natural gas) passes through the Red Sea (ING, 2024). States supportive of Israel's actions in the Israel-Hamas War have faced significant inflationary pressures since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, a point that renders further disruption to global supply chains as a new weapon in the Houthis' arsenal.



This crisis saw both diplomatic and military approaches deployed. The UNSC passed Resolution 2722 on 10th January 2024; targeting the Houthis as a non-state actor, it called for them to immediately stop all attacks on vessels passing through the Red Sea, as well as for the release of the captured Galaxy Leader ship and its crew. Furthermore, it condemned the provision of military equipment to the Houthis that violates Resolution 2216 (UN Press, 2024).

Despite the above Resolution's passage, the Russian Federation criticised its authors for seeking to "legitimize the coalition's actions in hindsight" (UN Press, 2024). This is in reference to the aforementioned Operation Prosperity Guardian. From 12th January 2024, the United States and United Kingdom (with support from other allies) launched continuous cruise missile strikes and airstrikes against key Houthi targets, including radar systems, air defence systems, launch sites, and missile sites (The Guardian, 2024). These attacks were justified as a defence of 'freedom of navigation' by then-president Biden (BBC News, 2025).

This military response continued until 6th May 2025, which saw a temporary ceasefire between the United States and the Houthis, ending on 6th July 2025 with the Houthis resuming Red Sea shipping attacks, after the US's attack on nuclear facilities in Iran the previous month. Iran's use of the Houthis as their proxy shows this to be a form of indirect retaliation, despite technically being a non-state actor.

The headline implication of this case study is the internationalisation of the Yemeni crisis, specifically in economic and security terms. Aside from this though, the intervention pursued by the US and its allies was not only directed at a non-state proxy, but circumvented the Security Council's mere condemnation. Questions around how chokepoints can be exploited to create global security flashpoints and how the Security Council can better counter non-state actors should be asked.



Points of Discussion

Internationalisation of the Crisis

What began as a civil war has mutated into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia (alongside its allies) and Iran, with its 'axis of resistance'. This can be seen through the lens of a regional struggle for control and influence over the Middle East, however even a regional consideration does little to address its inextricable entanglement with the international balance of power.

This is how the crisis has been internationalised; less through international organisations uniting global actors in action, but global actors being drawn in by threats to strategic interests.

It should crucially be noted that the Houthis developed independently of Iran and posed a security threat to Saudi Arabia prior to evidence of Iranian backing emerging. Their emergence in the 1990s as an opposition Shiite armed movement began as a rebellion against President Saleh's Sunni-majority government of Yemen (BBC News, 2025), which they saw as unduly influenced by Saudi Arabia, eventually crossing into the country for the first time in November 2009 (The Wilson Center, 2022).

Iran could see this instability as both an opportunity and a security threat, as even a collapse of a Saudi-allied government could have precipitated an earlier intervention than 2015 that would have reasserted Saudi influence in Yemen. Therefore, their subsequent bolstering of Houthi military capabilities, funnelled through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), rendered the Houthis dependent on Iran as a security supplier and, consequently, an implicit Iranian presence in Yemen.

International actors further afield are plunged into a multidimensional strategic dilemma. Alongside the 'axis of resistance' being also present in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Gaza (Hamas), countering this with Saudi Arabia aligned countries' ambition of preventing Iran from gaining access to nuclear weapons becomes a difficult balance to strike.



Iran's goal of regional dominance, promoted by Russia and China (both consistently vetoing US-led sanctions (Simpson, 2010)), is one it seeks to manifest through both its capture of non-state actors and nuclear weaponry. With states hostile to Iran opposing both, will one have to give for a chance at peace?

Maritime Security and Humanitarian Access



Oil tanker Marlin Luanda catches fire following an attack in the Gulf of Aden, 27th January 2024. [(CNN, 2024)]

As epitomised by the Red Sea Crisis case study, the position of Yemen adjacent to the Red Sea renders maritime security a critical dimension of the war. The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden have also become war zones, endangering commercial ships that rely on the Red Sea route as a straightforward point of access to South East Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific.

Decades' long reliances on lengthy supply chains, insured by a concomitant post-Cold War dividend of globalised free trade, have made the Red Sea an ever-more important target for the Houthis to disrupt in order to advance their broader ideological aims against Israel, the US, and their wider Western allies. The advent of specialised long-range weaponry and drone technology has made moot the need for naval capabilities to wage war in the seas, providing even non-state actors with a role in maritime combat.

Despite this, traditional warships enabled a naval blockade by the Saudi coalition from 2015, with these positioned in Yemeni waters to prevent supplies from reaching the country. It is this blockade that has caused significant humanitarian strife across Yemen.



At its core, this blockade imposed broad restrictions on aid and essential goods from reaching civilians, including food, fuel, and medicine (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The Saudi-led coalition's progression of this to closing airports and seaports across Yemen completely led to widespread criticism by the UN and over 20 aid groups, as this prevented any humanitarian aid from reaching civilian populations (AP News, 2017). This intense restriction was later lifted, although reports continued even into 2021 of United Nations cleared ships carrying essential supplies being held up by Saudi Arabian vessels (The Intercept, 2021).

While the total blockade has been eased, with Saudi Arabia denying any blockade, warships continue to be present in the surrounding maritime environment, with a looming threat of tightened blockade continuing to be a weapon of war.

Above all, managing the forces of traditional warships and a profusion of anti-ship weaponry are key to any solutions on restoring maritime security around Yemen. Continually impeded humanitarian aid flows via sea, exacerbated by the Red Sea Crisis and the difficulties of distributing aid via land, will continue unless an approach to restoring maritime security can be achieved. UNCLOS affirmations of 'freedom of navigation' are crucially not adapted to organised non-state actors like the Houthis. Even though they possess the tacit state support of Iran, any sovereignty they possess is not expressed through the traditional conception of the state, lacking even an organised naval presence to target vessels within waters. Any solution will be devised, consciously or unconsciously, with an approach to the legitimacy of non-state actors.

Legitimacy of Non-State Actors

The UN Charter's basis is one of states being equal, each endowed with their own sovereignty through the Article 2(1) principle of "Sovereign Equality", with member states prohibited from violating another state's "territorial integrity of political independence" (UN, 2025). Post-World War II, this order of the 'state' as the preeminent institution of sovereignty was dominant and unquestionable, its foundations dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia. However, this norm the United Nations sought to entrench now weakens its ability to reckon with non-state forces that violate that principle of "Sovereign Equality".



For the Houthis, while occupying most of north-west Yemen, their status as a government is only recognised by their key backer - Iran. Mass displacement, changing territorial boundaries of control, and its sovereignty arguably being in the hands of Iran (resulting from their reliance on its resources), deprive it of any conventional state characteristics. With this in mind, the Houthis are an illegitimate actor according to the international system, despite governing territory. Accordingly, this pushes the Houthis into a unique position, complicating negotiation and potential accountability mechanisms beyond simple non-recognition of their territory.

Why so? A simple answer to facilitate more UN-brokered attempts at peace would be to treat the Houthis with the same legitimacy as a state by virtue of it controlling territory, even if this violates the internationally recognised borders of Yemen and its Hadi-led government, enabling formalised diplomatic relations that smooth the implementation of agreements.

In previous situations involving non-state actors (notably Al-Qaeda and ISIS/ISIL during the War on Terror), Chapter VII of the UN Charter is a default approach by member states, enabling interventions against 'threats to the peace' (UN, 2025). Perhaps what roadblocks this in the case of Yemen is Iran utilising the Houthis as part of a quasi-intervention in Yemen. Any direct intervention against the Houthis could be seen as a national security threat in Iran's eyes, as the official uncertainty around the position of Iran as either actively or passively intervening in Yemen is a decision Iran can take at the moment it benefits their interests most.

The roles of AQAP and IS-Y as more decentralised non-state actors should also not be diminished. Any actions that alter the perceived legitimacy of the Houthis could also impact how these other non-state actors are seen in the view of international law. Questions would need to be answered about the criteria of higher-level engagement with non-state actors, and how the UN approaches this. Moreover, any true peace agreement involving the Houthis, the Hadi-led government, and Saudi-led coalition would need to address how their territorial operations are treated, relating to their dispersed yet lingering presence in rural areas.



Violations of International Law



U.S. President Donald Trump greets Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman, prior to signing a US\$142 billion arms deal, 13th May 2025. | (Al Majalla, 2025)

A litany of international law violations have been found across this conflict, from war crimes overwhelmingly harming innocent civilians to unimaginably detrimental breaches of international humanitarian law. International law has little means for consistent enforcement, again owing to the principle of sovereign equality, but international organisations (including the International Criminal Court) and the United Nations itself have provided institutional examples of how accountability for such crimes could be advanced.

What exists as a fundamental complication to how the commonplace flouting of international law in Yemen could be addressed is how culpability may not be confined to solely the chief belligerents of the conflict (the Houthis, the Saudi-led coalition with its ally organisations, AQAP, and IS-Y). Third-party complicity in war crimes, of states like the United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Iran, could in fact prevent any realistic accountability.

On the ground in Yemen, any standards of war or basic expectations for the protection of civilians have been erased from memory, on all sides of the conflict. Verified UN reports feature indiscriminate bombing and airstrike campaigns by the Saudi-led coalition, the planting of landmines by the Houthis, and immeasurable harm done to civilian infrastructure (including schools and hospitals), as well as to civilians themselves (UN News, 2020). Notably, just airstrikes alone (bar other tactics) have led to over 19,200 civilian casualties (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025).



At least 4 million people have been displaced, facing further suffering despite this (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025). Tactics by both sides have seemingly targeted civilians, including enforced disappearances, sexual violence, torture, arbitrary detention, and arbitrary killings (UN News, 2020). Children have been especially vulnerable, as both the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition have been verified to have cumulatively recruited over 4,000 children for combat (UNICEF, 2023). Poor educational and health facilities further compound this loss of development, an area that shows little sign of improving from the unnecessary restrictions imposed by both sides on aid projects designed to restore civilian quality of life (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

How are third-parties implicated? These above crimes may not have been directly committed by states such as the United States and United Kingdom, but the arms and military support they have provided to Saudi Arabia, and the selfsame support given to the Houthis by Iran, could hold them complicit (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025). Providing military intelligence, training, and logistical support also stand as criteria for complicity, as alleged by the UN Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) on Yemen in 2022 (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025).

Notwithstanding this, the balance of power regarding whether effective accountability could be achieved for the crimes above rests in the hands of those third-parties. Vetoes on the UN Security Council, standing arms deals, and varying commitments to international organisations tasked with accountability (exemplified by the US's lack of commitment to the ICC Rome Statute), at least allow these states to determine who suffers consequences of violating international law, and whether consequences should exist at all.



Key Stakeholders and Blocs

The Houthis and their Backers

Since the start of the war in 2014, the Houthis have remained the principal opposition in the war against the internationally recognised coalition-backed government. They have remained well entrenched in the country and continue to receive support from foreign sources. The primary such source is the Islamic Republic of Iran and its “axis of resistance” which mostly fights against US, Israeli and Saudi interests in the region.(Reuters, 2024) As the only major Shia Muslim state, many have also called Iran a “natural ally” to the Zayadi Shia Houthis in ongoing tensions between the two major branches of Islam. Aside from Iran itself, a number of other international actors have also been accused of (and in some cases admitted to) supporting the Houthi insurgency. Those include Russia, China, North Korea, as well as a few other US, Saudi or Israel rivals, such as the Gaddafi government in Libya up until his overthrow in 2011. (Zhang, 2024)

The Coalition-Backed Government

Since the start of the war, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia has backed a Yemeni government led by Hadi himself in an attempt to push back against the Houthis. This government has received broad international support, including from the United States and the UN at large, however the fighting has persisted nonetheless. With the major backers also being the preeminent regional powers, the civil war has turned into something of a proxy conflict for the Saudis and Iran. (Jones, et al., 2024) Regardless, this bloc seeks to reinstate what they deem as the legitimate government (even after Hadi himself resigned in 2022) and push out the insurgency. Despite this, it is useful to remember that this isn't always a unified bloc, especially due to its high reliance on foreign support. Internal divisions are also sometimes unclear.



A subfaction in the conflict, known as the Southern Transitional Council seeks independence for southern Yemen as a whole. Previously backed by the UAE, they are now part of the coalition government, however their goals remain different from those of the rest, adding a layer of complexity to solving this conflict for good. (Sanaa Center, 2023)

Western-aligned Powers (US and UK)

Since the outbreak of the conflict and the formation of the Saudi-led coalition to back the Hadi government, the United States and United Kingdom have provided tangible support to Saudi Arabia in the pursuit of its intervention.

How does this manifest itself? Crucially, we see a marked shift away from traditional Western interventionism in the Middle East through direct means, towards an approach of materiel provision, intelligence support, and training of Saudi-led forces. 2016 saw the US sell US\$1.3 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia (Reuters, 2016), along with the United Kingdom's sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE increasing by £1 billion in 2019 compared to the year before (The Guardian, 2019).

This perhaps derided approach by the West in its attempts at statecraft in the Middle East has still come under heavy criticism. Accusations levelled at Saudi Arabia of violating international law in its bombing campaign, seen as indiscriminate due to an estimated 19,226 civilian casualties by 2023, have implicated the West as complicit in these violations (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Such pressure led to an initial deceleration of arms sales, with the Biden administration freezing the sale of weapons for offensive operations to Saudi Arabia and the UAE in 2021, for example (CNN, 2021). However, recent years have shown a continued insistence on weapons sales. Not only has the second Trump administration recently agreed a significant US\$142 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, declared as the 'biggest arms deal in history' (The Guardian, 2025), but the United Kingdom has reportedly ignored legal advice to cease arms sales (Middle East Eye, 2025).



Guiding Questions.

Below is neither an exhaustive, nor a compulsory set of questions that can be kept in mind when debating the agenda topic, writing Position Papers, or even contributing to the substance of Working Paper concepts. As exclusively guiding questions, these are starting lines for consequential facets of the agenda topic that can be run with and pursued in a multitude of directions at one's own discretion. Moreover, as a Dais, we profoundly encourage delegates to introduce unconsidered aspects of what is already an overlooked security threat, as a holistic debate is equally as critical as resolution creation:

- ◆ Does the Council have a greater role to play on the ground that can be validated and justified through its mandate?
- ◆ How might the tools at the Council's disposal be best tailored to the current situation of a de facto partition?
- ◆ As much of the fate of any peace covenant rests on the shoulders and whims of non-state actors (such as the Houthis but also AQAP), what accountability mechanisms can the UN enforce on a group that it does not technically recognise as legitimate?
- ◆ What precedents of negotiating with and legitimising non-state actors could any peace agreement set, especially if brokered by the UN?
- ◆ What is the role of regional organisations in fostering dialogue between communities and groups caught in conflict? How can the Council best empower them?
- ◆ In what ways can historical grievances with previous regimes and separatist sentiments be heard and included within new settlements?
- ◆ How might the fragmented nature of present alliances translate post-war, with special reference to the Southern Transitional Council and similar separatist movements?
- ◆ What measures can the Council implement to deliver progress on easing the humanitarian crisis, while simultaneously promoting human development long-term?



- ◆ Following the collapse of the Stockholm Agreement, what challenges has UNMHA faced? Should its mandate and resources be expanded as part of a peace process, or should resources be diverted to other regions of Yemen in need?
- ◆ Has the Council proven itself to be effective in responding to this conflict and, consequently, is it best placed to monitor the security situation post-war?
- ◆ If the present de facto partition is to continue, how can the Council and the wider UN facilitate the peaceful establishment of state institutions, the rule of law, and the guarantee of self-determination?
- ◆ How can regional and international organisations work in collaboration with local officials to rebuild shattered and wrecked civilian infrastructure?
- ◆ Despite its lack of territory, how can the terrorist activities of non-state actors (such as AQAP and IS-Y) be fought by new authorities and what threat does this pose to state cohesion in the future?
- ◆ What security guarantees could a new settlement involve for Saudi Arabia and the state(s) that emerge out of Yemen? How could the Council play a role without undermining sovereignty?
- ◆ In terms of maritime security, how can this be restored for further guarantees of economic security, appreciating the interplay between the Houthis and other adversaries (such as Israel and the United States)?
- ◆ How can the Council work with local communities to establish a means for war crimes and human rights violations to be heard and for relevant individuals to be tried?
- ◆ Would members of the Council acknowledge a tacit role in the crisis through arms sales? How can the Council work within its mandate to implement checks and balances into arms trading and intelligence sharing, to then be used to violate international law?
- ◆ What does the Council have at its disposal that it can leverage for the primary purpose of long-term internal security in Yemen and external security for the region and its maritime waters?



What should Resolutions Address?

Building upon the previous Guiding Questions, these points illustrate the comprehensive nature the Dais recommends any Resolution appreciates with respect to the topic. Once again, these points are neither an exhaustive, nor a compulsory set, and a Resolution that expands upon these main issues will be warmly welcomed at the end of the Conference:

- ◆ Restoring maritime security. With a ceasefire between the Houthis and the US on the Red Sea Crisis all but suspended, this is a crucial time to make progress on maritime security in the Red Sea and the Strait of Aden. The now possibly deadly nature of this route is a disaster for trade and has created a bottleneck, as this is a vicious theatre of combat. UNCLOS and the concept of 'freedom of navigation' will need to be debated as to what qualifies as 'freedom of navigation' in this space.
- ◆ Progress towards an all-encompassing peace agreement. This should be the obvious focus of any Resolution, whether through formalising backchannel talks between the Houthis and the Saudi coalition, or involving third-party states (such as Iran or the United States), ideas on how a settlement can be achieved and sustained for the long-term will need to be featured. Furthermore, choices on how institutions could work and how non-state actors feature in agreements will be significant.
- ◆ Addressing the Southern separatist angle and how allied groups will co-exist. Coalitions to resist a shared enemy often find future enemies amongst themselves. The Southern Transitional Council's integration into government is sustaining for now, but a Resolution cannot ignore the history behind the now fractured unified Yemeni state.
- ◆ The wider Middle East picture. While not a specific policy issue, the internationalisation of the crisis introduces implications for either the Iranian 'axis of resistance' or US-backed Saudi Arabian power. A Resolution may be the eventual product of compromise, however this does not need to be confined to Yemen.



- ◆ Humanitarian crisis and international law. In the short term, the conflict has created and prolonged a dire state of need for clean water, food supplies, and medicine, the flow of which needs to be uninterrupted. Although, this needs to be balanced with the security needs above with the Council's specific mandate kept in mind. Moreover, decisions on international law violations will be critical, as part of a peace agreement to tackle arms trading and for accountability reasons.

Alongside these major points, we would encourage any Resolution proposed to answer these questions:

1. What measures and mechanisms can be deployed to secure a sustained cessation of hostilities, leading the pathway to a nationwide ceasefire?
2. What frameworks can the Security Council help establish in coordination with regional bodies and/or member nations to sustain peace efforts and possibly de-escalate proxy dynamics?
3. How can the Security Council facilitate the operation of key infrastructural channels, ports and on-ground chokepoints for unhindered aid delivery for Yemeni citizens, ensuring their overall security?
4. What can be learnt from UNMHA's successes and failures? How can the Security Council improve their approach and ensure sustainable and long-term functioning of initiatives like UNMHA?
5. How can the Security Council address Yemen's regional fragmentation and foster cohesion among regional actors in order to conduct meaningful negotiations, ones in which no party prematurely withdraws during the initial stages of the process?
6. How should the Security Council engage with the Houthis, bearing in mind that its approach will set a critical precedent for future dealings with violent, extremist Non-State Actors? What framework/s of engagement policies should the Council establish for interactions with non-governmental entities and armed groups?
7. How can the Council establish maritime security and moreover, sustain it for the long run?
8. How will the Security Council address violations of international law, and will it establish mechanisms to ensure accountability for war crimes, including those in which regional actors or other member states may be implicated?



Additional Resources

The Dais encourages delegates to utilise the materials below in pursuit of their own conference preparations. However, this list (in conjunction with this Study Guide) is intended to serve as a starting point for deeper research specific to your country and the issues you wish to advance during debate.

Security Council Resolutions

S/RES/2216 (2015) - Targeted arms embargo, increase in members of Yemen Panel of Experts, pushes for Houthi withdrawal.

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

S/RES/2451 (2018) - Implementation of Stockholm Agreement.

[[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2451\(2018\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2451(2018))]

S/RES/2624 (2022) - Expanded arms embargo.

[<https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2624%282022%29>]

S/RES/2722 (2024) - Red Sea attack condemnation.

[<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4033392?ln=en&v=pdf>]

S/RES/2742 (2024) - UNMHA extension.

[<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4053874?ln=en>]

Other Resources

The War in Yemen, Mapped - Johnny Harris - YouTube [<https://youtu.be/qsO-rULEfrk?si=ABQM9OYmOopU7UVW>].

A mapped timeline of the war since circa 1990, useful for visualising the multitude of actors at play.

What the Red Sea ship attacks are really about - Vox - YouTube

[<https://youtu.be/nPhTwmylZi8?si=s9WuaFXHWWR9yjIQ>].

Provides further background on the Red Sea crisis and the interplay between international actors and a non-state actor.



Palik, Julia. 'Watchdogs of Pause: The Challenges of Ceasefire Monitoring in Yemen'. *International Peacekeeping*. 28(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2021.1918004>

Provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by UNMHA monitors in Hudeydah, tasked with upholding the 2018 Stockholm Agreement.



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