

# Security Council – Research Report II

## Addressing the Conflict in Yemen and the Red Sea Region

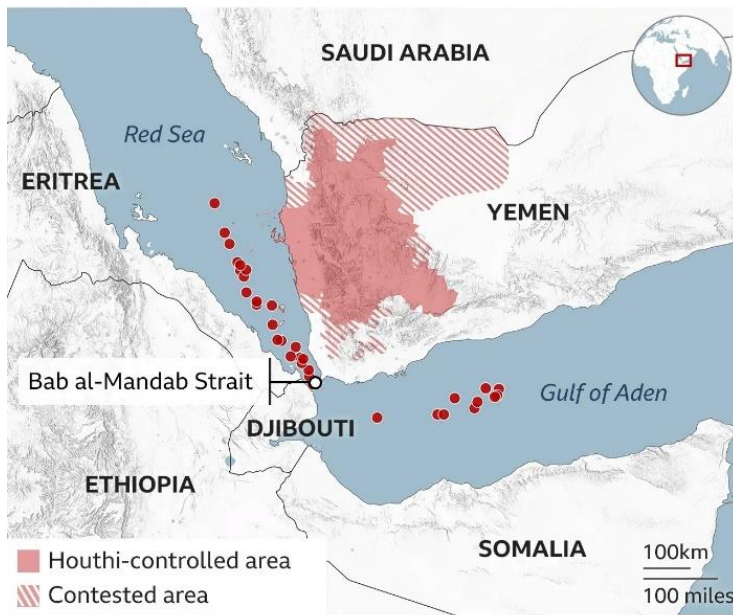
### Introduction to the Topic:

The Yemeni War, which worsened in 2015, is a crisis on many dimensions: it is essentially rooted in various local, regional, and international parties based on political, social, and economic grievances against the regional power struggles-most noticeably between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The two main parties are the Houthi movement and the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. The Houthi Movement, officially called Ansar Allah, is a Zaydi Shia Islamist political and military organization that emerged in Yemen in the 1990s. It germinated from among the revivalist movement of the Zaydi Muslims, which was situated in northern Yemen. The latter has resisted foreign influence while trying to further their community interests. On the other hand, President Hadi has been supported by a Saudi-led coalition that includes several Arab nations, mostly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but also Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, and others. The coalition was put together in 2015 with the aim of restoring Hadi's authority and fighting against the Houthi movement, which had forced him from power.

The conflict began in 2011 as a crisis associated with the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring of 2011 consisted of a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that appeared late in 2010 and swept the Middle East and North Africa. It was meant to challenge the deeply entrenched dictatorships, bringing about massive political changes in several countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. It thus led to mass protests against the long rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. A transitional government took over after he left and grappled with ingrained problems, including poverty, corruption, and sectarian divides. Matters took a turn for the worse when, in September 2014, the Houthis seized control of Sana'a. That urged Saudi Arabia, in March of 2015, into military intervention either because President Hadi had sought asylum in Saudi Arabia after being ousted from power or because Saudi Arabia suspected the Houthi movement was an Iranian proxy and thus one capable of calling stability and safety of the Arabian Peninsula into question. It has now become a humanitarian tragedy, resulting in the risk of hunger and disease, displacement of millions and the destabilization of the region of the Red Sea, including the international shipping routes and regional security.

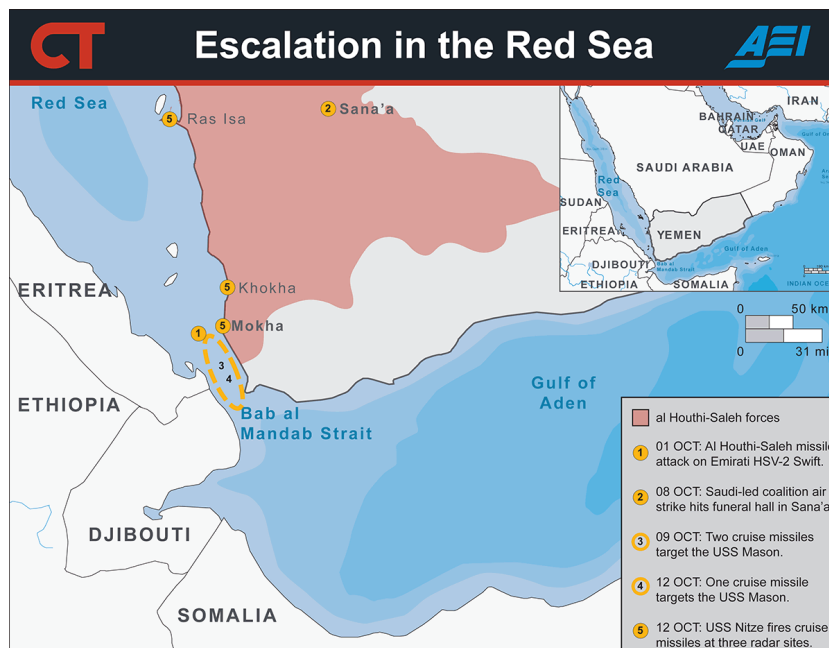
### Shipping damaged in attacks off coast of Yemen



Source: Ambrey Intelligence, 13 March, and Acted, Dec 2023

BBC

**Figure 1.1** – Ships damaged in attacks off the coast of Yemen Near both Houthi-controlled and contested areas (SOURCE?)



**Figure 1.2** – Escalation of the conflict with key events mapped out. (Refer to key)  
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## Background Information:

The roots of the Yemen conflict are complex, with historic events, social dynamics, and regional rivalries combining in ways that have given rise to the modern political landscape. A seminal event in the process was the unification of Yemen in 1990, whereby North Yemen and South Yemen united to form the Republic of Yemen. This unity sought to bring together a single nationality, but it also underlined profound tensions between tribal, regional, and political constituencies that had long divided the south from the north. The north was essentially Zaydi Shia and the south predominantly Sunni, with different political thought, different concepts of government, and different social mores-another factor in continued instability. **SUNI AND SHIA ARE DIFFERENT RAMIFICATIONS OF THE ISLAMIC RELIGION**

The newly unified Yemen remained unstable due in part to high unemployment and decline in oil revenues and also because southerners were feeling politically marginalized. With some degree of self-governance through its prior socialist government, the southern people felt estranged in this completely new political landscape dominated by the North. These tensions exploded in the civil war of 1994, where the government of the north, headed by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, put down a secessionist movement of the south. The fighting not only sharpened regional divides, it also intensified bitterness among myriad factions that thus prepared the ground for outbreaks to come.

In 2011, the so-called Arab Spring motivated uprisings throughout the Middle East, including Yemen. Demonstrations by citizens filled the streets in protest against President Saleh's regime, which had been in power for more than three decades. The protests were driven by general discontent with corruption, economic mismanagement, and the lack of political freedom. Eventually, increasing pressure from the protests forced Saleh to resign, in 2012, paving the way for a transitional government to be formed under his vice president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. But this transitional government was poorly prepared to face the many challenges that beset it: a failing economy, high unemployment, and inflation ran riot, creating fertile ground for discontent.

In the midst of chaos, different factions started to **flex their muscles (please, revise expression)**, most prominently the Houthis, a Zaydi Shia group from northern Yemen. For a long period of time, the Houthis had felt discriminated against and disenfranchised, especially after being targeted in earlier government crackdowns. They had managed to take advantage of popular discontent with the transitional government to pose as protectors of the downtrodden and disaffected. The roots of their grievances were planted in political exclusion and economic underdevelopment, to which many Yemenis could relate.

In 2014, the Houthis initiated an armed process that eventually enabled them to take control of the capital city, Sana'a. Such a situation led to the complete collapse of the transitional government, creating such a power vacuum in the country that further weakened the already shaky conditions. This case soon grew into a regional conflict following an intervention from Saudi Arabia, in 2015, which it regarded as an affront to its national security and hegemonic influence within the region. It consisted of several Arab states, such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, whose stated goal was

to reinstate the Hadi government and curb what they perceived as Iranian expansionism in the region.

Thus, this intervention turned the conflict into a sort of proxy war: Saudi Arabia and its allies supported the Hadi government, while Iran supported the Houthis. The involvement from outside actors further complicated the local dynamics as the conflict became entangled with the broader geopolitical rivalries in the Middle East. Historical relationships among those countries have been marked by competition for influence, sectarian affiliations, and different political ideologies that further fuel the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Of particular significance is the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, as both nations vie for dominance in the region, a factor that has made resolution increasingly elusive and the suffering of the Yemeni people even more terrible.

### Recent Developments:

Major developments mark the conflict in the past few years. The United Nations has described the situation in Yemen as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 24 million people in need of assistance. Famine, cholera outbreaks, and malnutrition have reached alarming levels. Several attempts at ceasefires have been made, including an UN-brokered ceasefire last April 2022, which should have allowed for humanitarian access to pave the way for peace talks. Though some progress has been witnessed in that direction, violations have also been reported.

Besides, the conflict has consequences on regional security, especially around the Red Sea, where shipping routes are so critical to the global trading system. The Houthis launched attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, raising concern over the security of the trade-route. The UN, however, has continued to facilitate the peace talks; recently, in 2023, discussions happened, but clearly, no political solution has yet been found because of a consensus not being reached among parties on fundamental issues.

### Focus of the Debate:

The debate should be mainly focused on aiding with the humanitarian crisis, assuring that no more humanitarian violations take place, facilitate peace talks between both parties, and find a diplomatic solution to mitigate the situation in Yemen.

### Significant Parties:

**Houthi Movement:** Armed group controlling northern Yemen that seized power amid political instability and public discontent. Gained prominence in 2014 with the capture of Sana'a.

**Government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi:** Internationally recognized government supported by Saudi Arabia and allies, which struggled to maintain control after the Arab Spring and Houthi takeover. It was established in 2012 after Saleh's resignation.

**Saudi-led Coalition:** Military intervention to restore Hadi's government, due to concerns about Iranian influence in Yemen and regional security. Launched military operations in March 2015.

**Iran:** Alleged support for the Houthis through military and logistical assistance, that mainly just aims to expand its influence in the region. This support has been ongoing since the Houthis' rise to power.

## Past UN Actions and Possible Solutions:

The United Nations has been actively involved in addressing the conflict in Yemen through various resolutions, peace talks, and humanitarian efforts:

- **UN Security Council Resolutions:** The UN Security Council has passed several resolutions aimed at addressing the conflict, including Resolution 2216 (2015), which condemned the Houthi takeover and called for their withdrawal from occupied territories.
- **Peace Talks:** The UN has facilitated multiple rounds of peace talks, including the Geneva talks in 2015 and the Kuwait negotiations in 2016, although these efforts have yet to provide a lasting resolution.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** The UN has launched several humanitarian appeals to address the situation in Yemen, with agencies like the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF providing aid to millions affected by the conflict.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** The UN has established mechanisms to monitor the humanitarian situation and report on violations of international humanitarian law, including attacks on civilians and the use of child soldiers.

Possible solutions for the crisis include:

- Facilitating peace talks;
- Maintaining safety in the Red Sea to allow global trade through the Red Sea;
- Halting the interference of other middle eastern countries on Yemen;
- Monitoring the crisis and escalations;

## Glossary and Key Terms:

**Transitional government:** A transitional government is a temporary political authority established to manage the transition from one form of government to another. It typically governs until official elections can be held, addressing immediate governance needs and preparing for a more permanent political structure. This type of government often emerges during periods of significant political change, such as after a revolution, civil war, or the collapse of an existing regime.

**Sectarian divisions:** Sectarian divisions refer to the social, political, and cultural differences and conflicts that arise between various religious or ethnic groups within a society. These divisions are often based on distinct beliefs, practices, and identities associated with different sects or denominations within a larger religious tradition, such as Sunni and Shia Islam, or among various Christian denominations. Sectarian divisions can lead to tensions, discrimination, and violence, particularly in contexts where one group seeks to assert dominance or where historical grievances exist.

**Proxy war:** A proxy war is a conflict in which two opposing countries or parties support combatants that serve their interests instead of waging war directly against each other. In a proxy war, the primary actors do not engage in direct military confrontation; instead, they provide support—such as funding, weapons, training, or political backing—to third parties or groups involved in the conflict.

**Yemeni War:** The multidimensional conflict that exploded in 2015, involving several local, regional, and international parties, mainly based on political, social, and economic grievances.

**Houthi Movement (Ansar Allah):** A Zaydi Shia Islamist political and military organization that first emerged in the 1990s in northern Yemen, which champions the rights of the Zaydi community and resists foreign influence.

**Zaydi Shia:** The Zaydi Shia is a branch of Shia Islam found mainly in northern Yemen; it has some peculiar religious practices and political identity distinct from the more common Twelver Shia sect.

**President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi:** The internationally recognized president of Yemen who assumed office in 2012 after the resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh. His government has been supported by a Saudi-led coalition.

**Saudi-Led Coalition:** The coalition, initiated in 2015, is a military alliance primarily between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with a proclaimed purpose to restore the government of Mr. Hadi and push back against the Houthis, whom they see as an Iranian proxy.

**Arab Spring:** A wave of pro-democratic protests and rebellions that took place starting in late 2010, sweeping the Middle East and North Africa, challenged dictatorial governments and produced dramatic political changes in several countries.

**Sana'a:** The capital city of Yemen was seized by the Houthis in September 2014, which marked the collapse of the transitional government and thus plunged the country into a spiral of conflict.

**1994 Civil War:** The war in Yemen between the northern government and southern secessionists widened the regional divide and set the stage for further conflicts.

**Humanitarian Crisis:** a situation of widespread suffering, involving famine, disease, and displacement, affecting millions of Yemenis at the hands of the conflict.

**Peace Talks:** Diplomatic discussions facilitated by the United Nations and other entities aimed at reaching a resolution to the conflict, including negotiations held in Geneva and Kuwait.

**Humanitarian Assistance:** The provision of aid in crisis situations to alleviate human suffering, including food, medical care, and shelter. Organizations like the WFP and UNICEF have coordinated such efforts in Yemen.

**Regional Security:** The stability and safety of a geographic area, with a particular emphasis on threats to national interests, trade routes, and the safety of civilians, which has been impacted by the Yemeni conflict.

**Iranian Influence:** Iran's political-military patronage to the Houthis has come to be considered, by the Saudi Arabians and its coalition, as the most significant regional threat in undermining regional stability and security.

**Poor Economic Management:** A highly insufficient system of governance, combined with very unfruitful economic policy implementation that resulted in a state of financial turmoil, heavy unemployment, and inflation, has worsened people's discontent.

**International Shipping Routes:** Important maritime routes through which the conflict in Yemen, especially that initiated by Houthis through attacks on vessels, puts vital global trade in jeopardy.

**Child Soldiers:** The worst violation of human rights, where children are either recruited or used in armed conflict, has been reported in the context of the Yemeni War.

**Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms:** Mechanisms developed by the UN and other agencies to monitor the humanitarian situation in Yemen and to report on violations of international law, including attacks against civilians and other abuses of human rights.

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