

SPC 2

**Addressing the foreign involvement in
the Yemeni civil war**



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Introduction

The Yemeni civil war is an ongoing conflict that began in 2014. It is fought between the Yemeni government, led by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, the former president of Yemen, and The Houthi Armed Movement. Both groups believe that they make up the official government of Yemen. The conflict officially started in 2014 when Houthi rebels took over the capital Sanaa, and started making territorial gains throughout the west of the country, citing the economic and political instability supposedly caused by the Hadi government. The rebels then advanced on Aden, where Hadi's government sat. The advance forced Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia, where he sought financial and military help to combat the rising Houthi movement, which was now backed by the military, loyal to former president Ali Abdallah Saleh.

While the majority of Yemen are Sunni Muslims, the Houthi are Shia, a different branch of Islam. The two branches arose from a disagreement over the succession of the Prophet Muhammed. 85 percent of muslims are Sunni, but some countries such as Iran and Iraq are majority Shia. Due to this alignment in ideologies it is said that Iran has been supporting the Houthi rebels since the start of the movement, to push their influence within Yemen. Saudi Arabia viewed this as a threat so, in response to Hadi's requests, they formed an Arab coalition, which strongly supported the Hadi government. The Saudi-led Arab coalition was formed of Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Sudan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia themselves, each offering varied support to the Hadi government throughout the conflict.

Additionally the United States of America (USA) have sold Saudi Arabia billions of dollars worth of arms since the start of the conflict, and offered their assistance, often materialising in drone strikes conducted by the US Air Force. Other allies such as France and The United Kingdom (UK) have also sold arms to the Saudis. On the other hand, Oxfam reported that Germany and Russia, along with Iran had been supplying arms to the Houthi forces.



Reports from Amnesty International and the United Nations (UN) have called the Yemeni civil war “the biggest humanitarian crisis.” As, along with the fighting, an approximate 23.4 million people in Yemen are in need of humanitarian aid (NRC). For example, the World Food Program (WFP) estimates that 16.4 million Yemenis are “food insecure” despite the large-scale humanitarian programs currently in place. The official death toll is estimated to be 377,000 , with over half of those from indirect causes, such as famine or disease. Additionally many civilians are internally displaced due to the conflict and since the start of the conflict many have chosen to migrate, leaving refugees in many neighbouring countries.

Definition of Key Terms

Civil War

A civil war is defined as a conflict between groups of citizens of the same country, usually over the right to rule. It is a physically violent, organised, big scale event, usually lasting a long period of time.

Coalition

A coalition is defined as a collection of parties, all with the same or similar goals, who work together to achieve the goals. Usually used in government, when multiple parties rule together, in this context, a coalition is an alliance between countries with the same ideas and goals.

Humanitarian crisis

The UN OHCHR (Office of the High Commission for Human Rights) defines a humanitarian crisis as an “event series of events that are threatening in terms of health, safety or well-being” to a large group of people. Usually the result of scarce resources due to conflict, a humanitarian crisis can take many lives and leave communities without homes, food or healthcare.

Famine

Famine is caused by a scarcity in food resources, and results in starvation and malnutrition for a large group of people. It can be caused due a multitude of factors, including war, natural disasters or economic crises.



General Overview

Foreign involvement has been commonplace for centuries, with countries intervening in a domestic situation, either helping out an ally, or to carry out an ulterior motive. In the Victorian Era, the world powers would intervene and 'save' a country in conflict or crisis. The so-called western powers are often the culprits of these interventions, orchestrating coups and supporting sides in conflict. However in the case of the Yemen Civil War, this foreign involvement, on both sides, could be causing one of the greatest humanitarian crises ever.

In 2014, after the Houthi rebels took over Sanaa which officially started the civil war, many foreign governments took interest in the conflict. When President Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia, and asked for their help to fight off the rebels who were rapidly advancing across the country, he triggered an international response to what was before just a domestic conflict. Saudi Arabia formed the Arab coalition, composed of 9 North African and Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Sudan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia themselves,) which backed the internationally recognised Hadi government. Saudi Arabia has been allied with The United States (US) and by extension The United Kingdom (UK) and France, so when they formed the coalition, their western allies pledged to supply the coalition with arms and support. It then later emerged that the Houthis were allegedly getting their weapons and military support from the Iranians, and the coalition accused them of using the Houthis to spread Shia Islam into Yemen, a majority Sunni country. Iran has denied any involvement of the kind, but the US and several other independent organisations such as the Oxfam have accused them of supplying weapons and support to the Houthis and causing the humanitarian crisis. However the same report done by Oxfam, completed in 2015, alleged that German and Russian weapons were also being used by the Houthis.

So while on the surface this war looks like a conflict between rebels and the government, both sides are receiving much external help, with foreign countries backing sides to achieve their own goals, whether that's making money or spreading ideology. But most importantly amongst all of this politics, alliances and accusations, no-one can deny that this conflict has caused the biggest humanitarian crisis ever. An estimated 80% of Yemen's population require instant humanitarian aid. With many fleeing the country and millions internally displaced. The lack of imports has led to widespread hunger and disease, taking more lives than the conflict itself. So we must ask ourselves,



has the foreign involvement, in what was a small scale rebellion, caused this massive humanitarian disaster and how we can go about addressing this problem and helping the suffering people in Yemen.

Major Parties Involved

Saudi Arabia

In 2015, when Houthis were advancing all over southern Yemen, President Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia, where he knew he could find an ally. Seeing the Houthis (and their alleged partners Iran) as threats to the Sunni culture in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the Saudis put together an “Arab Coalition” comprising several other Middle Eastern and North African countries. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sudan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Senegal along with Saudi Arabia themselves received military and financial backing from the USA, UK and France. Since then they have been major players in the conflict, carrying out many military operations, working with the Hadi government, and attempting to negotiate peace talks.

United States of America

In 2015, after the creation of the Saudi-led coalition, Barack Obama made the decision to offer the US forces intelligence and logistical analysis to the Saudi intervention in Yemen. This included working closely with the coalition to align interests and helping the coalition carry out their military operations both on the ground in Yemen and the Navy and Air Force. The US also offered their support in the form of drone strikes, remotely controlled drones that are used to bomb targets, either wanted people or places. These drone strikes have officially been carried out against the Houthi rebels and AQAP, however many reports claim that there have been a large number of civilian casualties due to the drone strikes. Official numbers from the CIA show that 329 drone strikes have been conducted in Yemen, however the Pentagon was to do an internal investigation into the use and effect of these drone strikes after reports of civilian casualties, but no results have been made public. Additionally, throughout the conflict the US has been selling weapons to the Saudis, totalling an approximate \$64.1 billion in the five years from 2015 to 2020. This is up from \$3 billion worth of arms trade in the 5 years prior to the conflict. During the Trump presidency, the US declared the Houthi rebels “a foreign terrorist group,” and while Joe Biden initially promised an end to the US involvement in the Saudi intervention, two years into his presidency there is little to show for it.



Iran

Since the start of the civil war in Yemen, Iran has been accused of backing the Houthi rebels. The US, UK and the Saudi-led coalition have all said that Iran is both supporting the rebels both financially and with their military weapons. Iran has denied all involvement adamantly, with their Supreme Leader saying “The Americans shamelessly support the killing of the Yemeni population, but they accuse Iran of interfering in that country and of sending weapons when Iran only seeks to provide medical and food aid.” Reports from the UN Security Council show that Iran may have been shipping weapons to rebels from 2009 to 2013, before the start of the civil war. However the National Security Council in the US has come to an independent finding that dismissed the idea that the Houthis are Iranian “puppets” and do not carry out Iran's bidding. While the extent of their involvement remains unclear, they remain a major player in this conflict.

United Kingdom

The UK, being an ally of the US and by extension Saudi Arabia, supported the coalition strongly and since 2015 has been supplying arms and supporting the Saudi intervention in Yemen. In 2015 when the intervention started they upped their sale of arms to the Saudis to £1 billion, from £9 million the previous year. In 2016, Sky News reported that along with the sale of arms, the UK was giving military advisors, training and tactics to the Saudis. Reports suggest that since 2015 The UK has sold £5.7 billion worth of arms and military technology to the coalition.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
2011	Arab Springs - Protests in Yemen (along with many other Arab and North African countries, where the protesters opposed the leader.) In Yemen these protests ousted President Saleh and subsequently President Hadi was appointed. This instability allowed Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to occupy land in the east of Yemen and the official start of the Houthi Armed Movement
16-21 September 2014	Battle of Sanaa - Houthi forces advance and capture the capital of Yemen



2015 Houthi rebels, allegedly backed by Iran, continue to advance across western and southern Yemen, demanding a change in governance. President Hadi flees to Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-led Arab coalition is formed to counter the Houthi rebels.

2016 Houthi and coalition forces continue to fight, creating a warzone across most of southern and western Yemen. The humanitarian crisis starts, with millions of citizens affected by the military operations, and with food and medicine imports low, hunger and disease start to become a problem. Additionally, AQAP take advantage of the fighting to secure their stronghold in the east, surviving many airstrikes from the US Air Force

2017 Houthis fire missiles into Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. Iran is accused of smuggling and selling weapons into Yemen to support the Houthis. Former President Saleh is assassinated by the Houthi forces.

2018 Houthi forces take control of the Hodeidah Port, which handles the majority of imports for Yemens 30 million citizens, including food and medicine. In December, Houthi and coalition forces agree to peace talks in Sweden, which resulted in partial ceasefire, ease on imports in Hodeidah and prisoner swaps.

2019 A group of southern separatists, formerly backed by the UAE, advance on Aden and the Saudis help to keep peace in the region by negotiating a deal, to share power in the south, between the Hadi government and the separatists. While the Swedish truce largely works, conflict still continues between the Houthis and the coalition, with the US becoming more involved, launching air strikes on both AQAP and the Houthis.



2020 The UN negotiates a “coronavirus truce” and while it is effective, it is only temporary. An attack on a plane carrying some Hadi government and Southern Separatist officials kills 22, no one took responsibility, but the Hadi government blame the Houthis

2021 The humanitarian crisis reaches new levels with civilians being killed everyday and the country on the brink of widespread famine. The US labels the Houthis “a terrorist group.” Houthis attack the city of Marib, forcing an approximate 140,000 people to flee their homes

2022 President Hadi steps down (possibly due to pressure from the Saudis), subsequently put under house arrest and replaced by a “Presidential Council.” After 2 months of negotiation a 2 month complete ceasefire was put into effect in April, brokered by the UN. This truce will allow help to be provided to the victims of the humanitarian crisis with people like Amnesty International and the Red Cross rushing in to help. Additionally imports such as fuel and medicine will be increased and some commercial flights, to Amman and Cairo, will begin.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Question of Yemen, Security Council, 28 February 2022 (S/RES/2624)

Operative Clause 3 - *Emphasises* that there is no military solution to the current conflict and that the only viable path forward is dialogue and reconciliation among the multiple and varied parties including but not limited to the Government of Yemen and the Houthis, Yemen’s major political and regional parties, and women, youth and civil society;

- Security Council, 14 April 2015 (S/RES/2216)



Operative Clauses 14,15,16 and 17 all outline the terms and conditions of the so-called “2015 Arms Embargo.” This implementation was supposed to stop the flow of arms into Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

- The Stockholm Agreement (2018)

The Stockholm Agreement, signed by both the Houthis and the Hadi government was a deal, brokered by the UN, to de-escalate the conflict in the Red Sea, open up the port of Hodeidah and allow help for the growing Humanitarian crisis.

Previous Attempts to Solve This Issue

In April of 2022, the UN special envoy on Yemen secured a 2 month truce. This truce, brokered by UN official Hans Grundberg, is supposed to be a total ceasefire. Both parties agreed as January of 2022 was the deadliest month of the war in the last four year and the humanitarian crisis has escalated rapidly since then. This truce is designed so that those in need can get the aid that they desire and so that the situation in Yemen doesn't deteriorate even further. However, the truce is temporary and doesn't address the foreign interventions at all, so at the end of the two months, things are more than likely going to return to the way they have been for the last 8 years of this conflict.

Possible Solutions

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is the most important part of this conflict. Millions of people are suffering everyday as a result of the fighting that has been non stop for the past 8 years. While offering humanitarian aid and trying to solve the conflict through diplomacy are important, the fact of the matter is that the Houthis and the Hadi government can't cause problems if they aren't backed by military superpowers from all around the world. The foreign countries are all involved in the conflict to push their own agendas, whether economic, from the sale of arms or petroleum in the area, or ideological, they are willing to put their agendas above the lives of the Yemeni citizens. So while a diplomatic agreement might be the only way to stop the conflict as a whole, the large scale war and death is for the foreign intervention to stop.

This could be achieved in a number of ways, but the most effective might be to sanction countries who are fueling the conflict, either financially or through military power, or restrict the trade and sale of arms into the region. This would stop countries such as the US, the UK and Iran



from selling arms and supporting the two fighting parties in the conflict. Without the support of these superpowers, both sides would struggle to maintain the same level of fighting that occurs today, which would allow for the humanitarian situation to improve, and even if not an end to the ideological conflict, an ease in the physical one.

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