

Forum: Political Committee

Issue: Addressing the political instability in Yemen

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Introduction



Image 1: Civil war in Yemen

Political instability in Yemen has been one of the most prolonged issues in the Middle East over the past decade. Since the outbreak of the Yemeni Civil War in 2014, the region has faced continuous conflict between the government, and Houthi forces. The instability weakened Yemen's political institutions and also triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. According to the Human Rights Watch "more than 18.2 million people need humanitarian assistance" suffering from poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to basic services.

The instability in Yemen not only had consequences for the country itself but also for regional and international security. Trade routes near the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which are crucial for international maritime trade, have been threatened by the ongoing conflict, which has also weakened economic activity and hampered reconstruction efforts.

Addressing political instability in Yemen is therefore essential for restoring governance, rebuilding economic systems, and improving humanitarian conditions. In order to stabilize the nation and provide long-term recovery, international cooperation, discussion between opposing parties, and inclusive political processes will be essential. In this context, the issue is closely relevant to RCIMUN's theme, "In the Wake of Crisis: Rebuilding Trust, Peace, and Prosperity." Yemen's situation exemplifies how continuous conflict destroys the trust between political actors, the government, and civilians. Therefore, efforts to resolve the political crisis must focus not only on ending the conflict but also on rebuilding public trust, strengthening political institutions, and establishing the foundation for sustainable peace and economic recovery.

Definition of Key Terms

Political Instability: A condition characterized by uncertain or volatile political circumstances, such as conflicts, governance issues, or changes in the government affecting safety, and the overall business environment of the region ("What is Political Instability").

Civil War: A war fought by different groups of people living in the same country (Cambridge Dictionary).

Humanitarian Crisis: A serious event that threatens the health, safety, or well-being of a large group of people ("What is a Humanitarian Crisis?").

Peacebuilding: An activity that aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the cultural and structural conditions that generate deadly or destructive conflict ("What is Peacebuilding?").

General Overview

Historical Background of the Conflict

The wave of protests known as the Arab Spring quickly reached Yemen after the Tunisian Revolution. Yemen was among the poorest countries in the region. The government was plagued by allegations of corruption, and a large amount of weapons were in the hands of private individuals. By 2011, the country was already facing challenges from al-Qaeda-linked militants and separatists in the south and Zaydi Shia Muslim insurgents in the north. Yemen had been unified since 1990, and deep divisions between the north and south were present.

In early 2011, popular protests broke out, led by both secular and Islamist opposition groups. Rebel groups such as the Houthis and the Southern Movement also joined the protests. Ali Abdullah Saleh responded with repression, and the country was driven into near-total civil war as various elements of the army defected from the government and joined the protesters. Saleh was almost killed when a bomb went off in a mosque where he and other top government officials were praying on 3 June, which was apparently an assassination attempt. On 23 September, Saleh recovered and returned to work after several months of medical treatment in Saudi Arabia. He left Vice President Hadi in charge during his absence. Hadi, as acting president, met with the opposition and expressed openness to political reforms. However, he rejected the idea of forcing Saleh from power without the president's consent. Meanwhile, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) pressured Saleh to step down to end the political crisis. Eventually, on 23 November 2011, Saleh agreed to resign from the presidency. In return, he was given legal immunity, meaning he would not be prosecuted for actions taken while he was president.

After the resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, Yemen entered a transitional political period aimed at stabilizing the country. In February 2012, Hadi's election peacefully introduced a new government in Yemen, with only a small percentage of voters spoiling their ballots in the single-candidate contest. Hadi, a southerner, especially gained support in former South Yemen,

although the Southern Movement and the Houthis boycotted the presidential election. Despite the new government, political tensions and violence continued in several parts of Yemen. President Hadi made an effort to promote national reconciliation through communication with different political and tribal groups, including separatists and the Houthis. However, instability continued due to separatist tensions, economic difficulties, and regional conflicts.

Rise of Armed Groups and Civil War

The Houthis began protesting against Hadi's government, demanding political and economic modifications in order to resolve a years-long conflict they had been waging against the Yemeni state in mid-2014. The uprising escalated quickly as Houthi fighters moved toward Sanaa, the capital, and effectively seized control of the city from the Yemeni military within a couple of days in September. The forces of General Ali Mohsen Ali Mohsen al-Ahmer briefly fought the Houthis but soon surrendered. At the same time, Saleh was widely suspected of secretly supporting the Houthis and helping them gain power in the capital.

The Houthis and the government agreed on 21 September to form a "unity government" within one month to ease political tensions. However, the Houthi's rejected Hadi's original choice of prime minister, Ahman Awad bin Mubarak, and instead Oil Minister Khaled Bahah was appointed with the armed groups approval. Despite the agreement, the Houthis and the General People's Congress led by Saleh announced on 8 November that they would not participate in the unity government, claiming it was unacceptable to them. In response to their actions, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and United States Department of the Treasury (USDT) imposed sanctions against Saleh and senior Houthi leaders.

The Houthis stepped up their pressure on Hadi's weakened government, seizing the presidential palace and strategic military installations in Sanaa and shelling the president's private residence on 20 January. The following day, they took control of Hadi's home, putting armed guards outside to keep him under house arrest. Hadi, Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, and the cabinet resigned the following day, saying they could not continue to work under the conditions the Houthis had imposed. The rebel group welcomed Hadi's resignation, but continued to keep him under house arrest. The news prompted four southern governorates to announce they would disregard all orders from Sanaa.



Image 2: Territorial control of different groups during the Yemen Civil War

The House of Representatives was to meet on 25 January to discuss whether to accept or reject Hadi's resignation under the Yemeni constitution, but the session was cancelled after the Houthis took control of the parliament building. The United Nations stepped in to attempt a negotiated resolution to what many in Yemen regarded as a Houthi coup. UN negotiations were fruitless, and a Houthi ultimatum to Yemen's political factions to find a solution was not met. On 6 February, the Houthis declared themselves in total control of the Yemeni government, dissolving parliament and installing a Revolutionary Committee led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi

to lead the state in an interim capacity. The announcement sparked protests in Sanaa and other cities, especially in the south.

Post Coup Developments

Reactions to the Houthi takeover were mostly negative, with the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, United Nations, and United States refusing to recognise the "constitutional declaration" and several governorates rejecting the Houthis' authority. With most political parties criticising the coup, Jamal Benomar, the UN envoy to Yemen, announced a restart of national talks over the future of Yemen on 8 February. Benomar said the Houthis had agreed to participate in the talks. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for Hadi to be reinstated as president. The Houthis and other political groups reached a tentative agreement, announced on 20 February, to keep the House of Representatives in place despite the "constitutional declaration" ceasing it two weeks prior. The agreement also sets down that a "people's transitional council" would be established to represent southerners, women, youth, and other political minorities. The next day, Hadi traveled to Aden and condemned the coup and also said that all Houthi-directed actions since 21 September 2014 were invalid.

A fight broke out in the Aden International Airport in March 2015. Forces loyal to Saleh attempted to seize the airport; however, they were defeated by troops and militias under orders from the Hadi administration. The following day, which was an unrelated incident, four suicide bombers detonated themselves in Sanaa mosques packed with Houthi prayers, killing at least 142. The Sunni Islamist group Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS) and the Levant's Yemen branch claimed responsibility.

On 21 March, Hadi declared Aden as the Yemen's temporary capital while Sanaa remains under Houthi control. The next day, Houthi forces advanced toward Aden, capturing key parts of

Yemen's third-largest city, Taiz. They consolidated their grip on much of the south and seized much of Aden itself by early April.

On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia and several other countries announced that they had begun military operations in Yemen against Houthi rebels. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates issued a statement along with Saudi Arabia saying their goal is to "repel Houthi aggression" in Yemen. Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan are also members of the coalition. The coalition launched airstrikes across Yemen, while Egyptian warships attacked Houthi forces near Aden, and Saudi and Houthi troops exchanged fire along the Saudi–Yemen border.

On 8 October 2016, a Saudi Arabia-led coalition airstrike hit a funeral in Sanaa, killing at least 140 people and injuring more than 600, one of the worst death tolls in the two-year war. The coalition later said the strike happened because of faulty intelligence, believing Houthi leaders were gathered there.

The current situation in Yemen remains unstable against a reduction in large-scale fighting in recent years. Since a ceasefire in 2022 between the Houthi and the internationally recognized Yemen government, the frontlines have mostly remained frozen; however, several groups still compete for power. International organizations continue to call for peace and more aid to address the severe human situation.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Houthi Movement: The Houthis, officially known as Ansar Allah, is one of the main groups in the conflict and currently in control of most of northern Yemen, including the capital Sanaa. Their actions played a major role in the rise of the civil war.

Government of Yemen: The Yemeni government, previously led by Hadi, is internationally recognized but in loss of the control of the capital, Sanaa. Since then, it has mostly operated from the South and gained support from international allies to fight against the Houthis.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia supports the official government of Yemen. In order to drive back the Houthi forces, a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen in 2015.

Throughout the conflict, the nation has also conducted military operations and airstrikes to the regions of Houthis, still playing an important role in negotiations and regional security issues.

Iran: Iran has never officially acknowledged its involvement in the Yemeni war. It denies supporting the Houthis despite international reports confirming such support to the Houthis. It is believed that Iranian support affords Houthis additional strategic capabilities, enabling the group to threaten neighboring countries and maritime navigation.

United Arab Emirates: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined the Saudi-led coalition and supported operations against Houthis.

United States: The United States is in support of the official government of Yemen. It provided logistical, intelligence, and advisory support to the coalition, but ended aerial refueling in 2018 and later curtailed some arms sales to Saudi Arabia in response to civilian casualties and congressional action.

Timeline of Events

18 March 2011	The Yemeni revolution began as a part of the Arab Spring, with large protests against the President Ali Abdullah Saleh aiming for his resignation and reform.
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23 November 2011	President Ali Abdullah Saleh signed a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) transition agreement in which he officially agreed to transfer power.
27 February 2012	Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi was elected as the new president of Yemen in a single-candidate election as part of the transition.
21 September 2014	The Houthi Movement took over capital Sanaa, forcing the Yemeni government to lose control of the city.
25 February 2015	President Hadi escaped house arrest and fled to Aden.
26 March 2015	A military coalition led by Saudi Arabia began airstrikes and military operations in Yemen against the Houthi forces.
22 September 2015	President Hadi returned to Aden after months abroad and tried to reestablish the government's presence.
8 October 2016	A Saudi-led coalition airstrike hit a funeral in Sanaa, killing more than 140 people and injuring more than 500, being one of the deadliest incidents of war.
2 April 2022	The United Nations announced a ceasefire, reducing large-scale fighting between the Houthis and the Yemeni government.
2024- Present	Large battles have decreased, however Yemen continues to face political tensions and humanitarian challenges.

UN Involvement

The United Nations has been actively involved in the civil war in Yemen primarily through its peace operations and humanitarian assistance. One of the most significant UN presences in Yemen was the appointment of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to mediate between the Yemeni government and the Houthis. It helped in facilitating the peace-talks and establishing the 2022 ceasefire that temporarily reduced large-scale fighting in the area. Secondly, through the United Nations Security Council, the UN has adopted resolutions calling for ceasefires, negotiations, and the protection of civilians during the war. In addition, several UN agencies such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and World Food Programme (WFP) provided humanitarian assistance. They worked to address healthcare needs, food shortages, and the overall protection of the civilians. Despite these efforts, the UN still faces challenges in accessing some areas for assistance and to achieve long-term political stability.

Relevant UN Documents

Resolution 2140, 26 February 2014 (S/RES/2140)

Resolution 2216, 14 April 2015 (S/RES/2216)

Resolution 2451, 21 December 2018 (S/RES/2451)

Resolution 2452, 16 January 2019 (S/RES/2452)

Treaties and Events

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Transition Agreement: This agreement was signed in 2011 after many months of protests during the Yemeni Revolution. President Ali Abdullah Saleh

agreed to transfer power to Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in return for protection from prosecution.

Stockholm Agreement: The Stockholm Agreement was signed in 2018 between Yemen's warring parties. Its main goal was to reduce military escalation around the port city of Hodeidah and address the humanitarian crisis.

United Nations Brokered Ceasefire: The UN brokered ceasefire was established in 2022. The agreement included measures such as allowing fuel shipments into Hodeidah and permitting limited commercial flights from the Sanaa International Airport.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There have been several regional, national and international efforts to resolve the conflict in Yemen. While they definitely had an impact on the issue, they weren't able to solve it completely and most of them just provided temporary improvements. One of the earliest was the Gulf Cooperation Council Transition Agreement. Although this agreement reduced political tensions after the Yemeni Revolution, it was for a short time. Since it failed to address deeper political, economic, and regional divisions in the country, dissatisfaction remained among the groups, which later contributed to the escalation of the civil war. Another major attempt was the Stockholm Agreement. It did succeed in preventing a large-scale battle in Hodeidah, however due to the mistrust between parties and disagreements over troop withdrawals, its implementation was slow and incomplete. Most recently, the 2022 UN- brokered ceasefire significantly reduced the large-scale fighting. Unfortunately, the ceasefire was temporary and expired within the year without a solid settlement. The lack of trust between the parties involved, the existence of several armed groups with conflicting interests, and the involvement of regional powers that support opposing sides are the main reasons these attempts have failed to completely resolve the conflict.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution is the expansion of internationally monitored ceasefires in Yemen. A longer-term ceasefire under the monitor of the UN could minimize violence and create settlements which will then contribute to meaningful peace negotiations.

Another important step is increasing the number of observers from the UN or other neutral international bodies to ensure that agreements are properly followed by all parties. Establishing clearer monitoring systems and transparent reporting mechanisms may reduce misunderstandings and will strengthen the trust between the government and Houthis.

Humanitarian challenges must also remain as a priority. The situation in Yemen continues to affect thousands of civilians. International organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund or NGOs could increase funding for food, healthcare, and infrastructure programs. Also, aid delivery routes, especially ports and airports in Hodeidah, must be improved as well for humanitarian aid to reach more civilians.

Finally, cooperation between the UN, regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Houthis, and the government of Yemen is essential. A coordinated and inclusive diplomatic approach could increase the chance for peace negotiations. Sustainable peace in Yemen requires progress not only in terms of reducing violence, but also rebuilding political trust and development.

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