

# **Study Guide for the Baltic Modul United Nations Security Council**

On the question of: *Defusing the situation in Yemen to combat the political, humanitarian and developmental crisis.*

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*Esteemed Delegates,*

It is with great anticipation and joy that we welcome you to the Security Council of BALMUN 2021. We want to assure all of you, that the organizers of this year's conference have done an outstanding job and we would like to inform you that we are on track to fill our committee with a large group of young people. It is a great honor and privilege for us to serve as your chairs. This position is a role we are happy to take on, but at the same time, one that we wage with great respect and responsibility.

Before your eyes lay the overview of our committee and our topic, which should serve as the basis for your further research. It includes a historical overview, a timeline, and an overview of the current situation. We encourage you to not stop at the last page of this document. See it as your first step in becoming an expert on the topic as a whole and your country's position. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We wish you the best of luck and are looking forward to meeting you online

Your Chair Cops, Parents of the Security Council

*Kristina Udženija*

*Tom Hradil*

## **History of the Conflict**

### **Pre-unification era**

After gaining de facto independence from the British government in 1964, relations deteriorated with the predominantly Shia north and the rest of Yemen. After the death of Imam Ahmad Bin Yahya, the unifying symbol of Yemen, relations worsened even more. The Imam was succeeded by his son, but the Yemeni army carried out a coup d'état, in which they captured the capital and numerous provinces in the Eastern and Southern parts of Yemen. Subsequently, the Imam was able to escape to Saudi Arabia and he started a counter-revolution in North Yemen. After a grueling Civil War, the army revolutionaries were successful. Coincidentally the Aden Emergency took place, which achieved total independence

for the region of Yemen, which was split into two countries. The North and Southwest, under the control of the republican forces, became the Yemen Arab Republic. The South and Southeast became a Marxist state, under the name of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).

As time would have it, relations worsened with the two entities, each being backed by a global superpower, with the US helping the Yemen Arab Republic and the Eastern block funding the PDRY. In 1972, a war began between the two states, but after the Arab League's mediations, a ceasefire was eventually achieved upon the signing of a bilateral treaty, with a clause stating that reunification would happen soon. However, this would not be the case. After Ali Abdullah Saleh became the president of the Yemen Arab Republic, his government issued a series of drastic notes, complaining about the foreign involvement in Yemen. This would eventually lead to a series of events, known collectively as the "Events of 84", which were sparked by another *coupe d'état* in the P.D.R.Y.

Eventually, this conflict broiled into full-out war between the North and the South, with the North becoming victorious after virtually all members of the South communist politburo were either killed or executed. Finally, on the 22 of May 1990, the two states were merged, and created the Yemen Arab Republic, with Ali Abdullah Saleh as president and the former President of South Yemen, Ali Salim al-Beidh, as Vice President.

As time progressed, it became everlastingly clear that without a strong central political force, Yemen essentially became a triumvirate of three men: The president Ali Abdullah Saleh, a commander in chief Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, and Abdullah ibn Husayn al-Ahmar the leader of the Yemeni Islamist party. However, in 1992 and 1993 the economic situation in Yemen worsened, mainly due to trade disputes between individual tribes, which dominated the market in Yemen. This led to disagreement between the 3 men, which was even worsened by the Vice president's support for a socialist movement in South Yemen. Eventually, armies of the North and South (which were never truly integrated, partly due to their tribal heritage) gathered at their respective borders.

In 1994 a new Civil War started, which saw even more destruction and chaos in Yemen. The socialist forces of the South, supported by Saudi Arabia, were gradually pushed back and ultimately defeated by the republican North. Ali Abdullah Saleh retained his seat as president, and in 1999 he was elected as the first president in a direct presidential election.

## **The First Republic**

In 2004 the first Shia insurgency in Yemen began. A member of the Houthi tribe started a separatist movement seeking to overthrow the government. The Yemeni response was swift, and in a 2005 raid, the group was nearly wiped out. However, this sparked another series of protests in north Yemen, since the founder of the separatist movement was a member of the well-respected Houthi family. This turmoil in north Yemen would go well into 2011 and into the Arab Spring.

#### The Arab Spring and the start of the Civil War

In 2011, the revolutions which swept the Arab world, collectively known as the Arab Spring, started protests in Yemen. These were in response to president Saleh's increasingly authoritarian policies. After a series of clashes between the protesters and the army, Saleh agreed to step down, in favor of his Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. This sparked an uprising in the North, led by the Houthi family, which supported the, now former, President Saleh, and a new Civil War began.

In 2014 the Houthi-led army was able to occupy Sana'a (the nation's capital) and capture president Hadi, who was placed under house arrest. Meanwhile, in the loyalist South, a new Islamist insurgency came to its peak, when a group affiliated with Al-Qaeda started a new rebellion in the coastal provinces of Eastern Yemen. This weakened the loyalist forces, to a degree where Saudi Arabia started to become threatened by the instability in the region.

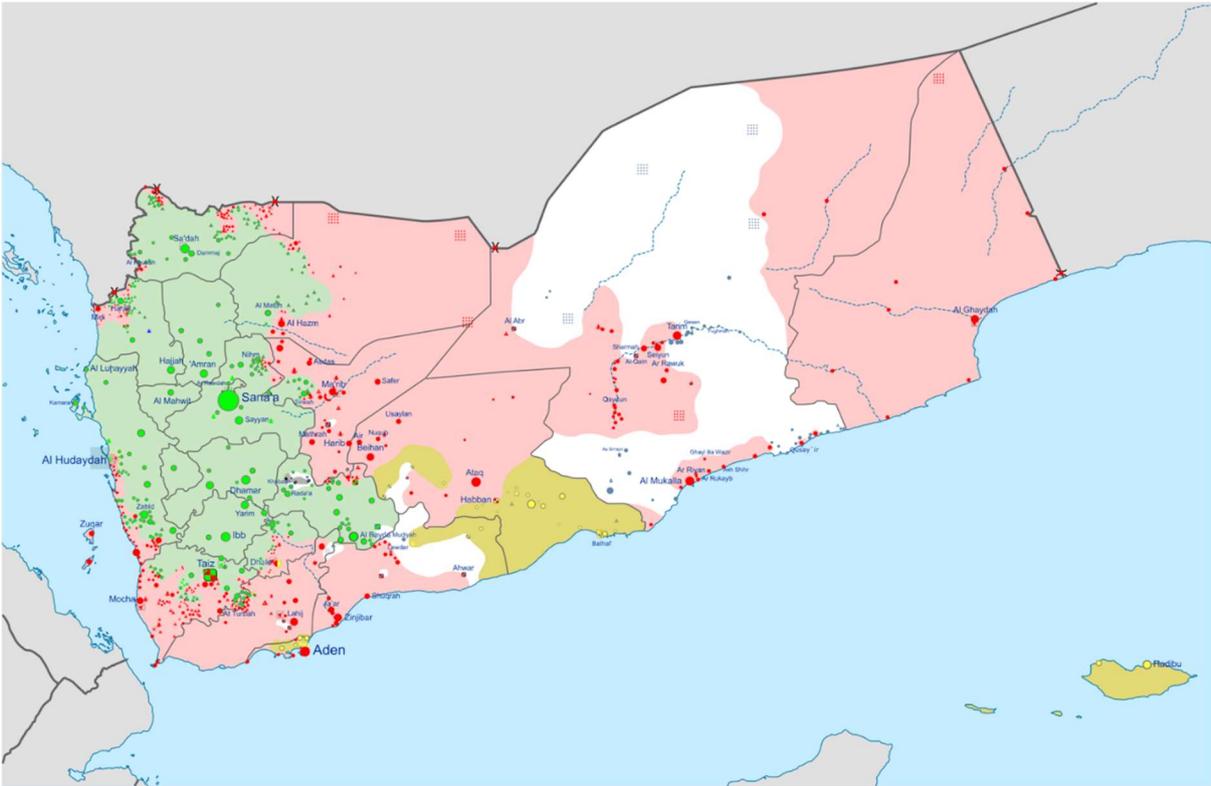
In 2015 president Hadi was able to escape Sana'a and fled to his hometown of Aden, from which he flew to Riyadh, where he addressed the nation and called for a strong counterattack against all insurgency forces. Days after Hadi left Aden, the city fell to the Houthis' hands. This seemed to have been the last spark for Saudi Arabia, and on the 26th of March 2015, its crown prince announced the launch of Operation Decisive Storm, which was supported by a coalition of Arab countries: UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, and Pakistan. A large proportion of the equipment used was provided by the US, who sold it to their ally Saudi Arabia. This bombing campaign was to target Houthi strongholds in South Yemen but quickly evolved into carpet bombing of cities controlled by the Houthis, killing thousands of civilians.

As Hadi's forces were able to take back most of South Yemen, a new insurgency started. The Southern Transitional Council, a separatist movement, quickly captured vast amounts of territory in Southern Yemen, including the port city of Aden. Around the same time, insurgencies carried out by members of the Islamic State sprung out all around Yemen, most

of them unsuccessful, however, one group was able to capture the island of Socotra (it was eventually recaptured in 2017 by a Yemeni-led attack).

### Current situation

The military gridlock continued well into 2020, with only minor progress being made by both sides. On the other hand, the bombing campaign, operated by the Arab coalition, is intensifying, with thousands of civilians dying monthly and an ever-growing threat of famine looming on the horizon, it looks like the two main parties are willing to come to an agreement. In late 2019 Houthi representatives arrived in Saudi Arabia to discuss a possible ceasefire. Although these talks failed, it is a step on which the Arab league can very possibly build, when trying to achieve a ceasefire between the two groups.



Military situation in Yemen on 7 April 2020  
Green: Controlled by the Supreme Political Council ([Houthis](#))  
Red: Controlled by the Hadi-led government and allies  
Yellow: Controlled by Southern Transitional Council  
Grey: Controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Yemen Province (ISIL-YP)

## **The frontlines**

In military terms, the Civil War is in gridlock. Neither side can launch an offensive powerful enough to achieve any meaningful progress, and the fighting has essentially bogged down to guerilla fighting in the border cities. In 2020, the loyalist forces, supporting president Hadi, claimed to have begun planning an operation to knock the Houthi forces out of the war. However, this kind of operation seems very unlikely to succeed, since neither the loyalists nor the Houthi rebels have enough military strength to mount a successful offensive.

## **Bombing campaign**

In 2020, the number of aerial bombing raids on Houthi-occupied cities has increased dramatically. On the 15th of February, 31 civilians were killed in a bombing, 17 the week later, and an additional 24 at the beginning of March. The Arab coalition bombing force is allegedly committing war crimes (Humans Rights Watch report on Yemen) by carpet-bombing cities which are not under loyalist control and targeting civilian infrastructure and social care (hospitals, police stations, etc.). On the other hand, the Arab coalition, led by the Saudi government, has denounced these claims and has a strong ally in the form of the United States, who do not seem about to renounce their support of the Saudi Government. It is also crucial to understand that the majority of weapon systems used by the Arab coalition are purchased from the United States, which use the arms trade as a way to limit what weapons the coalition uses (outbuying other potential sellers, with much more destructive weapons).

## **Humanitarian crisis**

In 2019, UNICEF expected that famine would hit Yemen in the following year if action is not taken. Because of constant fighting, which has been going on for well over 5 years, and blockades by the Arab coalition, only a limited supply of food makes it into Yemen. This, combined with the zero-like food production in Yemen, can hardly feed the population. It is estimated that nearly 2 million people are in starvation, or close to it. Amnesty International reported that in 2022, Yemen would become the poorest nation in the world, with nearly 69% of its population living under the poverty line. In 2018, a cholera outbreak ravaged the parts of Yemen, affected the worst by the war. So far, it has claimed over 2 000 lives, with confirmed cases climbing over 200 000. The situation in Yemen is currently the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet, estimated to claim thousands of lives in the next years (as estimated by Amnesty International).

## **The United Nations Response**

In 2015, the UN's Under Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator stated that she was "extremely concerned" with the fate of civilians trapped in the Civil War. In April 2015 the UN Security Council passed a resolution denouncing the Houthi rebel group and placing an arms embargo on their territory. The Expert Panel of Yemen, mandated by the UN Security Council, submitted a 300-page long report, denouncing the United Arab Emirates, Houthi Rebels, and the Yemeni Government for torturing civilians. In 2018, UN-sponsored talks began in Oman, which failed the following year.

## **A proxy war**

As the conflict in Yemen developed into a stalemate, all sides found countries willing to support them. The Yemeni government is supported by the Arab coalition, most importantly Saudi Arabia who frequently sends equipment and provides air support to their forces. The Houthi rebels are supported by their Shia brothers from Iran. Iran supplies equipment for Houthi, to counterweight Saudi Arabian involvement in the region, as this conflict is a part of a broader struggle known as the Arabic Cold War. The Southern Transitional Council is supported by the United Arab Emirates, which seeks a fractured Yemen, in order to outweigh the potential threat posed by a Saudi-controlled unified Yemen. Islamic fighters, which control small packets of land throughout Yemen, were supported by ISIL until its fall in 2019.

## **Glossary**

**The Government of Yemen** – The officially recognized government of Yemen, supporting president Hadin and backed by the Arab coalition.

**Houthi Rebels** – a Shia rebel group, occupying most of Northwestern Yemen. They are supported by Iran.

**Southern Transitional Council** – a separatist group occupying land in Northeast of Yemen, as well as the city of Aden. Supported by the UAE

**Operation Decisive Storm** – An operation led by Saudi Arabia and supported by an Arab coalition, which aims to bomb rebel strongholds in Yemen.

**Proxy war** – A war of two or more actors, who act on the behalf of other parties, which are not directly involved in the hostilities.

**Arab Spring** – A series of revolutions that swept the Arab world in 2011.

**Arab Cold War** – A “cold war” between Sunni Saudi Arabia, and their allies, and the Shia Iran, and their allies.

**Coup d'etat** (also known as a putsch) - means the overthrow of an existing government, typically an unconstitutional seizure of power by a dictator, fraction, political party, or military

## **Main players**

### **1. Saudi Arabia**

Being one of the most important sides of the conflict Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of Gulf states that in March 2015 have started a campaign of economic isolation and airstrikes against the Houthi rebels, with U.S. logistical and intelligence assistance.

### **2. Iran**

Iran is backing up the Houthi insurgents. The interference of regional powers in Yemen's conflict, including Iran and Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia, threatens to pull the country into the wider Sunni-Shia divide. Various Iranian weapons shipments to Houthi rebels have been caught in the Gulf of Aden by a Saudi naval blockade in the position since April 2015. In response, Iran has sent its naval convoy, which further risks military escalation among those two nations.

### **3. the United Arab Emirates**

In mid-2019, the United Arab Emirates declared that it would be removing at least part of its military contingent from Yemen, indicating a serious concern in the country's relationship with Saudi Arabia. The statement came on July 8, when the UAE noted that it would be turning its "military first" strategy to a more subtle approach. It also said it would reduce the number of troops it has in the area.

4. All sides of the conflict were reported to have violated human rights and international humanitarian law according to Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by Security Council resolution 2342 (2017)

Proposed topics for open debates and suggested contents of the resolution

1. Ways to deescalate the Yemeni conflict
2. The threat posed by Islamist extremist groups and ways of reducing it
3. Means to protect civilians
4. How should the Arab League work on tense relations with the Yemeni government?
5. How to prevent ethnic cleanses?
6. Influence of non-Arab countries in Yemen
7. Children of Yemen
8. Alleviating the humanitarian crisis

Questions worth including in your position paper

1. How did your country contribute to the crisis?
2. Has your country supported or was ever against any of the Houthi attacks?
3. Did your country get involved in the conflict directly?

4. What is your country's official policy on providing help to Yemen?

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