

Forum: Arab League

Issue: The Issues Regarding Security and Managing Rising Political Instability in Yemen

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Introduction

Yemen is experiencing a profound crisis, one marked by severe political instability and escalating threats to security that affect the nation on multiple levels. This instability stems not merely from the collapse of government structures, but from a deeply rooted fragmentation of authority and pervasive insecurity facing Yemen's citizens daily. From the rise of armed local militias to the near-total absence of basic services and the constant intervention of foreign powers, the Yemeni crisis is as much about individual survival as it is about state governance.

Yemen's unraveling state mechanisms trace back to the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, which saw mass protests and demands for change after over three decades of leadership under President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh's resignation, brokered through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative, led to a fragile transition of power to Vice President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in 2012. However, the Hadi government struggled with internal divisions, economic hardships, and ongoing tribal conflicts. In 2014, these challenges intensified as the Houthi movement, initially a Zaidi Shia revivalist faction, seized the capital, Sana'a, marking the beginning of a full-scale civil conflict. This takeover led to Hadi's exile, further weakening the central government and opening doors for external intervention.

Saudi Arabia and Iran quickly became significant players in Yemen, with Saudi Arabia leading a coalition in 2015 to reinstate the Hadi government, countering Iran's alleged support for the Houthis. The intervention has been costly and complex, drawing international attention to Yemen's humanitarian crisis, with the United Nations estimating that over 24 million Yemenis—roughly 80% of the population—are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. This complex network of competing internal factions and external influences has produced a

continuously shifting power structure, where "security" has various interpretations, yet remains elusive for most Yemenis.

Thus, as we examine Yemen's conflict, it is vital to approach "security" as a multi-dimensional issue, with each layer reflecting different priorities and perspectives. Yemen's story is not only one of political rivalry; it is one of human resilience in the face of profound instability.

Definition of Key Terms

Civil War

A conflict between organized groups within the same country. Yemen's civil war involves multiple factions, including the Houthi movement, the internationally recognized government, southern separatists, and extremist groups like AQAP and IS.

Proxy War

A conflict where external powers support local factions to further their own geopolitical interests. In Yemen, this includes Saudi Arabia backing the government and Iran allegedly supporting the Houthis, with both seeking influence in the region.

Humanitarian Crisis

A severe situation where the population suffers from extreme hardship, including lack of food, clean water, and healthcare. Yemen's civil war has created one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with millions facing starvation and disease.

Houthi Movement (Ansar Allah)

A Zaidi Shia political and military group that controls much of northern Yemen, including Sana'a. The Houthis are central to the conflict, fighting against both the internationally recognized government and the Saudi-led coalition.

Southern Transitional Council (STC)

A political body representing southern separatists, advocating for the re-establishment of an independent southern Yemen. The STC is influential in the south and often at odds with the Hadi government, despite both opposing the Houthis.

Internationally Recognized Government

Led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, this government is supported by the United Nations but holds limited power due to the Houthi takeover of Sana'a and ongoing factionalism within the country.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

A branch of Al-Qaeda operating in Yemen, AQAP has taken advantage of the instability to gain influence and control parts of southern and eastern Yemen, posing a significant security threat.

Ceasefire

A temporary halt in fighting agreed upon by warring parties, often as a step toward peace negotiations. Multiple ceasefires have been attempted in Yemen, but none have led to a lasting resolution due to ongoing distrust and violence.

Economic Blockade

A restriction on the flow of goods, including food and medical supplies, into Houthi-controlled areas by the Saudi-led coalition. The blockade has worsened Yemen's humanitarian crisis, causing shortages of essential goods.

Tribal Dynamics

The influence of Yemen's tribal structure on the conflict. Tribal loyalties and rivalries play a significant role in the distribution of power, and many local militias and leaders operate independently of formal political factions.

Key Issues

Collapse of Central Authority

The Yemeni government's inability to maintain control over the country has resulted in the fragmentation of power. As the central authority weakens, various non-state actors, including local militias, tribal factions, and extremist groups, have filled the power vacuum. The government, led by President Hadi, holds little authority, especially after the Houthis seized the capital, Sana'a. This lack of centralized control has made it nearly impossible to enforce law and order or deliver basic services to citizens, further destabilizing the country and deepening the conflict.

Humanitarian Crisis and Blockade

Yemen's civil war has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe, with over 24 million people—about 80% of the population—now needing aid. Around 16 million Yemenis face critical food shortages, and 400,000 children are at immediate risk of death from starvation. The Saudi-led coalition's blockade on Houthi-controlled ports, particularly Hodeidah, has severely limited the flow of food, fuel, and medicine, intensifying shortages. Frequent disruptions to these aid routes have led the UN to warn that Yemen is enduring one of the worst famines in decades. The ongoing fuel shortage has forced hospitals to shut down critical services, while displaced families in makeshift camps suffer from lack of clean water, sanitation, and basic medical care.

External Interference and Proxy Warfare

Yemen's conflict is not solely internal; it has been significantly shaped by regional powers seeking influence. Saudi Arabia, fearing the rise of Iranian-backed Houthis on its southern border, leads a coalition that conducts airstrikes and supports ground operations against the Houthis. Meanwhile, Iran allegedly provides financial and military support to the Houthis, turning the Yemeni conflict into a broader proxy war. This external interference complicates peace efforts and extends the duration of the conflict, as both sides are empowered by foreign backing.

Rise of Extremism

The chaos in Yemen has enabled extremist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State (IS) to expand rapidly, exploiting the absence of state control. AQAP has entrenched itself in areas like Hadhramaut Province, carrying out attacks on government sites, assassinating leaders, and even briefly capturing territory in 2015. Meanwhile, IS has executed deadly bombings, such as the 2015 mosque attacks in Sana'a, killing over 140 civilians. These groups leverage Yemen's instability to bolster regional influence and coordinate with international networks, posing significant threats beyond Yemen's borders.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Saudi Arabia

As a regional Sunni power, Saudi Arabia leads a coalition to counter the Houthi movement, which it views as an extension of Iranian influence on its southern border. Saudi Arabia's primary goal is to prevent the establishment of a Shia foothold in Yemen, which it perceives as a direct threat to regional stability and its own national security. Since 2015, Saudi forces have conducted extensive airstrikes and blockades, though these actions have drawn international criticism due to their impact on Yemen's humanitarian crisis.

Iran

Iran, a Shia-majority state and rival to Saudi Arabia, allegedly supports the Houthi rebels by supplying them with arms and political backing. Although Iran denies direct involvement, it views the Houthi movement as a strategic ally in its regional influence campaign. Iran's engagement in Yemen is part of its broader ambition to expand influence within the Arabian Peninsula, countering Sunni dominance and establishing itself as a regional counterweight to Saudi power.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

As a member of the Saudi-led coalition, the UAE has played a distinct role by supporting the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a southern Yemeni group seeking independence from the

north. The UAE's support for the STC aligns with its interest in securing influence over Yemen's strategic ports and waterways. While allied with Saudi Arabia, the UAE's unique support for the STC has complicated coalition dynamics, as its interests increasingly diverge from those of its primary coalition partner.

The Houthi Movement (Ansar Allah)

The Houthis, a Zaidi Shia group from Yemen's northern highlands, have evolved from a religious revivalist movement into a powerful military force. They seized the capital, Sana'a, in 2014, and have since established themselves as Yemen's primary northern power, opposing both the internationally recognized government and the Saudi-led coalition. The Houthis assert that they are resisting corruption and foreign interference; however, their alleged links to Iran have attracted the attention and hostility of regional Sunni powers, notably Saudi Arabia.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

AQAP, one of the most dangerous branches of Al-Qaeda, has taken advantage of Yemen's instability to establish a significant presence, particularly in southern Yemen. Exploiting the collapse of central governance, AQAP offers local security and governance in certain areas, positioning itself as a dominant force and a regional threat. The group has conducted attacks on both Yemeni and international targets, which has drawn counterterrorism efforts from the United States and other actors concerned with extremist activities in Yemen.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
2011	Arab Spring Uprising	Inspired by the Arab Spring, Yemenis stage mass protests against President Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33-year rule, calling for political reform and an end to corruption. Saleh ultimately steps down under the GCC Initiative, transferring power to Vice President

		Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, but issues of corruption, poverty, and internal divisions persist.
2014	Houthi Takeover of Sana'a	The Houthis, capitalizing on growing public dissatisfaction with Hadi's government, seize control of Sana'a in September 2014. This takeover forces Hadi to flee to Aden and divides Yemen politically and territorially, with the north under Houthi control and the south remaining loyal to Hadi.
2013-2014	National Dialogue Conference (NDC)	The NDC is launched to address Yemen's internal divisions, gathering political parties, civil society, and tribal representatives to discuss a new constitution and federal governance structure. However, the conference fails to achieve consensus, with the Houthis and southern factions voicing dissatisfaction over marginalization, ultimately leading to escalating tensions.
2015	Saudi-led Coalition Intervention	As the Houthis advance towards Aden, Saudi Arabia forms a coalition, including the UAE, Bahrain, and other regional allies, to restore Hadi's government and counter Houthi influence. The coalition conducts extensive airstrikes, marking the conflict's escalation into a broader regional struggle, with Iran alleged to

		<p>support the Houthis. The intervention leads to large-scale displacement and humanitarian devastation, but it prevents the Houthis from capturing southern Yemen.</p>
<p>2017</p>	<p>Southern Transitional Council (STC) Formation</p>	<p>With the rise of the Houthis, southern Yemen experiences renewed calls for independence. The STC, supported by the UAE, forms to advocate for southern autonomy, reviving aspirations to separate from the north, as the south had been an independent state until unification in 1990. This division deepens Yemen's internal strife and leads to clashes between STC forces and Hadi loyalists in southern regions.</p>
<p>2017</p>	<p>Houthis Form and Break Alliance with Saleh</p>	<p>The Houthis form an alliance with former President Saleh to strengthen their position. However, internal tensions lead to a split, culminating in the Houthis killing Saleh in December 2017 after he attempted to shift allegiance to the Saudi-led coalition. His assassination destabilizes Houthi control, yet the Houthis retain dominance in the north.</p>
<p>2022</p>	<p>UN-Mediated Ceasefire and Partial Calm</p>	<p>The United Nations negotiates a ceasefire, creating the longest stretch of relative peace since the start of the conflict. While violence sporadically resumes, the ceasefire allows limited humanitarian relief and initiates renewed diplomatic efforts. However, core</p>

		political divisions remain unresolved, signaling the need for ongoing negotiations.
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Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative, introduced in 2011, was one of the first major diplomatic efforts to address Yemen's political crisis during the Arab Spring. It facilitated the resignation of long-time president Ali Abdullah Saleh and handed power to his deputy, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, in exchange for Saleh's immunity from prosecution. While this arrangement temporarily halted the protests, it did not resolve deeper issues of corruption, economic challenges, or governance. These underlying problems continued, ultimately fueling the rise of the Houthi movement and further unrest.

National Dialogue Conference (NDC)

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC), held between 2013 and 2014, was an inclusive initiative aimed at bringing together diverse Yemeni political, tribal, and civil society groups to draft a new constitution and establish a federal governance structure. However, the conference lost traction when the Houthis and the Southern Movement withdrew, voicing dissatisfaction with the lack of substantial inclusion of their demands. The NDC's collapse eroded trust among factions, setting the stage for the Houthi takeover of Sana'a in September 2014.

Peace Talks in Kuwait

Peace Talks in Kuwait in 2016 were brokered by the United Nations to bring major factions, including the Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized government, to the negotiating table. Despite months of discussion, the talks ultimately failed due to unresolved disagreements on issues like disarmament and the formation of a unity government. Deep-seated mistrust, compounded by continued ground fighting, undermined this initiative's potential.

United Nations Security Council Arms Embargo

In 2015, as the conflict intensified, the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on the Houthis and forces loyal to former President Saleh. The embargo aimed to limit the flow of weapons to the Houthis, thereby reducing their military capability and weakening their influence. However, the embargo has had limited effectiveness due to the complex regional supply lines and ongoing alleged arms support from Iran. While intended to stabilize the region, the embargo has not substantially curbed the Houthis' military power or reduced violence.

Stockholm Agreement

The Stockholm Agreement, negotiated in 2018 and mediated by the United Nations, focused on de-escalating hostilities around the port city of Hodeidah, a critical entry point for humanitarian aid. While the agreement succeeded in temporarily reducing violence and facilitating limited humanitarian access, its implementation has been inconsistent. Key provisions, such as troop withdrawals from Hodeidah and a prisoner exchange, have encountered obstacles, and violence continues in other regions.

UN Ceasefire Efforts

In 2022, the UN Ceasefire created the longest stretch of relative peace since the start of the conflict. This temporary truce allowed more humanitarian aid to reach affected areas and opened the door for renewed discussions on a permanent peace agreement. However, sporadic clashes and deep-seated political grievances among the Houthis, the government, and various factions remain unresolved, limiting the truce's long-term impact.

Possible Solutions

Localized Governance Supported by International Mediation

Yemen's complex political and tribal landscape calls for a decentralized governance framework that grants significant autonomy to its regions while maintaining a unified national identity. Under this model, local councils would oversee governance, resource allocation, and security in their respective areas, reducing the competition for power at the national level. To ensure fairness

and stability, a neutral international body, such as the United Nations or a coalition of mediators, could provide oversight. These mediators would monitor elections, mediate disputes, and ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups like the Houthis and Southern Transitional Council (STC) in decision-making. This system could reduce friction among Yemen's fragmented factions, while addressing regional grievances that have fueled the conflict.

Establishment of Humanitarian Corridors and Neutral Safe Zones

The ongoing humanitarian crisis requires the urgent creation of demilitarized safe zones across key regions, particularly near conflict hotspots such as Hodeidah and Taiz. These zones would be monitored and secured by peacekeeping forces drawn from neutral countries, ideally under the Arab League's coordination with United Nations assistance. These areas would allow for the secure delivery of aid, medical supplies, and other critical resources while providing civilians with safe havens. Additionally, humanitarian corridors linking these zones to major ports and supply hubs would ensure uninterrupted access to aid. Cooperation between warring parties could be incentivized by tying compliance with such measures to economic or political benefits, such as eased sanctions or access to international development funds.

Comprehensive Regional Security Pact

Given the significant external involvement in Yemen, a long-term solution requires addressing the proxy war dynamic. A regional security pact involving key stakeholders such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) could create a framework for non-interference in Yemen's internal affairs. This pact would include agreements to cease arms shipments to local factions and establish a regional monitoring body to enforce compliance. To incentivize participation, economic benefits such as expanded trade agreements, energy cooperation, and reconstruction aid could be tied to adherence. By ensuring that external powers prioritize diplomacy over militarization, this approach could pave the way for lasting peace in Yemen while fostering broader regional stability.

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