



CRISIS IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

THE CONFLICT IN YEMEN

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Executive Summary

The ongoing conflict in Yemen with multiple internal and external actors has the country facing severe risks of militarization, economic performance, human development, governance and political stability. Failure to progress in peace talks has international linkages, demographic stress, and population and heterogeneity at high risk. Only the environment is measured at moderate risk and even then, the environmental conditions in Yemen are deteriorating. If mediation does not make grounds, the de-facto two state Yemen could become a reality, undoing the unification of 1990.



Background

The Republic of Yemen is a unified state of (North Yemen) Yemen Arab Republic and (South Yemen) People's Democratic Republic of Yemen founded in 1990.¹ The unified Yemen was ruled by President Ali Abdullah Saleh from its inauguration until he stepped down in 2012.² The unified state constantly faced instability from poor economic conditions and weak territorial hold over its regions. In 2011, demonstrators saw an opportunity to gain traction when the Arab Spring blew Yemen's way.³ Despite Saleh stepping down, the Houthis, who represent the Zaidi sect of Islam from the Shi'a branch, managed to force out the government in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a in February 2015.⁴ However, the country has been embroiled in civil conflict ever since.

The internal conflict in Yemen has opened the opportunity for foreign actors to make use of Yemen as a playground in a broader proxy war in the region. Although the conflict in Yemen is not black and white in sectarian nature, foreign actors have exasperated the conflict and pushed sectarian lines. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) back different Sunni groups, while the Islamic Republic of Iran has been forced into growing their support to the Houthis due to connections under the broader umbrella of Shi'a Islam.⁵ External actors in the West, such as the United States are involved indirectly through aiding Gulf State allies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE and providing air strike support.⁶ Yemen today faces one of the largest humanitarian crises, from ongoing war to famine and cholera.⁷



Internal Stakeholders

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	A branch of the insurgent group Al-Qaeda that has been present in Yemen for years and has seen a window of opportunity to grow their operations and hold territory like other non-government groups in the war. AQAP is being fought by both the Southern Movement and the Houthis. ⁸
President AbduRabbu Mansour Hadi	Took the reins after his predecessor Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down, but Hadi was forced out as Houthi fighters took control over Sana'a and the region surrounding the capital in early 2015. Continues to run his government from Riyadh; visited Aden in 2018. ⁹
The Southern Transitional Council	Backed by the UAE, the Southern Movement are not interested in returning to a functioning unified Yemeni state ruled by president Hadi. Instead, they formed an alliance of 26 members under the former South Yemen flag after the former capital of South Yemen, Aden was retaken from the Houthis. ¹⁰
Houthis	The main group representing the Zaidis in Yemen. ¹¹ Politically and militarily backed by Iran and have been in control over the Yemeni capital Sana'a since 2015, despite efforts by Saudi led coalition to defeat them. ¹² Are not acknowledged as the legitimate leaders of Yemen by Saudi Arabia and the international community. ¹³



External Stakeholders

The West / United States of America	The United States and other Western states have backed the Saudi-led alliance with large arms sales to Saudi Arabia that have been used to target Yemen. ¹⁴ However, after the killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, U.S. Senate voted to revoke U.S. support of Saudi Arabia in the conflict in December 2018. The vote is seen as symbolic because the Trump administration continues to back Saudi Arabia. ¹⁵
Arab Alliance/ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammad Bin Salman created an alliance of Arab states to air strike the new Houthi government in Sana'a, fearing the regional hegemony would tip further towards Iran's favour. Saudi Arabia houses President Hadi, which it views as the legitimate President of Yemen after President Saleh stepped down. ¹⁶
United Arab Emirates	UAE is Saudi Arabia's largest partner in the coalition in Yemen, however, the Emiratis have been less keen on supporting Saudi-backed President Hadi and have been increasing their presence by focusing on separatist groups from the South, who are looking to revive the former South Yemen state. ¹⁷
Islamic Republic of Iran	Regional superpower that has been involved in proxy wars in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon supporting local Shi'a groups. ¹⁸ Despite being from a different branch of Shi'a Islam, Saudi Arabia's growing activity in Yemen pushed Iran closer to backing the Houthis to counter Saudi Arabia under the umbrella of Shi'a Islam. ¹⁹

 Militarization  Severe Risk	
Stabilizing Factors	UN Arms Embargo: The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2402 in February 2018 which renews the arms embargo put in place in 2015. ²⁰
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Military Expenditure: Between 2011 and 2014, military expenditure as a percentage of GDP declined from 4.93 to 3.97. The 2014 figure remains a relatively high military burden. Due to the lack of reliable data, no estimate is available for total military spending thereafter.²¹</p> <p>Fraction of Regional Military Expenditure: Yemen's neighbours have boosted military expenditure significantly over the last decade. Saudi Arabia was ranked third in military expenditure in 2017, below only the U.S. and China.²² Saudi Arabia also had a 9.2% increase in military expenditure from the previous year, and a 74% increase between 2008 and 2015.²³ Total regional expenditure increased by 41% between 2009 and 2015. Lower oil prices interrupted this trend in 2015-16 (decrease of 16%) but expenditures moved upward again in 2017.²⁴ The latest data for the UAE is from 2014, and at this time, it had the second largest expenditure in the region.²⁵</p> <p>Government Armed Forces Personnel Total: As of 2013, this figure was 137,900.²⁶ At that time, the same figure for Saudi Arabia was 251,500, and the UAE and Qatar totals were 63,000 and 11,800 respectively.²⁷</p> <p>Import/Export of Arms: Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the first and second ranked clients of U.S. arms exports (at 18% and 7.4%, respectively, of total U.S. arms exports).²⁸ The U.S. and the United Kingdom have sold large quantities of cruise missiles and other guided weapons, which have been used in Yemen.²⁹ Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE were the second, third, and fourth largest arms importers during that period (Qatar ranked 20th).³⁰ In the same 2013–17 period, 31% of arms transfers to the region went to Saudi Arabia, 14% to Egypt and 13% to the UAE. The three largest suppliers were: U.S. (52%), the U.K. (9.4%), and France (8.6%).³¹</p> <p>Arms Control: Various U.S. weaponry (including armored vehicles and mortar systems), intended for use by the UAE, have reportedly been diverted to UAE-backed militia groups in Yemen.³² The Saudi naval blockade has also resulted in interceptions of Iranian weapons shipments to Houthi fighters.³³</p>
Assessment	The militarization of the conflict represents a severe risk. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the first and second largest arms importers in the region, are supporting different parties in the civil war, which adds more complexity to the Yemeni conflict. The dominance of the U.S. in arms exports to the region suggests that the current U.S. administration holds a great deal of leverage, which could be used to manipulate the direction of the conflict.

 The History of Armed Conflict  Severe Risk	
Stabilizing Factors	Internally Displaced People: As of 2018, there are more than 2,015,000 internally displaced people (IDP) and 89% of IDPS have been displaced for more than a year. However, close to 1 million refugees (2018: 956,076) have been reported to have returned home. ³⁴
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Coalitions: Saudi Arabia continues to back President Hadi's government, the UAE continues to back the Southern Movement, and Iran has backed the Houthis for some time and has increased their contributions towards the group since 2011.³⁵</p> <p>Casualties and conflict-related deaths: The war has not only contributed to over 10,000 deaths of civilians (a controversial figure, with estimates suggesting that deaths have been higher than 50,000) but has also (in combination with the Saudi-orchestrated blockade) contributed to other problems, such as the lack of sanitation services. This, in turn, has resulted in over 2,000 cholera affected deaths, showing the cross-cutting nature of this conflict.³⁶</p> <p>International aid: Entry-point for aid is restricted to the control by the Houthis, whose control of aid has created problems for international organizations and non-governmental organizations to retain the capacity of their staff and ensure donor accountability.³⁷</p>
Assessment	Yemen is often considered the "forgotten war". ³⁸ The conflict has received relatively little attention from the international community, despite being considered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. However, the recent peace talks have sparked hope within the region. The ultimate assessment is that without third party international intervention, the conflict is unlikely to conclude, and the repercussions from the conflict, especially in terms of aid and deaths, will be grave.

 Economic Performance		Severe Risk 	
Stabilizing Factors	N/A		
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Annual growth rate: Annual percentage growth rate of GDP decreased drastically from its 2.4% rate in 2012 to -5.9% in 2017-2018, representing ongoing deterioration of economic conditions.³⁹</p> <p>GDP per capita: GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity has decreased from \$3, 863.30 in 2012 to \$2,600.90 in 2017-2018 and has been on a continuous downward trend since 2013.⁴⁰ For the current 2019 fiscal year, the World Bank Group classifies Yemen as a low-income economy with a GNI per capita less than \$995 using the World Bank Atlas method.⁴¹</p> <p>Foreign direct investment: FDI net inflows as a percentage of GNP have gone from 0.0% in 2012 to -0.9% in 2017-2018, representing significant investments being pulled out of the country.⁴² This is expected as on-going violence would incentivize investments to be pulled out until peace and security could establish an increasingly secure business climate.</p> <p>Economic warfare: With the internationally recognized government withholding salaries from civil servants⁴³ a shattered economy, high unemployment, and devastated ports have made food prices soar and even double in some parts of the country.⁴⁴</p> <p>Inflation: While inflation was somewhat contained in 2017 following non-payments of contractual obligations like public salaries, inflation has rose significantly in 2018 estimated by the World Bank to be 40% larger than the previous year.⁴⁵</p>		
Assessment	<p>With inflation likely on the rise, the health of the economy is dependent on finding an end to the conflict. The unstable political and security environment is preventing the restoration of the oil and gas industry, and economic warfare continues to cripple resources coming into the country as well as public sector salaries.⁴⁶ Without containment of the ongoing violence, the economy will continue to deteriorate.</p>		

 Human Development		Severe Risk 	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Life expectancy: Life expectancy has been found to be steadily increasing since 2012. In 2018, the UNDP has reported life expectancy in Yemen to be 65.2 years. Infant mortality rate has remained stagnant since 2012 at 43.2 deaths per 1,000 live births.⁴⁷</p> <p>ODA: Gross ODA has doubled since 2015 and was reported at 3.2 billion US\$ in 2017. Despite this upward trend, ODA alone does not satisfy the demand for basic human needs in Yemen.⁴⁸</p>		
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Access to water: According to the UNICEF's 2017 <i>Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Program</i>, 14% of the population in Yemen relies on packaged or delivered water.⁴⁹ Similarly, 69% relies on water from an improved source. In 2018, the same program reports that roughly 57% of the population lacks regular access to clean water.⁵⁰</p> <p>Food security: According to USAID, Yemen hosts the largest food security emergency in the world. As of January 2019, roughly 53% of the population face crisis due to food shortages. Food insecurity is a major problem in the country with a Saudi-led blockade being enforced that looks to target arms being brought in from Iran.⁵¹</p> <p>Cholera outbreak: Due to poor access to food and water, a cholera outbreak has seen 1.1 million suspected cases from April 2017 to June 2018.⁵²</p> <p>Access to health care: The World Bank estimates that roughly 64% of the population in Yemen lacks access to adequate healthcare. Half of all health facilities are determined to be functioning as of 2018, and these facilities face severe shortages in medicine, equipment, and staff.⁵³</p>		
Assessment	<p>Yemen continues to face an unprecedented social and humanitarian crisis. With little coming into the country due to the Saudi blockade and continuous devastation to key ports, essential access to food and water is limited.⁵⁴ This has led to a significant outbreak of cholera and a situation that will continue to destabilize without improved access to key ports and a reduction of barriers.</p>		

 Governance & Political Stability		Severe Risk 	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Informal peace talks: The end of 2018 has led to UN-brokered peace talks in Sweden between the Houthis and Hadi government on what the future political solution will look like in Yemen. A prisoner swap has been agreed upon that will see thousands of families reunited. The main sticking point has been the demand by the Hadi government for the Houthi withdrawal from Hodeidah, which has been met with significant disagreement from the Houthis.⁵⁵</p>		

Destabilizing Factors	<p>Level of democracy: With President Hadi securing Yemeni presidency in 2012, and the Houthi rebel movement taking over the Saada province and the capital city Sana'a, both sides claim central authority of Yemen. <i>Polity IV</i> concludes that with a collapse of central political authority, Yemen cannot be scored on its democracy or regime durability with no universally recognized or acting regime in place.⁵⁶</p> <p>Political right and civil liberties: Freedom House's <i>Annual Survey of Freedom</i> scored Yemen 13/14 on a scale for political rights and civil liberties, indicating very low degrees of freedom. These scores reflect an inability to participate freely in the political process, a lack of fair elections, and limited freedom from local and external powers among others.⁵⁷</p> <p>Press freedom: Yemen scores 85 on Freedom House's <i>Annual Press Freedom Survey</i> assessing a country's free flow of information, classifying it as a country with "not free" press.⁵⁸</p> <p>Corruption: <i>The World Governance Indicators</i> data scores Yemen as -1.6 indicating extremely poor governance. Without any formal anticorruption mechanisms in the context of the civil war, alongside a network of corruption and patronage linkages entrenched in institutions from the previous Saleh government, it remains widespread and uncontrolled.⁵⁹</p>
Assessment	<p>With competition between the Houthis, the Hadi government, and the Southern Movement, deep mistrust is still prevalent. UN-sponsored peace talks have constituted only relatively small steps towards peace. No immediate actions have been taken given the Saudi-led coalition's unwavering request for the key port of Hodeidah. While dialogue is a necessary first step for peace, there is no indication that political stability is on the horizon considering the competing groups involved, and the lack of any display of flexibility during talks.⁶⁰</p>

 Population and Heterogeneity	High Risk 
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Ethnicity: Most of the people in Yemen self-identify themselves as "Arabs". However, Yemen is also home to people with ethnic backgrounds of Afro-Arab, South Asians, and Europeans.⁶¹</p> <p>Religions: Muslims 99.1% (an estimated 65% are Sunni and 35% Shi'a).⁶²</p> <p>Regionalization: Yemen is informally separated by geographic divide between the North and South.⁶³</p> <p>Refugees and Asylum seekers: Yemen hosts about 160,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Most are from Somalia, Iraq, Ethiopia, and more recently, Syria.⁶⁴</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Ethnic tensions: Yemen is home to nearly 400 known tribes in the region. However, the conflict today is between the Houthis, the forces aligned with President Hadi, and the Southern Movement.⁶⁵</p>
Assessment	<p>Yemen's population is not necessarily ethnically diverse, but it <i>is</i> diverse in the context of how many tribes it hosts. This is the critical weak point for Yemen as the conflict in Yemen is being driven by sectarian divisions.⁶⁶</p>

 International Linkages	High Risk 
Stabilizing Factors	<p>International and Regional Organizations: Yemen is a member of the UN, the World Trade Organization, as well as several regional organizations, including the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the African Union.⁶⁷</p> <p>Cease Fire: Houthi and Yemeni government representatives agreed to a UN-brokered ceasefire in December 2018. The ceasefire ("the Stockholm Agreement") required the parties to move forces out of Hodeidah, thereby guaranteeing open ports for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Each side has since accused the other of agreement violations.⁶⁸ UNSC Resolution 2452 was adopted on January 16th, 2019 and establishes the United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA).⁶⁹ To support the maintenance of the ceasefire, the UN aims to place 75 observers in the area.⁷⁰</p> <p>Humanitarian Aid: Total funding of the UN humanitarian plan for Yemen in 2018 was US\$4.4 billion, a significant increase from the 2017 total of US\$2.4 billion. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and U.S. donations represent 71% of all reported funding.⁷¹</p> <p>Border Controls: Saudi Arabia is attempting to address the issue of cross-border illegal activity by reinforcing its security barrier along its border with Yemen.⁷²</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>N/A</p>
Assessment	<p>The current ceasefire is a promising development. At the very least, civilians will gain greater access to humanitarian aid. It is important to note that the three largest donators of humanitarian aid are supporting actors that are opposed to the goals of the Houthis.</p>

 Demographic Stress High Risk 	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Urban Population Growth Rate: Annual percentage growth has decelerated between 2012 and 2017, from 4.5% to 4.13%.⁷³</p> <p>Urban Population: As of 2017, the population is now 36% urban, relatively unchanged over the previous five years (an increase of 2.4%).⁷⁴</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Total Population: The population has risen from 25,576,322 in 2013 to 28,250,420 in 2017, an increase of 10.5% in just five years.</p> <p>Youth Bulge: Population ages 0-14 (% of total) has been in a consistent downward trend since 1990.⁷⁵ Despite this trend, the figure remains high at 39.16%.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the population aged 15-24 years stands at 21.26%, which means that those aged 0-24 make up 60% of the population. Average birth rate for women is 3.99 (as of 2016).⁷⁷</p> <p>Population Growth Rate: Growth has decelerated from 2.63 to 2.38 between 2013 and 2017, nonetheless, Yemen continues to have to have a high growth rate. The population is expected to nearly double in the next 23 years. A growing population means growing demand for resources, government services, and employment. Given Yemen's physical environment and experience of climate change, this trend poses a significant challenge to state stability.⁷⁸</p> <p>Dependency Ratio: The ratio of the population ages 0–14 to the population ages 15–64 has declined slightly from 73.8 to 69.8 between 2013 and 2017 but remains very high; substantially higher than its neighbours (UAE 16.4, Qatar 16.4, Oman 28.8, Saudi Arabia 35.2).⁷⁹</p>
Assessment	Yemen's age pyramid is a cause for great concern. The youth bulge phenomenon, coupled with the high dependency ratio, will increasingly strain Yemen's economy and natural resources (including its water supply).

 Environment Moderate Risk 	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Legislation: The National Environmental Council of Yemen, established in 1976, has created laws in response to the decreasing environmental developments in the region. Particularly in the context of protecting Yemen's marine life. (Resolution 99, Resolution, 36, Law no 42, 1991).⁸⁰</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Water Pollution: The country has 4.1 cubic kilometers of renewable water resources with 92% used for farming activity and 1% for industrial purposes.⁸¹ Water is viewed as being highly contaminated from the oil industry, untreated sewage, and salinization. Further, Yemen faces a prevailing problem of water shortages due to low rainfalls and uneven distribution of water resources within urban and rural areas.⁸²</p> <p>Deforestation: Natural forests in the regions, particularly in the mountainous areas, have been destroyed due to agriculture clearing and livestock overgrazing. Currently, only 1.5% of land area is covered by forests.⁸³</p> <p>Endangered species: Five mammal species and 13 bird species are listed as threatened species. There is one confirmed species that has gone extinct.⁸⁴</p>
Assessment	Yemen has a rapidly growing population. This fact has been accelerating pressure on Yemen to provide to its population based on its available resources, both natural and artificial. In consequence, these demands have taken their toll on the environment and have put Yemen's environmental conditions under stress. However, despite the environment being high-risk, it has had little effect on the conflict itself.

Scenarios	
Best Case Scenario	The violence in Yemen ceases after successful peace talks through the mediation of the United Nations and third-party countries. The internal actors (President Hadi's Government, the Houthis and the Southern Transitional Council) are able to come to terms on a confederate Yemeni state that allows for a power sharing solution over territory and governance. Islamic-Jihadist groups like AQAP hold no base in the new confederate state of Yemen, while their insurgency is successfully countered by the Yemeni state.
Worst Case Scenario	Peace talks fail, the country remains fragmented and civil war over territory continues to drag on. The Arab Alliance led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue their airstrike campaign and embargo, affecting millions of people in need of aid and basic services.
Most Likely Scenario	Yemen divides into two de-facto states: (i) an autonomous South Yemen region backed by the UAE based out of Aden; and (ii) an autonomous North Yemen region governed by the Houthis in Sana'a. The latter will continue to be targeted through military campaigns and embargos by Saudi Arabia, who will not recognize this neighbouring state.

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