

## **Letter from the Executive Board**

Dear Delegates,

As the Executive Board of the United Nations Security Council, we extend a warm welcome to all of you. This background guide serves as a starting point for your research, but true preparation goes beyond these pages. We encourage you to delve deeper into the topics at hand, conducting thorough research and applying your knowledge throughout the committee sessions.

We recognize the complexity and significance of the issues we will be addressing and strongly advise you to arrive well-prepared. Active participation is key to making this an insightful and engaging experience for everyone. Throughout the committee, you will engage in diplomatic negotiations and discussions to add depth to our deliberations.

We hope you approach this committee with enthusiasm, a collaborative spirit, and a commitment to meaningful dialogue. Together, we will analyse global challenges, propose solutions within legal frameworks, and, in the process, develop essential diplomatic skills. Our ultimate aim is to create a rewarding experience where we tackle real-world problems through constructive debate and cooperation.

Best Regards,  
Executive Board

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## **United Nations Security Council**

### **Mandate**

The United Nations Charter established six main organs, one of which is the Security Council. This body is primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security and has the authority to convene at any time when peace is under threat. The Charter outlines four key purposes for the United Nations: preserving international peace and security, fostering friendly relations among nations, promoting cooperation in resolving global issues and upholding human rights, and serving as a central platform for coordinating the actions of member states. Unlike other UN bodies that can only make recommendations, the Security Council has the unique authority to issue binding decisions that all UN members are obligated to follow.

### **Role in Maintaining Peace and Security**

When confronted with a potential threat to peace, the Security Council typically begins by encouraging the parties involved to settle the dispute through peaceful means. This may involve setting guidelines for agreement, initiating investigations or mediation, deploying missions, appointing special envoys, or asking the Secretary-General to mediate. If conflicts escalate into violence, the Council aims to restore peace swiftly, potentially issuing ceasefire orders or deploying peacekeeping forces. For more serious situations, it can enforce actions such as economic sanctions, diplomatic cutoffs, travel restrictions, blockades, or collective military intervention. In taking these steps, the Council strives to target those responsible for harmful actions, while minimizing negative effects on the general population and economy.

# **Agenda: Yemen-Houthi Attacks and Red Sea Security**

## **Summary**

The conflict in Yemen began as a local political and sectarian struggle but has since evolved into a devastating civil war with deep regional and international implications. At the heart of the conflict is the Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah, which originated in northern Yemen during the 1990s as a group promoting the interests of the Zaidi Shia minority. Over time, the group became increasingly militarized and politically active, especially after tensions with the central government escalated.

In 2014, the Houthis seized control of the capital, Sana'a, and overthrew the internationally recognized government, prompting a civil war. In response, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in 2015, aiming to restore the ousted government. The conflict has since resulted in widespread destruction, a humanitarian catastrophe, and significant civilian casualties.

The Houthis, who receive political and military backing from Iran, have grown into a powerful non-state actor controlling much of northern and western Yemen. They have carried out missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and more recently, they have targeted commercial shipping in the Red Sea, citing opposition to foreign intervention and support for the Palestinian cause. What started as a domestic uprising has now become a proxy war involving regional powers, severely affecting not just Yemen but also the broader Middle East and international maritime security.

## **A Brief History of the Yemen Conflict**

The Yemen conflict may be traced back to deep-rooted political, sectarian, and regional dynamics exacerbated by the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. Yemen was unified in 1990 under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, whose three-decade rule was marked by suppression and failure to address the demands of the Zaydi Shiite population, which later formed the Houthi movement. The 2011 Arab Spring protests, inspired by regional uprisings, challenged Saleh's regime with a coalition of diverse opposition groups including Houthis, southern separatists, and Sunni Islamists. Despite initial concessions, Saleh resisted stepping down, leading to violent clashes and his eventual removal in 2012.

The civil war erupted in 2014 when Houthi rebels, Shiite insurgents with Iranian links, seized the capital Sanaa amid demands for lower fuel prices and government reform. Their advance forced President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi to flee, and by early 2015, the Houthis controlled much of northern Yemen. In response, a Saudi-led coalition, backed by the UAE and supported logistically by the U.S., launched a military intervention aimed at restoring Hadi's government.

This intervention escalated Yemen into a proxy battleground reflecting the broader Sunni-Shia regional rivalry, with Iran supporting the Houthis and Saudi Arabia leading a naval blockade to cut off Iranian supplies.

The war has consistently been marked by shifting alliances and internal fractures. Former President Saleh, who was initially allied with the Houthis, was killed in 2017 after breaking with them. The Southern Transitional Council (STC), a separatist faction, emerged as another key player, controlling parts of southern Yemen, complicating the political landscape despite a 2019 Saudi-brokered integration deal. The conflict has also seen the rise and decline of extremist groups like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which continues sporadic attacks in southern Yemen.

Humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been catastrophic. Yemen faces one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with over 377,000 deaths since 2015, mostly from indirect causes such as famine and disease. Cholera outbreaks and food insecurity afflict millions, while economic collapse has worsened living conditions, triggering protests met with repression. Airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition have caused extensive civilian casualties, while Houthi missile and drone attacks have targeted Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Recent developments include a 2022 resignation of President Hadi, replaced by a presidential council aimed at inclusivity, and intermittent UN-mediated ceasefires and peace talks, which have yet to yield a lasting resolution. The conflict's regional dimension intensified in 2023 with Houthi attacks on Israel and commercial shipping in the Red Sea amid the clashes between Israel and Hamas, prompting international military responses and raising global economic concerns due to disrupted maritime trade routes.

### **A Timeline of Key Events**

- **May, 1990:** Yemen unifies under President Ali Abdullah Saleh; Houthis begin to gain influence.
- **May-July, 1994:** North-South civil war; northern forces led by Saleh defeat southern separatists.
- **June, 2000:** Saleh signs border treaty with Saudi Arabia; tensions with Houthis rise.
- **March, 2006:** Saleh grants amnesty to 600 Houthi fighters after sporadic clashes.
- **January-June, 2007:** Ceasefire reached between Saleh's government and Houthis with Qatari mediation.

- **August, 2009:** Yemen launches “Operation Scorched Earth” against Houthis; cross-border fighting with Saudi Arabia.
- **February, 2010:** Ceasefire reached; crackdown on AQAP.
- **September, 2010:** Government besieges AQAP in Shabwa.
- **January, 2011:** Arab Spring protests begin; Saleh’s rule challenged; violent crackdown.
- **February, 2012:** Hadi sworn in as president after Saleh steps down.
- **August-September, 2014:** Houthis seize Sanaa.
- **October, 2014:** Houthis capture Hodeida.
- **March 19, 2015:** ISIS claims first attacks in Yemen.
- **March 26, 2015:** Saudi-led coalition launches “Operation Decisive Storm” to restore Hadi.
- **April, 2015:** Coalition announces “Operation Restoring Hope” but airstrikes continue.
- **May-November, 2017:** Humanitarian crisis escalates; cholera outbreak, famine warnings.
- **January-June, 2019:** Houthi drone attack on Al-Anad Air Base, UAE scales back military presence; Houthis increase attacks on Saudi targets.
- **November, 2019:** Riyadh Agreement signed to end fighting between government and STC.
- **January-March, 2020:** Houthi offensives in al-Jawf and Marib; Saudi airstrikes on Sanaa.
- **September, 2023:** Houthi delegation visits Saudi Arabia for direct negotiations; relative truce holds.
- **November, 2023:** Houthis declare war on Israel, hijack cargo ship in Red Sea. A series of missile and drone attacks targeting Israeli-affiliated shipping vessels transiting this critical maritime route are launched. These attacks rapidly expanded, with over 40 vessels struck by February 2024, including ships from multiple nations beyond Israel, reflecting

the Houthis' broadening campaign in retaliation for what they termed "Israeli-American aggression" and in solidarity with Palestinians.

### **Importance of the Red Sea**

In November 2023, the Iran-backed Houthi movement in Yemen formally declared war on Israel amid the ongoing Gaza conflict, marking a significant escalation in regional hostilities. On November 19, 2023, the Houthis hijacked a commercial ship in the Red Sea and began launching a series of missile and drone attacks targeting Israeli-affiliated shipping vessels transiting this critical maritime route. These attacks rapidly expanded, with over 40 vessels struck by February 2024, including ships from multiple nations beyond Israel, reflecting the Houthis' broadening campaign in retaliation for what they termed "Israeli-American aggression".

The Houthis' operations disrupted nearly 15% of global seaborne trade passing through the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, forcing hundreds of commercial ships to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope, significantly increasing shipping costs and impacting the global economy. In response, the United States and allied forces launched Operation Prosperity Guardian in January 2024, conducting air and missile strikes against Houthi positions and escorting commercial vessels to ensure freedom of navigation.

The Red Sea holds immense strategic importance as a critical maritime corridor connecting the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean, facilitating nearly 10-12% of global trade, including about 30% of container traffic and significant volumes of oil and liquefied natural gas. Its narrow chokepoints, especially the Bab el-Mandeb Strait near Yemen, make it a vital artery for commercial shipping between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Yemeni Houthi airstrikes and attacks on vessels in the Red Sea threaten this crucial trade route, risking disruptions that can cascade into global economic instability by forcing costly rerouting and increasing shipping insurance premiums. Given the Red Sea's role as a lifeline for energy supplies and essential goods, maintaining security in this region is a priority for regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as global stakeholders, who have increased naval presence to safeguard uninterrupted maritime traffic amid the ongoing Yemen conflict and related geopolitical tensions.

## **Main Issues and Security Council Relevance**

### **Maritime Security Threats**

- Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping threaten global trade, especially oil and energy supplies, with nearly 15% of seaborne trade passing through the area.=
- Disruptions have raised shipping and insurance costs, impacting global markets.
- The use of drones and missiles has challenged conventional naval defenses, prompting calls for stronger international maritime security measures.

### **Regional Proxy Conflicts**

- The Yemen conflict is a proxy war, with Iran supporting the Houthis against a Saudi-led coalition.
- The Houthis have grown from a local insurgency into a key regional actor.
- The rivalry fuels instability and complicates peace efforts, raising risks of wider regional conflict.

### **International Law and Naval Operations**

- U.S. and U.K. airstrikes on Yemen have raised legal concerns due to the lack of explicit UNSC authorization.
- These actions test the limits of international law and the UN Charter on the use of force.
- The situation challenges UNCLOS principles, especially freedom of navigation through international waters.

### **Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen**

- Over 21 million people need aid; famine, disease, and economic collapse have devastated the population.
- Airstrikes and blockades have restricted humanitarian access.
- Aid agencies face serious obstacles delivering relief, worsening civilian suffering.

### **Role of the United Nations Security Council**

- UNSC Resolution 2216 called for an end to hostilities, but enforcement has been limited.
- There is a need for new, stronger resolutions addressing maritime threats and humanitarian protections.
- The UNSC must act to de-escalate the conflict, ensure aid access, and uphold international peace and security.

## **Guiding Questions and Possible Solutions**

- What actions should the Security Council take to ensure safe navigation in the Red Sea?
- How can the UNSC balance counter-terrorism and humanitarian protection in Yemen?
- Should the Council support or condemn unilateral military actions by member states?
- What mechanisms can be introduced to prevent escalation between regional and global powers?
- How can the Security Council address the root causes of the Houthi conflict?
- How can the Security Council tackle the multifaceted, intertwined aspects of the conflict?