



SC

Issue 1

Oscar Wisgerhof

Forum:	Security Council
Issue:	Addressing Religious Extremism in Yemen and the Red Sea
Student Officer:	Oscar Wisgerhof
Position:	Head Chair Security Council

Introduction

The Republic of Yemen has a long history with religious extremism and civil war. Since 2004, major clashes have erupted between the Yemeni government and various extremist groups, with foreign powers such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates intervening and playing a pivotal role in combating the Houthis and other extremist factions since 2015. The Saudi-led coalition has previously been profoundly supported by the United States of America. However, in February 2021, President Joe Biden changed US policy toward Yemen, which included declaring an end to US support for the Saudi-led coalition's offensive operations in the conflict.

The duration of the conflict has heavily impacted civilians within Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Continued terroristic attacks from the Houthis and other extremist groups have plagued the region. Persistent attacks by the Houthis and other extremist groups have destabilized the region, and Saudi Arabia had provided substantial financial aid to Yemen's government, but corruption raised doubts internationally about its effectiveness.

While Saudi Arabia is fighting the Houthis in Yemen, The Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to support and fund the Houthis in Yemen. Some experts call the conflict in Yemen a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. There have been multiple negotiations between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, however none of the previous negotiations has been successful.

Due to the duration of the conflict, religious extremism in Yemen was not widely broadcasted, until the October 7 attacks in Israel, when the Houthis entered international headlines

by declaring war on Israel and shot down a US drone. On November 19, the Iran-funded group hijacked an Israel-linked cargo ship in the Red Sea and held 25 crew members hostage. Since then, the Houthis have continued to attack ships in the Red Sea shipping route. In response to ongoing Houthi attacks against ships in the Red Sea, the United States of America initiated Operation Prosperity Guardian, along with a coalition of 20 other countries, some of which wanted to remain anonymous. Most notable not on the list was Saudi Arabia.

In February of 2024 Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi stated that the group will further escalate its attacks on Red Sea shipping if “aggression against Gaza does not stop.” The Houthis territory is located next to the Red Sea. Since 2023 the Houthis have been attacking commercial ships within the Red Sea. The Houthis are located near the Red Sea, which is one of the world’s busiest shipping routes. Their repeated attacks on commercial vessels have heightened global concerns. These vessels carry approximately 12% of global trade." This has increased international concern. In 2023, approximately 59 ships passed through the Red Sea daily. By July 2024, reports indicated this number had dropped to about 30 ships per day. This shows the significant impact of the religious extremism from the Houthis.

Key Terms

Operation Prosperity Guardian

A defensive coalition meant to reassure global shipping and mariners that the international community is there to help with safe passage.

Hijacking

To seize possession or control of (a vessel) from another person by force or threat of force.

Shipping Routes

Navigating lanes, both natural and man-made, in wide waterways used by large vessels to connect major ports and carry cargo.

Hostages

Someone who is taken as a prisoner by an enemy to force to get others involved to do what that enemy wants.

Declaring War

A formal act by which one state announces existing or impending war activity against another.

Dogma

A principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true.

Religious Extremism

An ideology of certain groups or individuals in denominations and religious organizations, characterised by adherence to extreme interpretations of dogma.

Proxy War

A war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved.

Houthis

A Zaydi Shia Islamist political and military organization that emerged from Yemen in the 1990s.

Gulf of Aden

A deepwater basin that forms a natural sea link between the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea.

Bab al-Mandab Strait

A strait between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa.

Primary Benefactor (Political Use)

A term to describe the nation that receives the benefit from a relation with another nation.

General Overview

Religious extremism in Yemen

The Houthis are an armed political and religious extremist group which champions Yemen's Shia Muslim minority, the Zaidis. Formally known as the Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), the group emerged in the 1990s. During the 2011 Arab Spring, a popular uprising forced President Saleh to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. President Hadi's government was overwhelmed with problems. The Houthis took this to their advantage and seized control of the northern province of Saada before taking the Yemeni capital, Sanaa. In 2015, the rebels seized large parts of western Yemen and forced Mr Hadi to flee abroad.

Saudi Arabia feared the Houthis, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of Arab countries that intervened in the war. But some argue that the coalition did worse to the country than good. After years of air strikes and ground fighting, they have not dislodged the Houthis from most of the territory they seized in 2015. [OBJ]

The War in Yemen has killed more than 160,000 people. Saudi Arabia and the US blame Iran for smuggling weapons including drones, and ballistic missiles to the Houthis during the Yemen civil war which would be in violation of a UN arms embargo. The US and Saudi Arabia claim that such missiles and drones have been used in attacks on Saudi Arabia, as well as its ally, the United Arab Emirates. Iran has denied the allegations of supplying weapons to the Houthis and says it only supports them politically. The Houthis have also received support from the Lebanese Islamist group Hezbollah. The Houthis currently control Sanaa and the north-west of Yemen, which include the border with the Red Sea. Most of the Yemeni's population lives within the area controlled by the Houthis. While the internationally recognised government of Yemen is based in the southern port of Aden.

Cooperation with Iran and the Houthis have raised concerns within the region and Yemen. An example of tension within the Yemen region is when experts blamed Iran for attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities that the Houthis claimed in September 2019. Some are concerned with the actions of the Houthis in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Some experts have expressed concerns that the Houthis offer Iran plausible deniability for bombing attacks on Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Yemen's internationally recognized government. The civil war in Yemen has significantly impacted living conditions in Yemen. Since 2014 the country has had significant problems with hunger, and religious suppression.

The 2020s were especially difficult for humans in Yemen, after the covid-19 pandemic the war in Ukraine started which forced food prices to skyrocket. This made it extremely difficult for the World Food Program and other organizations to help Yemeni citizens. This is not even to mention

that one-third of Yemen is hard to access for organizations due to the war within Yemen between the Arab forces and the Houthis.

Religious extremism in the Red Sea

As a result of October 7, the extremist religious group known as the Houthis have targeted commercial shipping in the Red Sea. Major shipping companies have stopped using the Red Sea through which almost 15 percent of global seaborne trade passes. These significant transport companies have rerouted their vessels to take longer and costlier journeys around Southern Africa instead to avoid the threat that the Houthis pose in the Red Sea.

During the Gaza and Lebanon wars, the Houthis effectively turned the Bab al-Mandab into a chokepoint for commercial and military vessels. The Houthis have used various types of weapons, they have so far conducted over one hundred attacks against commercial ships and warships since November 2023. After these attacks on Western vessels, many Major companies stopped using the Red Sea route and instead often take the longer route around Africa. This has caused massive delays in shipping vessels worldwide. Nations like the US, UK, and the Netherlands have sent military vessels to protect commercial shipping. The presence of Western navies has been instrumental in certain areas, such as intercepting Houthi weapons, escorting some merchant vessels, and salvaging stricken ships. While the presence has been instrumental in certain areas the size of the Red Sea is 438,000 km², this size makes it almost impossible for military vessels to stop religious extremist groups from threatening commercial vessels. The vast size and advanced weaponry allow the Houthis to continue carrying out attacks within the Red Sea on commercial vessels.

The Houthis have made some significant mistakes when targeting commercial vessels. In October the Houthis attacked a Russian tanker that the Houthis mistook for a “British” oil tanker. Such incidents underscore the risks of miscalculation in a highly volatile region, where errors can lead to unintended diplomatic and possibly military consequences. This was not an isolated incident; the Houthis have occasionally misidentified targets, creating further complexities in an already tense environment. As the situation with the Houthis unfolds, the challenge of securing the Red Sea remains a pressing concern for the international community.

Major Parties Involved

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been significantly involved with religious extremism in Yemen and the Red Sea. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has led significant operations against the Iranian backed Houthis. Saudi Arabia has backed Yemen both financially (with 1.2 billion USD) but Saudi Arabia has also supported Yemen with its advanced military. Saudi news outlet Al Arabiya, has stated that Saudi Arabia contributed 100 warplanes and 150,000 soldiers to military operations in Yemen and the Red Sea.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates has been involved with religious extremism in Yemen and the Red Sea. The United Arab Emirates has been mostly involved in economic activities within Yemen. The United Arab Emirates has also been significantly involved within controversial operations within Yemen. The country has been accused of backing local militias and separatist groups that have sought to gain more autonomy or independence from the central government. The United Arab Emirates has been accused of using these groups to further its own interests in the region, rather than working towards a broader peace and stability in Yemen.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

British forces have played a significant role in countering religious extremism from the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. British forces launched a series of proportionate strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen in response to continuing attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The UK conducted five joint naval and air strikes with the US against the Houthis in response to their attacks on commercial shipping. The UK has been a major force in the Red Sea to combat the Houthis religious extremism within the region.

The United States of America

The United States of America has historically played a significant role in countering religious extremism in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The United States of America has led Operation Prosperity Guardian countering religious extremism within Yemen and the Red Sea. The United States of America has also been active in the Red Sea trying to counter religious extremism from the Houthis. The US has been a key ally with the Yemeni government to counter religious extremism within the region. The Houthi threat in the Red Sea concerns the US especially, as freedom of navigation is a core U.S. interest.

The State of Israel

The Houthis have declared war on The State of Israel. The Houthis group have launched repeated drone and missile attacks against Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The Houthis are allied with Hamas and have continued to call for the freedom of Gaza. The State of Israel have since 2024 been bombing and attacking the Houthis within Yemen. The State of Israel does not have diplomatic ties with the Yemini government. The State of Israel condemns the Houthis and its extremism within Yemen and the Red Sea.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

The Houthis' government, based in their capital, Sanaa, is officially only recognized by Iran. Iran has a long history with the Houthis. Some experts predict that Iranian military support to the Houthis began as early as 2009, amid the Houthis' first war against Yemen's government. Iran is the Houthis' primary benefactor, providing them mostly with security assistance, such as weapons transfers, training, and intelligence support. Iranian support has bolstered the Houthis fighting abilities, helping the Houthis gain and maintain military superiority within Yemen and the Red Sea.

The Russian Federation

The Russian government has sought to maintain positive relations with all the key players in Yemen and the surrounding region. Russia has provided the Houthis with limited assistance throughout the conflict, including small arms. Russian arms dealers have provided the Houthis with weapons, arms dealers such as Viktor Bout have been criticised for selling weapons to the Houthis. Western Media have claimed that Russia is considering sending advanced weapons, including Yakhont supersonic anti-ship missiles which can be a significant threat to commercial shipping within the Red Sea. These advanced weapons could also pose a significant threat to Saudi Arabia, commercial vessels and the Yemini government.

Timeline of Key Events

June 2004	Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi launched an uprising against Yemen's government, citing political marginalization and corruption. Yemeni forces
------------------	---

	then killed Hussein in September. This marked the start of intermittent wars between the Houthis and the Yemeni's government.
September 2014	The Houthis seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa. They then ousted President Hadi and consolidated control over northern and western Yemen. Their advance triggered widespread unrest, leading to another civil war as they expanded into other regions of Yemen.
March 25, 2015	Saudi Arabia and its allies launched Operation Decisive Storm to counter Houthi advances, fearing Iranian influence in the region. Airstrikes and ground operations targeted Houthi-controlled areas. Despite massive military efforts, the coalition struggled to dislodge the Houthis.
September 14, 2019	Drone and missile attack targeted Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq and Khurais oil facilities, temporarily halting nearly half of the kingdom's oil output. The Houthis claimed responsibility, but experts suggested Iranian involvement.
October 7, 2023	Following attacks in Gaza, the Houthis declared war on Israel. The Houthis then shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone over the Red Sea. Which marked the group's first real expansion of hostilities beyond Yemen.
December 2023	The Houthis conducted over 100 attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, including commercial and military ships. Using advanced weaponry, they turned the Bab al-Mandab Strait into a chokepoint. This raised major international concern and forced rerouted shipping routes.

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

Security Council Adopted Resolution 2768 (2025), Sustaining Monthly Reporting on Houthi Attacks in Red Sea. By a vote of 12 in favour to none against, with 3 abstentions (Algeria, China, Russian Federation), the Council (Security Council) extended until 15 July 2025, its request that the Secretary-General provide it with written monthly reports on Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

Security Council adopted Resolution 2758 (2024), Security Council Renews Sanctions, Panel of Experts concerning Yemen. The resolution requested the Panel of Experts to provide a midterm update to the relevant committee no later than 15 April 2025 as well as a final report to the Council no later than 15 October 2025 that includes information related to the illicit transfer and diversion of

conventional weapons and to commercially available components used by designated individuals or entities to assemble certain weapons systems.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

August 2021 Negotiations

Oman attempts to broker a peace deal between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. But Houthis negotiators refuse to meet with the newly appointed UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg.

February 2021, Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen

Houthi rebels conducted missile air strikes in Saudi Arabia, including targeting oil tankers and facilities and international airports. The Saudi-led coalition responded to the increase in attacks with air strikes targeting Sanaa. The offensive was the deadliest clash between the two groups since 2018.

September 2023 Negotiations

A delegation of Houthi officials and Omani mediators visited Saudi Arabia for a five-day round of negotiations. This was the first official visit by Houthis to the country since 2014. The discussions included reconstruction plans, a timeline for foreign troop withdrawal from Yemen, and the reopening of the Sanaa airport and ports controlled by the Houthis. Officials were optimistic, in the end no concrete agreement was drafted.

February 2024, Saudi Arabia funding to Yemeni Government

Saudi Arabia gave \$250 million in aid to the Yemeni government for civil servant salaries, the budget deficit, and other government expenses. This was part of the country's plan, introduced in August 2023, to provide \$1.2 billion in aid to the Yemen government. This money was given to the Yemeni government to counter the Houthis within Yemen and the Red Sea.

Possible Solutions

Economical Intervention

Secure international commitments for long-term development aid to support Yemen's reconstruction. Economic interventions can strengthen the Yemeni government's capacity to address the Houthis conflict, rebuild infrastructure, and restore essential services like education and healthcare after years of civil war. However, concerns about corruption in Yemen's government raise questions about the proper use of these funds. To ensure effectiveness and accountability the Security Council would have to come up with a solution that would ensure that the money is properly managed. While economical intervention provides a reasonable solution for the problem of the Houthis within Yemen it does not solve the problem of the Houthis constant attacks on commercial shipping vessels.

Red Sea Maritime Security

Red Sea maritime security is critical to protecting global shipping lanes from threats posed by the Houthi insurgency. The Houthis have targeted vessels in the Red Sea, disrupting trade and jeopardized regional stability. Ensuring maritime security requires a coordinated international effort, including naval patrols, intelligence sharing, and securing key chokepoints like the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. Establishing a joint monitoring system involving regional stakeholders, supported by neutral bodies like the International Maritime Organization (IMO), can help prevent attacks and maintain safe passage for vessels in the Red Sea. Red Sea Maritime Security is an extremely ambitious plan. A financial cost for sustained patrols and infrastructure can strain budgets, especially for developing nations within the region. Furthermore, focusing on military solutions risks neglecting the root causes of the conflict, such as the Houthis' grievances and Yemen's internal instability.

Neutralizing external influences

Neutralizing external influence through sanctions and diplomacy can reduce the proxy nature of Yemen's conflict, encouraging local stakeholders to prioritize peace. Targeted sanctions on actors supplying weapons or exacerbating tensions can pressure compliance with peace efforts. However, sanctions risk harming civilians if they disrupt essential supplies or trade. Additionally, external powers may circumvent restrictions, prolonging the conflict.

Military Intervention

Military intervention could neutralize the Houthis capabilities and protect vital infrastructure, potentially hastening conflict resolution. It can secure shipping lanes in the Red Sea and support Yemeni forces in regaining control of key regions. However, such actions risk civilian casualties, worsening the humanitarian crisis. Military Intervention has historically also shown the world that Military Intervention can cause significant risk to the nations persuading military

intervention. Historically the Houthis have not been removed by military intervention from the Saudi-led Coalition, this raises questions about the effectiveness of potential Military Intervention.

Peacekeeping Intervention

UN-led peacekeeping can help enforce ceasefires, protect civilians, and create space for political negotiations, fostering stability in Yemen. It brings international legitimacy and impartiality to peace efforts. However, deploying peacekeepers is costly and requires broad consensus, which may face political resistance by the Houthis. Furthermore, the Houthis have historically rejected any foreign intervention into the Yemen civil war. Therefore, the possibility of an UN-led peacekeeping force could increase tensions within the region rather than deescalating the conflict. Peacekeeping Intervention might solve the problem of religious violence in Yemen, but it does not address the Houthi attacks on commercial and military shipping vessels.

Bibliography

1. DC (ACW), Arab Center Washington. "Houthi Red Sea Attacks Have Global Economic Repercussions." *Arab Center Washington DC*, 15 Apr. 2024, arabcenterdc.org/resource/houthi-red-sea-attacks-have-global-economic-repercussions/.
2. Austin, Lloyd. "Statement from Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on Ensuring Freedom of Navigation." *U.S. Department of Defense*, 18 Dec. 2023, www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3621110/statement-from-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-ensuring-freedom-of-n/.
3. Center for Preventive Action. "Conflict in Yemen and the Red Sea." *Global Conflict Tracker*, Council on Foreign Relations, 8 Oct. 2024, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen.
4. Montgomery, Marcus. "A Timeline of the Yemen Crisis, from the 1990s to the Present." Arab Center Washington DC, 19 Feb. 2021, arabcenterdc.org/resource/a-timeline-of-the-yemen-crisis-from-the-1990s-to-the-present/.
5. Priestman, Will. "Red Sea Disruption Continues to Effect Shipping." *Logistics Business*, 21 Nov. 2024, www.logisticsbusiness.com/transport-distribution/ports-shipping/red-sea-disruption-continues-to-effect-shipping/.
6. Robinson, Kali. "Iran's Support of the Houthis: What to Know." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 Mar. 2024, www.cfr.org/in-brief/irans-support-houthis-what-know.
7. Smith, Mary Kate. "Russian Support for Yemen's Houthi Movement." *Gulf International Forum*, 24 Dec. 2024, gulfif.org/russian-support-for-yemens-houthi-movement/.
8. "Timeline: Houthi Attacks." *Wilson Center*, 2024, www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-houthi-attacks.
9. United Nations. "The United Nations in Yemen | United Nations in Yemen." *Yemen.un.org*, 2023, yemen.un.org/en/about/about-the-un.

