

*Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and  
Government*

# **YEMEN AT THE CROSSROADS**

**CRISIS AND RECONSTRUCTION**

Edited by  
Khalil Fadl Osman and Mona Hedaya



# Yemen at the Crossroads

Nearly a decade into a devastating conflict, Yemen stands at a crossroads, grappling with destruction, socio-economic decline, and political deadlock. This edited volume provides a comprehensive and insightful exploration of Yemen's current crisis, emphasising the urgent need for a holistic and forward-looking approach to post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

*Yemen at the Crossroads: Crisis and Reconstruction* examines the historical roots, geopolitical implications, and local dynamics of Yemen's conflict. Structured into two comprehensive parts, the book first provides a thorough examination of the conflict's evolution and peacemaking processes, and then shifts to envisioning and strategising for post-conflict recovery and sustainable development. By highlighting the interplay between local political dynamics and international interests, this book enhances our understanding of Yemen's conflict and illuminates potential pathways toward peace and reconstruction.

*Yemen at the Crossroads: Crisis and Reconstruction* is an essential resource for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners involved in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. It aims to guide efforts toward a resolution that respects the resilience and aspirations of the Yemeni people, fostering a just, inclusive, and sustainable peace.

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# Yemen at the Crossroads

## Crisis and Reconstruction

**Edited by Khalil Fadl Osman and  
Mona Hedaya**



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First published 2026  
by Routledge  
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Open Access funding provided by the Qatar National Library

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80331 München, Germany.

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and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Osman, Khalil, editor. | Hidāyah, Muná, editor.

Title: Yemen at the crossroads : crisis and reconstruction /  
edited by Khalil Fadl Osman and Mona Hedaya.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2026. |

Series: Routledge studies in Middle Eastern democratization and government |

Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2025033768 (print) | LCCN 2025033769 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781041051824 (hardback) | ISBN 9781041051848 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781003631644 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Postwar reconstruction—Yemen (Republic) |

Peace-building—Yemen (Republic) | Yemen (Republic)—History—Civil War, 2015—|

Yemen (Republic)—Politics and government—21st century. |

Yemen (Republic)—Foreign relations.

Classification: LCC DS247.Y48 Y345 2026 (print) | LCC DS247.Y48 (ebook)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025033768>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025033769>

ISBN: 978-1-041-05182-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-041-05184-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-63164-4 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Newgen Publishing UK

**To Zainab Alalawi, a budding scholar whose untimely departure  
left broken hearts and a motherless child.**



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# Foreword

One of the early Western explorers to write about Yemen's captivating landscapes was Walter B. Harris, a journalist and traveler who chronicled his 1893 journey in *A Journey Through the Yemen*. Harris's descriptions of Yemen's stunning beauty that enchanted readers were a variation on an old theme. The ancient Greeks and Romans, recognising Yemen's splendor, referred to it as "Arabia Felix" – a testament to its abundant treasures and spices.

Yet, from the turn of this century, Yemen has been remembered for all the wrong reasons: the appalling economic inequality, the presence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the ugly civil war leading to thousands of deaths, starvation of a sixth of the Yemeni population and a sense of hopelessness, prompting editors Khalil Osman and Mona Hedaya, in this edited volume, to describe Yemen as being a Hobbesian state of nature.

The United Nations is involved in many trouble spots in the Arab world, i.e., Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Yet, it is in Yemen that it seems poised to play a more meaningful role.

Yemen has been high on the United Nations peace agenda since 2011. But even a truce, let alone peace, had proved elusive until recently. UN-facilitated talks in Switzerland in 2015, Kuwait in 2016 and Sweden in 2018 made little headway, if any. The UN put forward a road map for peace where the antagonists would sign up for a truce, open up Hudaydah Port, ease restrictions of movement and sit to talk about the future. But years later, all that has been achieved is a tacit truce since the expiry of the April 2022 UN-brokered truce in October 2022 and the opening of the Sanaa airport, shining a faint ray of hope for the future.

Yemen remains the poorest of the Arab states. Its colonial and cold war past had divided the country until 1990 into the Soviet-oriented south, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and the north, the Yemen Arab Republic. In 1990, the South Yemenis foresaw the implosion of the Soviet Union and joined the North as one state while the trend was dismemberment elsewhere. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia splintered in 1990 and 1991, and Eritrea broke away from Ethiopia in 1993. In 2010, South Sudan's departure from Sudan completed this process.

Despite the farsightedness and Realpolitik, the coming together of the two Yemens was fraught from the outset. Decades of political and geographical

differences were difficult to overcome under a northern military-turned-civilian President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who concentrated all power into his hands. Saleh battled with southern separatists, and from 2004 onwards, an insurgency launched by Hussein al-Houthi in the north that proved potent and involved six wars until 2009.

Saleh had put down the southern separatist drive in 1994. But two decades later, the Southern Movement would prove resilient and win UAE patronage. During all this time, radical elements found a haven in Yemen, adding to the menagerie of conflicting interests and actors. They continue to control pockets of influence in the east.

The 2011 Arab Spring galvanised disillusionment with Saleh's rule, who refused to go until the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stepped in. That year after a 23-year-long stint, Saleh handed over power to his deputy Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. Since then, the United Nations has supported the Yemeni-led political transition process.

In 2014, with help from their erstwhile foe Saleh, the Houthis took over Sanaa driving President Hadi into his southern stronghold of Aden and appointed a presidential council. As they pressed their advantage, Hadi took refuge in Saudi Arabia. Heeding Hadi's call for help, a Saudi-led coalition tried to roll back the Houthi advance for its own reasons. Soon, the issue became a proxy regional war between the Houthis and their Iranian patrons on the one hand and President Hadi and his Saudi patrons, the Coalition, on the other.

In 2017, the Houthis killed Saleh after he called for talks with Riyadh. In 2019 the Southern Transitional Council or the southern separatists supported by the UAE declared self-rule in areas under their control. In April 2022, Hadi resigned, handing power to an eight-member Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) based in Riyadh.

Since 2015, the United States has backed the Coalition with arms and intelligence. In January 2021, President Donald Trump undercut the Houthis in his last hours in office, listing them as a "foreign terrorist organisation." But, one of the first things a more pragmatic administration under President Joe Biden did as soon as coming to office was to reverse the previous administration's decision in February 2021, making talks kosher with the Houthis.

Yemen's civil war has many elements vying for power – the Shi'ite Zaydi Houthis, who hold most of the north if not the populous areas, the de jure PLC, the southern separatists as part of the PLC, the AQAP in the east and other smaller de facto authorities. The UN's roadmap for peace involves the Houthis and the PLC, the two major antagonists. Still, analysts have pointed out that for any peace to be long-lasting, other actors with areas of influence, not to mention youth, women and civil society, need to be brought in. One hopes this will happen sooner than later and that an inclusive peace will be reached.

Unlike the member states involved in the Yemen miasma, the UN has no agenda but to see that it can bring about lasting peace, the purpose for which the organisation was founded. Although not as consequential as some member states' resources and influence, the UN is in a good place now.

The Biden administration delisted the Houthis, scaled back its support for the Coalition, and sought an exit from its Yemen involvement. Abu Dhabi has quietly withdrawn most of its forces, and Riyadh seems tired. The Houthis have dug in, but a stalemate on the battlefield could spur a sense of pragmatism in the parties. The UN, therefore, becomes very relevant and could save face for all, that is, if the parties would play ball. The UN is not the only player in Yemen, however. As some speakers in the UN Security Council (UNSC) debate on 17 May 2023 pointed out, other streams of peace, i.e., the Omani peace effort, should feed into UN efforts so that the UN could speak in one voice.

In my three decades of UN peacekeeping and political work, I have found multi-lateral efforts succeed whenever influential member states want the UN to front for them or when they throw their weight behind the UN and the populace is ready.

What exactly do conflicting parties in Yemen want? Why do they take to arms and cause agony and misery frequently to their own constituents? The answers to these questions could be complex, although setting wrongs right, power and influence could be the major driving factor for most. In some cases, like in Afghanistan, it could be ideology or normative standards – a certain kind of culture, lifestyle, civilisational change etc. that those who wield arms may wish to enforce. In Yemen, all these elements are present to some degree, but power seems to be the major driving force. Power sharing is the key to a solution. But Federalism appears to be a double-edged sword. Instead of bringing the Yemenis together, it could fan fissiparous tendencies.

But there is hope. At the height of the civil war no one would have imagined Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) as one entity later. After five years of terrible strife, international efforts finally bore fruit, and a complex power-sharing arrangement spawned two separate entities based on religion and a rotating federal presidency. Peace has failed to bring the two entities closer, but after a vicious five years of war, war's absence itself has become a laudable end goal.

Cyprus too closely mirrors Yemen's geographical divide. Every UN secretary-general from U Thant onwards has tried unsuccessfully to reunify Cyprus as a bizonal, bicomunal federation. Greek Cypriots have long argued that the island is under occupation by Türkiye. The Turkish Cypriots, in contrast, believe the Greek Cypriot government has hijacked the island's sovereignty. The last attempt in 2017 failed as Greek Cypriots wanted the Turkish army out, and Ankara stripped of its right of intervention. Türkiye is in no hurry to resolve the issue.

Yemen is similar to B&H and Cyprus in some respects. But for all its rickety immediate past, Yemen is a power slugfest, and the conflict is not as intractable. The Saudis could be compared to the Turks, but the comparison ends there. Unlike Türkiye, which one would assume is holding on to Cyprus for a more beneficial outcome, the Saudis appear ready to explore peace. The change in the US stance toward Yemen scaling down support for the Coalition, the Saudi-Iran détente in 2023, thanks to the Chinese, puts in place all the ingredients from the outside for peace.

Yemen's low-intensity conflict has slipped into oblivion. Yet, to a war-weary populace, a just peace is not one day too long. The UN had rightly called for a

Yemeni-led and owned peace, for anything less organic would be fickle. But equitable power sharing is the key to any lasting resolution, and the UN and its backers have their work cut out. No one argues that cracking the peace nut would be easy. The Houthis will likely expect a peace that resembles the balance of power today, where they have a dominant hand. Legitimate power, the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of peace, a role in rebuilding Yemen and ensuring their place in history should be good incentives for the protagonists. Regional powers and the international community could leverage post-conflict reconstruction funding to coax the parties toward a solution.

This book, therefore, could not have been better timed.

One of the few positive effects of conflict is scholarship on an area that had not gotten its due. Vietnam, Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Iraq would not have been studied this much without their difficult past and evolution. Scholarship on Yemen in English is sparse and is more historical than future-looking. This book, composed of eleven essays, would be crucial as Yemen stands on the cusp of an uneasy truce and peace. The contributors are accomplished analysts, area specialists, and writers whose in-depth knowledge of the region and Yemen is unparalleled. The book examines the past, the protagonists, their interests, and their goals. But it doesn't dwell on the past. Instead, it explores options for lasting and equitable peace and the post-conflict environment to promote peacebuilding, recovery, reconstruction, development, and regional and international cooperation in addressing competing claims.

The first chapter traces the five stages of the conflict, helping us understand the context. The second speaks of federalism – considered the key to a resolution but also a complex option. The third compares the role of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The fourth looks into America's Yemen policy, the fifth addresses the future implications of the humanitarian crisis, the sixth is on how good intentions do not always translate to good outcomes exploring peacemaking and conflict-making by Nobel Peace laureates, the seventh offers a recipe for lasting peace and future directions, the eighth explores the various mediation efforts at the local, regional, and international level, the ninth brings lessons from elsewhere on disarmament, demobilisation and reconstruction (DDR), the tenth speaks to governance and post-conflict reconstruction challenges and recommendations, and the last focuses on the health care priorities in post-conflict Yemen. The chapters are well thought out and offer a comprehensive view of the past, the present and the future.

The book will be indispensable for those studying Yemen, area specialists, policymakers, academia, journalists, etc. I am happy that Routledge is bringing out this edited volume. It will be a valuable addition to the scholarship on Yemen.

Rajarathinam Kannan  
Chennai, India  
4 July, 2023

# Acknowledgments

This book tells the story of a conflict. But in telling this story, it also keeps the spirit and flame of hope alive. This is, therefore, as much a story of a conflict as it is an attempt to chart a way to a future of hope where Yemen goes down the road toward recovery, national reconciliation and sustainable peace. This image of a “day after” marked by dramatic transformations toward peace has long captured the aspirations of millions upon millions of people in Yemen and beyond. By structuring the chapters of this book around the major dual theme of understanding the conflict and exploring the path and challenges of post-conflict reconstruction, we sought to move the current scholarship on the conflict in Yemen out of fixation on the ongoing war and in the direction of contemplating about the future. Therefore, in working on this book, our overriding concern was thinking about the opportunities and challenges of post-war peacebuilding in a number of vital issue areas and sectors in Yemen.

Working on this book has been punctuated by moments of hope and frustration. Yet, overall, it has been a wonderful and emotionally and intellectually fulfilling and rewarding experience. The idea of this book first germinated at a conference on “The Conflict in Yemen: Current Situation and Future Prospects,” organised in February 2022 by the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS) in Doha, in cooperation with the Arab Center Washington DC (ACW), and DeepRoot. The initial idea was to turn the conference papers into a book. However, for various reasons, this was not to be. So, we set about working on a new book guided by a firm belief in the importance and moral nature of scholarly speculation on post-conflict reconstruction.

In piecing together this book, we are indebted to the institutions and individuals involved in supporting or working with us during this intellectual journey. Special thanks go to the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and its General Director, Azmi Bishara, who graciously supported this project from its inception as an idea until its completion as a finished volume. We also warmly thank the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS) for the support and vibrant space for intellectual curiosity and productivity it provided us during our work on this book. An enormous debt is owed to CHS Director Ghassan Elkahout for his unrelenting affection, unwavering friendship, ceaseless encouragement and continuous

support throughout the work on this book. Ghassan's cheerful and motivating spirit throughout this long journey was instrumental in bringing this volume to conclusion. CHS researcher Rana Barout and Nour Abdel Hafez, a graduate student at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, rendered valuable research support for the work on the chapter on US foreign policy toward Yemen. Moad Ben Ghuzzi, a graduate student at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, assisted with reference formatting for a few chapters. We are also grateful to the Routledge anonymous readers for their helpful advice and insightful comments.

Most importantly, our sincerest thanks and gratitude go to our contributors for their cooperation, hard work, diligence, constructive and timely responses to comments, and, above all, their patience throughout the process. It has been a pleasure and an honor, as well as a rich learning and intellectually stimulating experience, working with all of them.

Last, but not least, our greatest debt goes to our families, whose love, support and patience always served as a source of inspiration, comfort and relief during this challenging intellectual journey.

Khalil Fadl Osman  
Mona Hedaya  
Doha, Qatar  
July 2025



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# Introduction

*Khalil Fadl Osman and Mona Hedaya*

Yemen has long been caught in a web of war, violence and misery. For nearly a decade now, Yemen has been deeply mired in an internationalised civil conflict, where the proxy war echoes of the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran reverberate. Coming on the heels of years of political upheaval and economic crisis, the conflict exacerbated an already fragile socio-economic situation. Escalating demands for secession in the south have compounded Yemen's woes. Following the 9/11 attacks, Yemen also emerged as a major theatre in the "war on terrorism," as al-Qaeda capitalised on state weakness and deep societal fissures to establish one of the strongest branches in its global terrorist franchise, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Amid this unfolding panoply of crises, the normal life of Yemenis was suspended as the country slipped deeper into a Hobbesian-like state of nature.

This book comes at a time when global concerns about the future of Yemen and the region continue to grow with the absence of tangible progress in the peace process toward ending the war which broke out in 2014, putting the country on the road to recovery, alleviating the suffering of its people, and kick-starting its economy.

These concerns have been compounded by attacks originating from Yemen on Israeli-bound or -affiliated shipping, as well as US- and UK-linked ships, in the Red Sea and Northern Indian Ocean precipitated by the Israeli offensive in Gaza following the 7 October 2023, attack on Israel carried out by Hamas. The stark implications of these developments cannot be underestimated. This book is an attempt to shed light on a range of issues pertaining to conflict and post-conflict environments in Yemen with an eye to promoting peacemaking, recovery, reconstruction, and development efforts. While some chapters analyse aspects of the conflict, others take a more future-oriented approach, reflecting not only their authors' interest in studying the present and the past, but also their desire to chart a better comprehensive understanding that contributes to producing thoughtful solutions to the conflict and its effects. Besides, the book aims to promote regional and international cooperation for addressing Yemen's critical challenges toward peace under a relentlessly changing and challenging conflict situation.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-1

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### **Tragedy of Protracted Conflict in Yemen**

Since 2014, Yemen has been afflicted by a complex grinding war, constituting a new chapter in a series of conflicts that have ravaged the country over the past decades, turning it to a tinderbox of conflicts. Over the years of this war, the situation fluctuated between de-escalation and major flare-ups. There were several attempts and initiatives that can be subsumed under the “peace process” heading. But, frequently, political and security decisions by the parties to the conflict or third parties set back the peace process, added fuel to an already combustible setting, and, sometimes, even re-escalated the war.

All these events have had severe humanitarian and economic consequences. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates the number of war deaths at approximately 377,000, of which more than 150,000 deaths were due to direct hostilities, including thousands of children. The rest died of indirect causes related to deteriorating health conditions, severe malnutrition, and the destruction of infrastructure (Hanna et al., 2021). The mutual attacks involved targets protected under international humanitarian law. Moreover, as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, an overwhelming 80 percent of the population live under the poverty line. A staggering 73 percent of the population rely on humanitarian assistance to survive, while approximately 4.5 million individuals became internally displaced persons (IDPs), underscoring the dire humanitarian crisis (UNHCR, 2024). Furthermore, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country, especially in view of the lack of health services, shortage of resources for diagnosis and treatment, as well as limited provisions of vaccines (M. Lederer, 2021). In addition, millions of Yemenis continue to live in an unhealthy environment in which there is no access to safe water and sanitation. These developments have led to the spread of deadly diseases among a large segment of Yemenis (World Bank, 2024).

The expected long-term economic impact of the conflict is likely to be profound. From 2015 to 2022, Yemen experienced a drastic 52 percent contraction in real GDP per capita, leaving approximately 21.6 million people, or two-thirds of the population, in need of humanitarian assistance. This decline was not only due to the usual effects of conflict but also because the Yemeni economy was heavily politicised, especially in sectors such as oil and gas. While in 2014 nearly half the population was living in poverty, the poverty level will have risen significantly by the time this book is published, exacerbating the conflict and creating even more challenging conditions for Yemenis (ReliefWeb, 2023). According to UNDP projections, if the conflict continues until 2030, the reversal in human development measured by the Human Development Index will reach nearly 40 years (Moyer et al., 2019).

At the economic level, successive economic shocks have plunged the country into deeper economic doldrums. These include the damage to the oil sector because of the large decline in global prices – oil being the mainstay of Yemeni imports (World Bank, 2021). The consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic inflicted additional shockwaves. The value of the Yemeni Riyal fell to its lowest levels ever,

while the size of foreign reserves dwindled because remittances of Yemenis abroad decreased by about 70%. The effects of limited job opportunities, low income, lack of fuel and means of transportation were aggravated by the effects of the heavy rains, floods, locust infestation, and other natural disasters that caused more displacement and further devastated infrastructure and livelihoods, especially given Yemen's limited ability to face them (OCHA, 2024). Moreover, the conflict has sapped the country's institutional capacities, leading to severe shortages – sometimes complete interruptions – in services, basic commodities, and fuel, casting a dark shadow on the activities of the private sector (World Bank, 2024). With continued insecurity, significant restrictions on trade, and currency inflation, the prices of commodities – even basic ones – have been almost constantly rising (World Bank, 2021).

As a result of the continued war, the humanitarian sector suffers from an increasingly challenging environment in Yemen. Its work is severely restricted. According to OCHA, nearly 10.1 million people, that is 49 percent of a total of 21 million people in need of assistance, live in areas that are hard to reach and deliver aid to, with significant logistical and bureaucratic obstacles hindering access, to say nothing of the lack of security. Humanitarian actors have been facing various types of harassment and threats that complicate their work and, in turn, contribute to exacerbating an already critical and precarious humanitarian situation (ReliefWeb, 2022). The obstacles facing the humanitarian sector are compounded by the lack of funding. By the summer of 2023, reports indicate that humanitarian aid has been cut by 62 percent over five years, endangering the lives and futures of the nation's most vulnerable people (Save the Children, 2023). In addition, the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected the economies of donors, have taken a toll on humanitarian assistance, setting off a trend of aid reduction. For example, the UK has slashed its funding to the humanitarian response in Yemen by over 86 percent since 2019 (Save the Children, 2023), which was described as a “death sentence” by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (BBC, 2021). Denmark, as well, has notably reduced its contributions by almost 80 percent, while Germany – recognised as the fourth largest donor – has not met its commitments, falling short by more than 60 percent (Save the Children, 2023). The decrease in funding levels encompasses the various humanitarian sectors, including, and alarmingly so, those concerned with saving and assisting children. Children's welfare remains the least funded. As of 2023, only 7.5% of the funding needed for child protection had been secured, alongside a slightly higher 9.6% of the required funding for education (Save the Children, 2023).

In February 2021, US president Joe Biden announced his administration's decision to “end all US support for offensive operations of the war in Yemen, including related arms sales, to both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,” as well as his administration's “pursuit of finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict.” The decision excluded “terrorist groups” and the protection of Saudi Arabia's security from attacks on its territories from this change in policy. At the same time, Biden affirmed US support for the UN initiative, which coincided with the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the war-torn country, and called for

a ceasefire, the resumption of the peace process, and the opening of appropriate channels for humanitarian aid. Biden also appointed Timothy Lenderking as the new US Envoy to Yemen, with the task of working on implementing the new diplomatic strategy. He also revoked the Trump administration's decision to designate the Ansar Allah Movement, also known as the Houthis after the family name of their leader, as a terrorist organisation to ease the humanitarian and political situation, as stated by his administration. This decision was reversed in January 2024 when the Biden administration redesignated the movement as a Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224 in response to its attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea.

There have been signs of an easing of tensions in the broader region since Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt signed the so-called "Al-Ula Agreement" with Qatar in January 2021, marking the return of diplomatic relations and an end to the crisis between them. The appointment of Ambassador Hans Grundberg of Sweden as the fourth UN envoy to Yemen in early August 2021 breathed new hope into the stalled peace process. In April 2022, Grundberg brokered a two-month ceasefire agreement between Ansar Allah and Saudi Arabia. Under the terms of the agreement, the Saudis pledged to end their blockade of the Houthi-controlled northern parts of the country, thus allowing fuel deliveries to help ease the humanitarian hardships of the population. The agreement also stipulated the resumption of commercial flights from Sanaa. After some hesitation, the Saudis allowed the first commercial flight out of Sanaa in May 2022. Extended twice, the truce expired in October 2022. However, the warring sides continued to implement the terms of the truce, although without a formal accord on the renewal of the ceasefire agreement. Moreover, the Chinese-mediated agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, announced in a joint tripartite statement on March 10, 2023, has ushered in a *détente* between the two longstanding rival regional powers and raised hopes of reducing and de-escalating regional tensions. However, the jury is still out on the potential of the China-brokered deal for bringing an end to the conflict in Yemen (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Therefore, amid the bleakness of the conflict situation in Yemen, there are opportunities to accelerate and operationalise the peace process. Cognizant of these opportunities, this book is devised as a scholarly tool to promote peacebuilding and nurture a vision for post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen. It goes without saying that the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen cries out for a solution, and the results of prolonging the conflict will be disastrous at all levels in Yemen, with negative reverberations for stability in the broader region.

### **Approaching the Yemen Conflict**

The current literature on the Yemen conflict suffers from a clear lack of analysis and understanding from a futurist peace-oriented perspective. Most books focus on the history of the war and the origins of the conflict (Lackner, 2019; Clark, 2010), or on analyzing the interests of one or more parties (Hill, 2017; Blumi, 2018). Some rare works deal with peace issues, but they mostly focus on one

aspect, for example, transitional justice (Yadav, 2022). The following survey is not exhaustive. It rather provides a fast-paced overview of the literature on Yemen that highlights the dearth of research that adopts a peace-oriented approach to explore post-conflict peacebuilding, reconstruction, and stabilization. As we embarked on working on this volume project, we were guided by a strong desire to fill this gap in the literature. We sought to expand the existing knowledge, with its narrow focus on the history of the conflict or certain aspects of it, to a broader examination that weds a critical examination of the conflict to a speculative, prognostic exploration into post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding in Yemen.

In her treatment of the civil war and Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, Ginny Hill not only unearths the underpinnings of and political calculus behind the Saudi decision to launch the war on Yemen, but also examines the factors behind the Saudi failure to retain the military upper hand against the Houthi rebels (Hill, 2017). Hill's book reflects on the multiple overlapping crises that preceded the intervention. In doing so, it scrutinizes how the patronage-networks and corruption that formed the basis of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's rule overlaid and reinforced domestic problems plaguing the country, such as falling natural resources, population growth, and poverty. In another thread of Hill's examination of the war, she provides a colourful narrative of key actors in the Yemeni crisis, including the Ansar Allah movement, AQAP, and the southern separatist HIRAK movement. These threads are combined into a unified narrative of the whirlpool of civil war and foreign intervention that has engulfed Yemen in recent years.

In a similar fashion, Helen Lackner goes beyond the immediate causes of the conflict, providing a broad-ranging exploration of the political and socio-economic dynamics of Yemen since the 1960s (Lackner, 2019). Lackner's historical narrative, which delves into the deeper historical roots of the conflict, plumbs depths that are usually left out of contemporary accounts of the war in Yemen. Following a useful, fast-paced survey of developments in the 1960s and 1970s, she sets out to investigate the events in the 1980s that culminated in the unification of Yemen in 1990. She also dissects the array of Islamist movements that populate the Yemeni landscape, including the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood branch in Yemen known as Islah, and AQAP, and examines the series of wars between Saleh's government forces and allied militias, on one hand, and the Houthis, on the other, that dominated the news on Yemen in the 2000s. Lackner, further, examines the problems that have saddled Yemen's economy, focusing on the effects of the depletion of natural resources, especially the scarcity of water resources, and the shift to high-value export crops. Against this backdrop, Lackner's account shows how the 2011 transition was a watershed moment in modern Yemeni history, engendering a series of events that climaxed in the Saudi-led intervention and the consequent devastating war. In a sequel to her *Yemen in Crisis*, Lackner provides a brief account of Yemen's slide to civil war and a fast-paced analysis of Yemen's economy and relations with other key regional and international state actors. Her analysis of the travails and prospects of Yemen's economy is disheartening. She traces how Yemen's economy lurched into the grip of a deepening economic crisis over the years. This crisis was compounded by the effects of structural factors, including

climate change, depletion of water resources, and migration, and adverse political influences, including corruption and nepotism. Suggesting that Yemen is not likely to emerge from the current conflict as a unitary state, Lackner warns that ending the war would not automatically end Yemen's political and economic difficulties. Reviving Yemen's economy, she contends, would require massive injections of development assistance (Lackner, 2022).

Much like Lackner, Isa Blumi has written a historical account to explain the origins of the Saudi-led war in Yemen. But ideology looms large in Blumi's narrative (Blumi, 2018). Employing a perspective steeped in global systems theory, he situates Yemen at the forefront of resistance to predatory capitalism, globalization, and "empire." The common thread that runs through his book is that attempts by global capitalism to spread its tentacles and dominance to Yemen, and Yemen's resistance to them, explain main developments in the country from World War I down to the ongoing Saudi-led war, through the 1962 revolution and the 2011 uprising. In Blumi's radical polemical telling, the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen is a war of plunder that seeks to subjugate Yemen to the interests of global financial capitalism. Setting out to excavate the genesis of the war, he traces the trajectory that culminated in the war back to isolationist policies of the Shi'ite Zaydi Hamid al-Din dynasty in the early twentieth century which established in Yemen "one of the unique cases of indigenous, independent political order to survive World War I" (Blumi, 2018). By the same token, the September 1962 coup that overthrew the Zaydi Mutawakkilite monarchy is read as part of an unrelenting "effort to subordinate Yemenis, long defiantly independent from the globalization trend infesting the larger world" (Blumi, 2018).

A narrower focus on Yemen's road to war can be found in Stacy Philbrick Yadav's account of the country's recent history from unification in 1990 down to the ongoing Saudi-led war (Yadav, 2022). Yadav foregrounds the issue of justice, especially transitional justice. In dissecting the debate over regime change, war and peacebuilding in Yemen, she criticizes international peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts in Yemen for their disinterest in questions of justice, inclusion, and local priorities. Noting that the 2011 transition in Yemen, which forced President Saleh's resignation in 2012, has been nothing short of transformative, Yadav shows how the transitional process fuelled tensions that led to war. While slamming the National Dialogue Conference's failure to forge a new national consensus, she argues that the federalist scheme proposed by President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi was meant to centralize power and weaken Hadi's adversaries, namely the Houthis and HIRAK. The federalist scheme attempted to rig the political map by cutting up the geographic bases of the two opposition groups. Yadav explores how the resultant tightening political deadlock hastened the country's slide to war. Yet, as the author shows, while the country has been consumed with the flames of war, the struggle for justice and inclusion continues to animate peacebuilding and civic activism by local actors.

Scholarly literature in Arabic on the conflict in Yemen, and on the complexities and prospects of post-conflict reconstruction, is virtually non-existent. Literature in Arabic on the war in Yemen suffers from a gaping dearth of social scientific or historical research employing systematic qualitative or quantitative methods. The

following two sources are the closest to any systematic research work in Arabic on the Yemeni conflict.

Saleh al-Baydhani provides a detailed account of the Yemeni war, focusing on the events that unfolded over the years (Al-Baydhani, 2021). Baydhani is keen to treat his readers to a wide-ranging narrative covering different aspects of the Yemeni conflict. In exploring the cultural, political, and historical backgrounds of the conflict, he examines the events that led to the Houthi takeover of Sanaa, the capital, and touches on the tribal conflicts and their historical significance. He further highlights the key players in the war during the past decade, including the Houthis, the General People's Congress Party, founded by Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Southern Movement, and the influential Al-Ahmar family. Baydhani does not lose sight of the broader regional and international dimensions of the Yemeni crisis. He dissects the positions of the international community, the United Nations, and the evolving positions of the Southern Movement, the Houthis, and the various alliances involved in the war.

A volume edited by Bakeel Al Zandani and Abdou Musa Al-Barmawi focuses on the socio-political and economic dynamics, and attendant dashed hopes, since the 2011 Arab Spring uprising in Yemen (Al Zandani et al., 2023). Contributors to this volume turn significant attention to the failure of democratic transition in Yemen. Their analyses pay a particular attention to two factors: continued strength of sub-national identities, and the detrimental role of regional and international actors. Cognizant of the strength of tribal loyalties in Yemen, the authors contend that sub-national, especially tribal, loyalties were not by nature fated to play a negative role in the political development of the country. They rather blame the political elites for utilizing sub-national loyalties and identities for political ends. The effects of this have been deleterious, negatively impacting the loyalty and cohesion of the armed forces. The authors are also critical of the role played by external actors, including the UN, in Yemen. Bemoaning the weakness of Yemeni civil society, they argue that external actors contributed to Yemen's economic crisis, including by pressurizing the Yemeni government to adopt International Monetary Fund reforms, marginalised national decision-making, aggravated the social fragmentation, and inflamed the conditions of conflict by turning Yemen to an arena for proxy wars.

A group of researchers team up to delve into the early stages of the Yemeni transition in 2011 and explore the potential for political transformation in Yemen (Al-Ssalhi et al., 2012). The contributors to this volume trace the emergence and historical development of the modern state in Yemen, shedding light on the domestic and international obstacles that hindered progress toward a modern state. Furthermore, they examine the roles played by different actors in the revolution which forced President Saleh out of power, with a particular focus on civil society. They also investigate the challenges to Yemeni unity, providing an in-depth examination of the southern issue. Moving forward, the contributors analyse the social and economic trajectories of post-revolution Yemen. They also explore the significant role of social media in the revolution and highlight the influential contributions of the youth. Overall, the volume seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the events that led to the outbreak of the Saudi-led war.

As can be clearly seen from this quick survey, Western scholarship on the conflict in Yemen focuses heavily on history. It leans heavily toward offering explanations of the origins of the war, examining its multiple dimensions, sketching the roles and profiles of various local, regional and international actors, and assessing its catastrophic effects. There is hardly any meaningful attempt to move beyond the current state of conflict. Notwithstanding this scholarship's useful and informative forays into the history of the conflict, it remains reluctant to venture into the less well-charted realm of exploring what it takes to build a future of sustainable peace and coexistence in Yemen.

Rare as it is, solid scholarly literature on the Yemen conflict in Arabic, the native language of the country at the core of our volume, focus solely on analyzing the conflict and the positions of its parties from a strictly political standpoint. This scholarship does not extend the scope of analysis to the post-conflict period. Furthermore, a lot of what has been written on Yemen in Arabic was published very early in the conflict. Hence, the analysis presented in Arabic scholarship on the Yemen conflict has largely been overtaken by dramatic changes that unfolded since they were published.

In the light of this state of the scholarship on the Yemen conflict, this volume represents a long-overdue attempt to both scrutinize the conflict, along with its many aspects and effects, and look into a future post-conflict Yemen. It explores new directions in, and makes new contributions to, the scholarship on the conflict in Yemen. This volume does not merely treat the conflict in Yemen as a historical case study, but also offers a wider appreciation of the current and future challenges facing peacebuilding in Yemen.

### **The Yemen Conflict: A Futurist Peace-Oriented Approach**

This edited volume adopts an integrative approach that combines covering the recent major changes in the conflict's context and dynamics with a future, peace-oriented perspective, with a special focus on post-conflict peacemaking, peacebuilding, recovery, reconstruction, and development. To this end, it seeks to grasp the roots and dimensions of the conflict in Yemen while not losing sight of exploring the future post-conflict reconstruction challenges. Contributors to this volume are a diverse group of prominent Yemeni, Arab and international academics and researchers specializing or interested in Yemen. We strongly believe that this diversity enriches the analysis in this volume as it allows for a more comprehensive, integrated and rigorous, and objective understanding of the conflict and the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction.

The edited volume will consist of eleven chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. It is organized into two parts. While Part I provides a review and analysis of the conflict in Yemen, Part II explores a range of issues and challenges related to post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

In Chapter 1, "Contextualizing Yemen's Current Conflict: A Journey Through Five Stages," Mona Hedaya and Wadee Al-Arabeed describe the evolution of the conflict in Yemen and its dynamic nature through a critical examination of its

historical background, context, and recent developments. Starting with the immediate historical background of the events leading up to the conflict, Hedaya and Al-Arabeed identify five distinct stages in the conflict. The first stage covers the Yemeni Revolution of 2011 and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative in April 2011, which eased President Saleh out of power and provided for a national dialogue as part of a transition plan. The second stage involves the failure of the national dialogue and the alliance forged between the Houthis and Saleh, while the third stage saw an internal armed struggle for influence that paved the way for the military intervention by Saudi-led coalition forces. The fourth stage covers the period since US President Joe Biden came to power and the changing roles of leading GCC members of the coalition, namely, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The last stage addresses the current state of no war, no peace.

In their chapter, “Federalism in Yemen: The Prelude to Peace?,” Bakeel Al Zandani and Youcef Bouandel, conduct a detailed examination that shows that, given the political, tribal and identity conflicts plaguing Yemen, federalism can be a slippery slope toward further conflict and, at best, pave the way for the return to the pre-unification period of two Yemens. While in theory federalism is an attractive proposition and could offer a potential way out of the difficulties that Yemen has been facing, the reality, the authors argue, is different. The authors’ examination notes that, since the unification of Yemen in 1990, power and the country’s resources have been centrally concentrated in the hands of a small political, tribal, and military elite. This situation, they explain, created an atmosphere of tension and mistrust between the different political forces in the country, and led to high levels of corruption. With increasing popular pressure on the government to decentralize power, Saleh’s government, in 2000, introduced the Local Authority Law (LAL) aiming to devolve more power to local councils. However, Saleh, fearful of conceding power, ensured the non-implementation of this Law. Hence, Zandani and Bouandel argue, the issue of decentralizing power was not only one of the contributing factors to the 2011 protests, but also one of the most significant challenges facing the country. The secessionist movement, the Southern Hiraak, which threatened the breakup of the country, exerted additional pressure on the Yemeni authorities to find a solution. Thus, a National Dialogue Conference was set up in 2013 and, in January 2014, delegates agreed to transform Yemen into a federal state. They were unable, however, to agree on the number of states, their boundaries, and the power- and resource-sharing arrangements. A month later, a committee led by President Hadi announced that the country would have six regions: two in the South and four in the North.

No volume on the conflict in Yemen would be complete without a discussion of the policies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two foremost members of the coalition that launched Operation Decisive Storm in 2015, toward Yemen. Mahjoob Zweiri and Nesibe Hicret Battaloglu take up this task in their chapter “Navigating the Yemeni Quagmire: The Evolution of Saudi and Emirati Intervention from Synergy to Strife.” The contributors’ principal contention posits that variances in the two countries’ priorities, motivations, and intervention strategies have engendered localized grievances and instigated additional schisms, thereby

exacerbating challenges pertaining to political stability and national unity within the Yemeni context. In July 2019, the UAE unilaterally announced its withdrawal from Yemen's Hudaydah port as part of Abu Dhabi's "Strategic Redeployment." Zweiri and Battaloglu maintain that, while withdrawal can be viewed as a calculated exit strategy for the Emirates from war-torn Yemen, it accentuated the diverging approaches and intentions toward Yemen between the two main coalition members. Adopting a multi-level, multi-dimensional analysis encompassing domestic, regional, and global perspectives with considerations for personal, economic, political, and security dimensions, the authors trace the initial Saudi and Emirati motivations to intervene, their strategies and tactics on the ground, and the setbacks they encountered in Yemen. In this context, the chapter seeks to address an analytical gap by investigating the implications of diverging Emirati and Saudi motivations and policies in the Yemeni war for the political future of Yemen as a nation.

Despite lacking a clear strategy toward Yemen, US foreign policy has had a major impact on developments in Yemen. In his "Evolving Dynamics: US Foreign Policy and the War in Yemen," Khalil Fadl Osman explores the elements of continuity and change in the US foreign policy approach toward Yemen and the accompanying internal policy debate within successive administrations and congress over foreign policy priorities and the definition of national interests in Yemen. Informed by the growing literature on securitization in international relations, Osman details America's policy toward Yemen, especially since the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen began in March 2015. After a brief survey of how Yemen had figured in US foreign policy interests, the author sketches the emergence of Yemen as a central focus of the US "war on terrorism" as Washington sought to counter the rising influence of AQAP in Yemen. He also touches on the US role in the Arab Spring-inspired political transition in Yemen, namely the Obama administration's support of the April 2011 GCC initiative which ended the 33-year-term of President Saleh. This sets the stage for an in-depth examination of the US support of the Saudi-led war effort against the Houthis. The US has been an indirect party to the conflict, providing weapons and other forms of support to the Saudi-led coalition. Osman traces the trajectory of the US role in the conflict from the Obama to the Biden administrations situating it in the broader context of the overall US policy toward the Middle East.

In "Towards Lasting Peace in Yemen: Lessons Learned and Future Directions," Shoqi Al-Maktary explores challenges facing efforts to design a successful peace process in Yemen, drawing insights from previous endeavors. Yemen has a history of conflicts; some were resolved through local negotiations while others required external mediation. Maktary interrogates past instances of violence in Yemen to generate valuable insights for ongoing and future peace processes. His starting point is an examination of the 1994 conflict between North and South Yemen – a turning point in Yemen's history. To guide the analysis, Maktary sets out to address several questions. Firstly, he explores the relevance of historical events in understanding Yemen's current dynamics and informing future peace processes. For instance, during the National Dialogue Conference following the Arab Spring

uprising, challenges arose in initiating a successful transitional justice process due to differing opinions on how far back in time cases should be considered. Secondly, he explores the drivers of conflict in Yemen, including political competition, dysfunctional governance, economic interests, and the lack of inclusive representation. Additionally, Matari investigates deeper issues such as weak national identity, historical grievances, and ideological differences, aiming to address root causes of success and failure in mediating peace agreements. He then moves to examine the characteristics of successful mediators to identify qualities that contribute to effective peace agreements. By analyzing previous peace processes, he seeks to distinguish successful mediators from those who failed. Furthermore, he evaluates the factors influencing the quality and suitability of peace processes and agreements. Aiming to identify areas for improvement and learn from past experiences, he examines such factors as inclusivity, process design and structure, agreement quality, implementation, and results, aiming to identify areas for improvement and learn from past experiences. Maktary concludes his chapter by offering options and recommendations based on a comparative analysis of previous peace processes in Yemen. He proposes a transformative approach that addresses Yemen's complex and multi-dimensional conflict context. The recommendations cover various aspects such as the scope of the peace process, the ideal mediator profile, and the structure of a successful agreement.

In her chapter, "Conflict Mediation in Yemen: Local, Regional, and International Efforts," Arwa Mokdad goes on another excursus into conflict mediation and peacemaking in Yemen. She notes that, despite continued engagement since 2015, UN involvement has remained unsuccessful in the context of Yemen's ongoing war. However, negotiations organized by local and regional efforts within Yemen have garnered more success. This leads Mokdad to raise the question: why are local and regional conflict mediation efforts more effective than UN mediation in Yemen? Building upon fieldwork and 30 elite interviews in New York, Muscat, and Sanaa, she introduces the concept of strategic bias, which, she argues, has been essential for the success of mediation on the ground in Yemen. Strategic bias, Mokdad explains, entails equal stake in each warring party and an invested interest in peace. Rather than dismissing bias, she argues that all mediators harbor a degree of bias and, as such, analysts should seek to take stock of what levels of bias are helpful. By comparing the biases among Yemeni, Omani, and UN mediators and the perceptions of these mediators by locals, she demonstrates that strategic bias can further dialogue between warring parties. For Mokdad, Oman exemplifies strategic bias as the country's economic and security stability is threatened by the war in Yemen, making it invested in conflict mediation. At the same time, Oman is a GCC member-state and must maintain positive relations with its strong neighbor Saudi Arabia. Thus, Oman is unable to choose between either side, and the conflict is linked to its national security and economy. In contrast, international actors, she argues, are often deemed biased toward parties to the conflict and uninvested in the conflict. She also contends that, while some local actors also contain biases toward certain parties, they are all invested in peace. Yet, party bias can colour perceptions of successful meditators.

In “Climate Change and the Challenges of Peacebuilding and Reconstruction in Yemen,” Bikem Ekberzade analyses the climate challenges facing Yemen and proposes a roadmap to mitigate their effects. The realisation of her roadmap requires concerted action by national and international actors such as policy makers, humanitarian organisations and aid agencies, with capacity and mandate to help the Yemeni people. As Ekberzade ably shows, Yemen, afflicted by long periods of civil war, is home to critically threatened ecosystems such as the coral reefs of the Hanish Islands and the unmatched biodiversity of the Socotra archipelago. With coasts on the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, the country is open to effects of powerful atmospheric low-level circulations such as the monsoons, rising sea levels and temperatures, and increasing length of drought episodes followed by extreme precipitation leading to fatal floods and landslides. The mountainous regions in the country are prone to erosion from shrinking vegetative cover, and areas where families engage in subsistence farming are similarly afflicted by drought, as well as flash floods mainly due to episodes of short, intense precipitation. Ekberzade situates her analysis in a growing corpus of literature that seeks to explain how disadvantaged populations in underprivileged nations, especially those struggling with poverty and debilitated infrastructure due to long-term conflict, are often left to bear the brunt of climate-triggered risks from potential geohazards. Through analyses of the short-, medium- and long-term climate projections for the country as shown in global climate model datasets, she highlights what these forecasts mean for vegetation and people’s livelihoods in the years to come. Her recommendations would aid relevant stakeholders and policymakers in their efforts to combat or mitigate hazards triggered by climate change.

In her “Post-Conflict Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Yemen: Lessons learned from Other Conflicts,” Julia Palik builds on newly collected data on 126 Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs between 1975 and 2021 to identify lessons learned for an eventual DDR program in Yemen. Over the years, Yemen has experienced multiple different conflicts. Once settlements are achieved, several questions remain regarding the quality of peace: What is going to happen to the weapons that were used by conflict parties? How will combatants’ relationships with each other evolve? And how will ex-combatants reintegrate into post-conflict Yemen? These questions encapsulate the essence of DDR programs which are aimed at preventing the recurrence of conflict. A DDR program has yet to be implemented in Yemen, where general armament levels have been high even before the onset of the current conflicts. Palik argues that given the multitude of conflict types, both territorial and over government, pre-conditions for country-wide DDR programs are unlikely to be in place. She asserts that alternative sequencing models (reintegration first, disarmament later), gender sensitive reintegration, and sub-nationally tailored community violence reduction (CVR) programs are possible options. However, as Palik shows, for these models to be implemented, sufficient external funding, security sector reform, and domestic institutional capacity building will be crucial.

Abdulghani Gaghman proposes a post-conflict reconstruction framework for the government of Yemen in “Governance and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in

Yemen: Challenges and Recommendations.” Gaghman’s proposed framework is multi-staged. It begins by ending the conflict and advancing peace dialogue, then moving to improving the safety and security of the Yemeni people, supporting justice and reconciliation organizations, and stabilizing and growing the economy. Gaghman focuses on highlighting the most critical features of governance during post-conflict reconstruction. His study finds that political stability, absence of violence, government effectiveness, and government integrity are the most sensitive variables that can hinder or advance the overall progress of the economic and governance indicators, institutional strength, and economic quality in post-conflict Yemen.

It is imperative for a volume on post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding in Yemen to address the challenges facing health and education – two vital sectors for the well-being and future opportunities available for Yemenis. In “Healthcare Priorities in Post-Conflict Yemen,” Aisha O. Jumaan discusses the complex challenges facing Yemen’s healthcare system in the post-conflict period. The war in Yemen has had a devastating effect on the population’s health and the healthcare system, as evidenced by a significant increase in infectious disease outbreaks. Half of Yemeni children under 5-years are chronically malnourished and 1.1 million pregnant or lactating women are anemic. About 49% of healthcare facilities were damaged or destroyed and most functioning facilities lack the basic medical needs. Jumaan maintains that key healthcare priorities require targeted immediate, medium-, and long-term interventions and sustained investments to rebuild and strengthen the healthcare system. Immediate needs, she argues, must include a comprehensive and coordinated response to improve maternal and child health, prevent and control outbreaks, provide targeted mental healthcare services, and strengthen primary healthcare. The medium-term healthcare priorities require sustained investments in the healthcare system, addressing non-communicable diseases, strengthening healthcare governance and financing, and improving the healthcare information systems. The long-term post-conflict healthcare priorities require sustained investments in infrastructure, healthcare workforce development, healthcare education and promotion, environmental health, and healthcare research and innovation. However, Jumaan emphasizes that it is critical to obtain valid population health and healthcare system indicators to help develop comprehensive and targeted post-conflict healthcare priorities’ support.

Education takes high priority in both the initial humanitarian phase of national and international responses to conflict and natural disasters as well as post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. In his “Education Recovery in Post-Conflict Yemen: Challenges and Opportunities,” Tawfik Sultan Al-Hakimi explores and analyses the challenges and opportunities for recovery in the educational sector in post-conflict Yemen, as well as the visions and perceptions of stakeholders on education recovery. Education is considered essential for achieving sustainable human development, achieving peace and social cohesion, and providing the skills needed for the labor market. Informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s structuralist-constructivist and realist paradigm, Al-Hakimi adopts the purposive sample approach to obtain data and insights from different education stakeholders, including school and higher

education teachers, administrators and ordinary citizens. Relying on findings that emerged from field observations, interviews and focus groups of teachers and ordinary citizens, Al-Hakimi identifies and explores the nature of imbalances plaguing the education sector and the challenges facing post-conflict education recovery and reconstruction in Yemen. His findings and insights represent a modest contribution to informing post-conflict recovery and reconstruction decision-making and planning in the education sector and the reactivation of the developmental role of education in Yemen.

Finally, Khalil Fadl Osman and Mona Hedaya provide the concluding chapter of this volume. They present some of the key findings of the chapters, drawing together the main threads and arguments emerging from them regarding the enhancement of effective post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding in Yemen. The authors highlight and sum up lessons learned, deriving from them insights regarding effective post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding in Yemen.

This volume is a humble scholarly endeavor that seeks to play a small part in the noble effort of planning for post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding in Yemen. It is our hope that its findings would help policymakers, both national and international, involved in planning for tackling the challenges awaiting Yemen in the post-conflict period design effective reconstruction strategies that would ensure building sustainable peace in this war-torn country. Yemen has long been caught in a seemingly relentless cycle of war, death, destruction, poverty and disease. However endless and unbreakable this cycle may seem history has taught us to keep hope alive.

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# 1 Contextualising Yemen's Current Crisis

## A Journey Through Five Stages

*Mona Hedaya and Wadee Al-Arabeed*

### Introduction

On 27 January 2011, students from Sanaa University poured into the streets and squares of the Yemeni capital to demand the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. This occurred at the height of the Arab Spring, which had begun in Tunisia and spread across the Arab world. In Yemen, the protest movement swept the entire country, thrusting it into a new era that would bring profound transformations at all levels. As grassroots pressures persisted and gained momentum, they were met with brutal force by the regime's security agencies. Many military leaders, opposition parties, and tribal groups soon joined the revolution.

Eventually, President Saleh stepped down as part of an agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which also launched a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in Riyadh. But soon after the NDC concluded, Yemen descended into anarchy, derailing the hoped-for democratic transition. Against the backdrop of sharpening socio-political polarization and increasing direct and indirect foreign political and military intervention, the Ansar Allah (Houthi) Movement, which had allied with Saleh, renounced the outputs of the NDC and marched on the capital, taking control of it in 2014. The interim government resigned and fled south, prompting Saudi Arabia to form the Arab Coalition to Restore Legitimacy, which launched a decade-long military intervention.

This chapter provides an overview of the evolution of the current conflict in Yemen, setting the stage for a detailed analysis of its various aspects in subsequent chapters. It begins with a discussion of the historical background and contextual factors that paved the way for the outbreak of the conflict. It then turns to an examination of its progression through five main phases:

1. The Yemeni Revolution of 2011 and the GCC initiative of April 2011.
2. The collapse of the NDC framework and the alliance between the Houthis and their former adversary, Ali Saleh.
3. The military intervention of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and the escalating military competition for territorial control and political influence.

4. The inauguration of Joe Biden as US President, the repercussions of his administration's foreign policies, and the changes in the roles of the Gulf powers in the Yemeni conflict.
5. The onset of a state of "no-war, no-peace" in Yemen due to the changes in the geopolitical landscape. This remains the state of the country at the time this chapter was completed.

The chapter draws from a comprehensive review of relevant literature from an array of disciplines, including conflict and peace studies, international relations, political science, and history. In addition to books, reports, and academic articles, contemporaneous news reports were consulted to track the progression of events in the conflict. It is important to note that while this chapter attempts to chronologically segment or periodize the conflict to facilitate clarification of how it unfolded within specific contexts, this does not imply that these phases are separated by hard and distinct boundaries. Rather the purpose is to frame and contextualize the conflict by means of a chronological map that illuminates the key factors, the main actors and their roles, the regional and international influences, and the dynamics of the political interplay at various levels.

### **Historical Background**

To understand the context of the current conflict, we must return to 1990, when the groundwork for the unified Yemeni state was laid. In May that year, Ali Saleh became the first president of the Republic of Yemen, uniting the previously separate state of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) with the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen). Prior to that, he had served as president of North Yemen since 1978, a period rife with socio-political turmoil. The unification was widely welcomed by the Yemeni people because of a feeling of oneness among Yemenis in both north and south. However, the newly established unified state was, as Sheila Carapico (2007: 201) put it, "a variable rather than a constant." Its capacities in both the north and the south were, according to Sharif Ismail, "constrained by conflicting societal dynamics" ensuring that the rapid political changes Yemen was undergoing at that time "disguised a reality of profound state-society tension throughout the post-revolutionary period [i.e., the 1960s] that repeatedly constrained attempts at institutional capacity-building" (Ismail, 1978).

The internal fissures were neither absolute nor insurmountable. However, governing a unified Yemen and challenging traditional centers of power were far from easy. But rather than mend the rifts, Saleh's determination to monopolise power and assert his control over the country's resources made them more pronounced. Although the Yemeni constitution had enshrined democracy and political pluralism as fundamental principles of the political system, the Saleh regime persisted in reversing the democratic path. Not only did he wrest control over the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities, but he also restructured the army to ensure its allegiance to him personally, by appointing members of his family and tribe to key positions in the military establishment (Al-Salhi et al., 2010). In fact,

forging an allegiance network around himself had been his approach to accumulating power since he founded the General People's Congress (GPC) party in 1982. The GPC quickly evolved into the largest umbrella for influential tribal, social, and economic forces and organizations in North Yemen (Ismail, 1978).

Many scholars view the discovery of oil in South Yemen in 1987 as a turning point and a main catalyst for unification. At the time, the South Yemeni government in Aden faced mounting dissent, discord, and instability, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the cut-off of its support for the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Simultaneously, in North Yemen, growing discontent and political opposition coupled with deteriorating developmental and economic indicators, jeopardized the stability of the regime in Sanaa (Ismail, 1978).

The unification process was far from smooth. No sooner was the constitution for the unified state adopted in 1990 than dispute flared between President Saleh and the YSP over the implementation of the provisions for the federation's decentralized administrative and financial system. The constitution had laid out the foundations for regional governors, mayors or municipal directors, and governorate councils which were endowed with an independent legal personality. However, Saleh pushed to amend the constitution to provide for greater centralization which prompted the southerners to counter with demands for greater federal autonomy. The question of centralization was "one of the conflict-inducing factors that, together with other governance-related issues, precipitated a severe political crisis in 1993," writes researcher Mohammed al-Mikhlaflafi (Al-Mikhlaflafi, 2018). Indeed, the matter had been a bone of contention between representatives from north and south Yemen on the National Dialogue Committee that had been formed at the outset of the 1990s to work out such thorny issues as the distribution of powers between the president (Saleh) and the vice-president (YSP Secretary General Ali Salem al-Beidh, who represented the south). Tensions between the two sides escalated but were then subdued thanks to a reconciliation agreement signed in Jordan in January 1994. The Document of Pledge and Accord, as it was called, reaffirmed "financial and administrative decentralization" as "one of the bases of government," especially as applies to local government, and the management of administrative and financial affairs. The agreement also established a Shura (advisory) committee responsible for legislating regulations pertaining to the local councils, ensuring that the councils were not subordinate to the president, except in the most limited way possible (Al-Mekhlaflafi, 2018).

The respite in tensions was short-lived. Saleh persisted in his manoeuvres to monopolize power and this, combined with various political, economic, and social pressures, drove Vice-President al-Beidh to declare the secession of the South in May 1994. This step was met with a swift military response, which flared into a brief civil war (from May – June 1994) pitting primarily northern pro-union forces against southern secessionist forces. The Summer War, as it was called, ended with the fall of the southern capital, Aden, the defeat of separatist forces, and the exile of many YSP leaders.

Sanaa's aggressive reassertion of political and military control over the south led many southerners to view the Saleh regime as an "occupying power." In subsequent years, mounting grievances of political and economic marginalization, exclusion, and inequality would lead a group of forcibly retired southern officers to form the pro-secession Southern Movement in 2007. Meanwhile, Saleh pressed his advantage, pushing through constitutional amendments that effectively put paid to the federal system and its provisions for local autonomy. The Local Authority Law Number 4/2000 was a landmark in this process. Under this law, adopted in February 2000, provincial governors became presidential appointees instead of locally elected officials, although local councils were still popularly elected (National Information Centre, 2000).

Saleh's style of rule, which relied heavily on kinship and regional affiliations, exacerbated tribal and regional tensions, and often stirred political and even economic crises. That Yemen's geopolitical environment "intersected with regional and, perhaps, international ambitions and concerns that were more far-reaching than Yemen's domestic realities" tended to further complicate and worsen the crises (Al-Salhi et al., 2010). From the perspective of a political economist, such as Robert Burrowes, the fragility of the Yemeni state in the 1990s was due to the political elites' gross mismanagement of the country's economic affairs. Effectively, he writes, the governing system "evolved largely into a special variant of oligarchy, a kleptocracy," and in the process, a "nouveau aristocracy of shaykhs, officers, and businessmen has been born with its own set of motives and values – and a pervasive, unquestioning sense of entitlement" (Burrowes, 2005).

Fouad al-Salahi (2010) agrees and adds that this mode of government "fostered the reproduction of tribalism and its cultural system as foundation for political strength, while it weakened civil society and its modern institutional frameworks." By extension, it weakened the state due to an inverse correlation whereby "the greater the [regime's] reliance on the tribe, the more the state's strength and prestige declined" (Al-Salhi et al., 2010). Some scholars believed that the new crises and challenges that arose with the birth of the modern Yemeni state were so severe that they ranked it as a failed state, for it had "failed to achieve its developmental function and political and security stability while conflicts multiplied, such as the war with the Houthis, the inter-tribal wars, and the wars between tribes and the state, and while the judiciary was ineffective and corruption ran rampant in all aspects of life" (Al-Salhi et al., 2010).

While Saleh pursued his tactics of forming and breaking transactional alliances as best served to consolidate and perpetuate his power, various socio-political forces asserted growing influence outside the institutional frameworks of the state. Foremost among these were several tribal federations, above all the Hashid and Bakil, and to a lesser extent, the Himyar, Kinda and Madhij. Saudi support significantly boosted the influence of the Bakil tribe and, even more so, the Hashid, the tribe of Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar, a main co-founder of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah), the political façade of the Muslim Brotherhood. These two tribes had previously been instrumental in obstructing the modernization

policies of Saleh's predecessor as the president of North Yemen, Ibrahim al-Hamdi (1974–1977). President Hamdi had tried to circumvent and marginalize their influence by drawing closer to the Marxist-oriented South Yemeni government. He was assassinated in October 1977, on the eve of an unprecedented visit to Aden. Suspicion immediately fell on these tribes and their Saudi backer who used them to counter the “Marxist threat” from the South (Al-Faqih, 2011).

Some religious groups also wielded considerable unofficial influence. Some were Wahhabist and also received support from Saudi Arabia to fight communism from the south as well as the Zaydi Shi'a influence in the north. The Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islah party, which emerged in that period, was funded by Saudi Arabia through academies that Saleh alternately harassed and utilised, depending on his tactical needs, until they were closed down in 2001 (Alislah Yemen, 2018). At the other end of the political spectrum were the leftist opposition groups or organizations, especially those based in Taiz and Ibb in the 1970s and 1980s which had come together under the umbrella of the “National Front.” By the time of unification, this front had fragmented and lost much of its influence. In addition, there were some Arab nationalist parties that had emerged in both North and South Yemen since the 1950s, most notably the Arab Socialist Baath Party, the Nasserist Organization, and the Union of Popular Forces (Al-Faqih, 2011).

As the complex interplay between these forces and the regime played out during the 1990s and into the new millennium, violence erupted along another major socio-political fault line. During the six years from 2004 to 2010, the Saleh government fought six wars against the Ansar Allah (Houthi) Movement based in the northern governorate of Saada. The Houthis, who cast themselves as defenders of Yemeni sovereignty, opposed the Saleh regime's close ties with Saudi Arabia which they accused of excessive interference in Yemen's domestic affairs (Malley, 2019). The government accused the Houthis of receiving funding and military support from Iran. But the roots of this conflict date back several decades. The Houthis are a Zaydi revivalist movement that harks back to the Zaydi imamate that had ruled Yemen for hundreds of years until it was overthrown in 1962. Since then, the Zaydis fought to regain power and to counter the erosion of their influence by the government and the growing Salafist influence in the country (Wilson Center, 2022).

The Ansar Allah Movement, itself, dates to the early 1990s when a group of Zaydi leaders founded the al-Haqq Party. A segment of the party's leadership then broke off to form the Believing Youth Organization which was subsequently renamed Ansar Allah. With this development, the Houthis' opposition to the Saleh regime hardened, reflecting their determination to reverse the marginalization of the Zaydis and counter the expansion of Saudi-backed Salafi activity in the country. Meanwhile, Houthis' opponents accused them of seeking to restore the power of the imamate, a cause supported by many Zaydis (Wilson Center, 2022). Tens of thousands of combatants and civilians lost their lives as a direct result of the “Six Wars,” which also had devastating economic and social impacts, leading to more widespread unrest and instability.

## **The Phases of the Current Crisis**

With their roots running deep in the cumulative effects of decades-old political, economic, and social legacy, the Arab Spring protests have been a defining moment in the contemporary history of Yemen. The protests set into motion events that led to the current crisis in Yemen. These developments can be divided into five main phases.

### ***Phase 1: The 2011 Revolution and the GCC Initiative***

The Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia in December 2010 and Egypt in January 2011 inspired large numbers of angry and disaffected Yemenis to stage mass demonstrations in late January, calling for the end of the Saleh regime. In February, the revolutionary protest movement gained momentum and continued to spread, spurred further by violent government crackdowns, until it encompassed the entire country. Many major tribes, including Saleh's own tribe, the Hashid headed by Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, joined the revolution. So did many prominent social and political tribal figures who resigned from the ruling GPC and the government (Al Jazeera, 2011a; Al Jazeera, 2011c).

Anti-regime sentiment grew more fervent after regime forces killed more than 56 protesters in the main rallying venue in Sanaa, dubbed "Change Square," during the "Friday of Dignity" demonstration on 18 March. Two days later, on 20 March, one of the most influential military figures, Major General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, Commander of the North-Western Military District, declared his support for the revolution and vowed to protect the protest squares. Al-Ahmar had commanded the "Six Wars" against the Houthis in Saada for the Saleh regime. However, he parted ways with the regime when Saleh stepped up his plans to hand down power to his son Ahmed. After al-Ahmar's defection to the revolution, numerous prominent figures in the Republican Guard, Central Security, and the Air Force followed suit (ACRPS, 2011).

The schism in the Yemeni army alarmed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member-states as it heightened the risks of a civil war that could easily spill beyond Yemen's borders. They also feared the "perils" of the expanding pro-democracy revolutionary wave and the resurgent power and influence of the Ansar Allah Movement, which the Gulf states saw as an Iranian proxy. Therefore, in April 2011, the GCC stepped in to contain the situation through an initiative that was first unveiled by the Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani during a visit to Washington. The GCC, he said, would propose an agreement to the Yemeni president that would include terms and arrangements to persuade him to step down and hand over authority to his vice president. This, in turn, would pave the way to the formation of a national unity government tasked with organizing a national dialogue conference and steering the country through the transitional period. The Saleh regime rejected the proposal and lashed out at Doha for fomenting anarchy in Yemen (Hilal, 2011; RT, 2011).

While the opposition forces accepted the mediating initiative in principle, they disagreed over some details regarding Saleh's departure from power (Aljarida, 2011). Around that time, seven opposition political parties came together to form the Coalition of Joint Meeting Parties: Islah, the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization, the Arab Socialist Baath Party, Yemeni Popular Unity Party, Al-Haqq, and the 21 September Democratic Organization (Al Jazeera, 2014b). Due to its lack of clarity and Saleh's resistance, the initiative could not move forward. Therefore, a second GCC meeting was held on 10 April, after which the GCC Secretary General Abdul Latif al-Zayani shuttled between Riyadh and Sanaa to lay the groundwork for the next step.

On 17 April, Abu Dhabi took charge of organizing a dialogue with a Yemeni government delegation and allies of the Saleh regime, while Riyadh took over the negotiations with the revolutionary forces. By this time, all parties had accepted the GCC initiative in principle, and the purpose of the negotiations was to refine the formula for an agreement to which all sides could agree. On 21 April, GCC Secretary General al-Zayani flew to Sanaa where he presented a third version of the initiative to both sides (NIC, 2012). It stated, "Saleh must agree to hand over his powers to his vice president for a thirty-day period, after which he will tender his resignation and the vice president will serve as acting president for two months, provided that this period ends with the election of a new president of the republic. Under the initiative, if approved, Saleh and his regime shall be granted immunity from prosecution" (Al Jazeera, 2011b).

By the end of the following month, after further consultations, the text was finalized. But now, Saleh refused to sign it. The Yemeni revolutionary youth groups and opposition parties sustained the impetus of anti-regime protests while regional and international powers tried to prevail on the Yemeni stakeholders to agree to the initiative. Meanwhile, the GCC led efforts to reformulate and expand the provisions of the initiative until, at last, on 23 November, all parties agreed to sign.

Under the final version of the agreement for the transfer of power in Yemen, Saleh was granted immunity from prosecution on the condition that he hand over power to Vice President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi while Saleh remained honorary president for 90 days. The transition period itself consisted of two phases, the first entering into force with the signing of this mechanism and ending with the inauguration of a new president following early presidential elections. During this phase, a government of national unity would be formed. The second phase, lasting two years, would start with the inauguration of the new president following early presidential elections and end with the holding of general elections in accordance with the new constitution and the inauguration of the new President of the Republic. With the beginning of the second phase, the president-elect in the early elections and the government of national unity would oversee the Conference for National Dialogue, the constitutional drafting process, and the restructuring of the army (OESGY, 2019).

The intense efforts to mediate between Yemeni parties and bring them on board the GCC initiative reflected the importance the GCC countries attached to Yemen for various geopolitical, security, socio-economic, ideological, and sectarian

concerns. Critics of the initiative hold that it was such concerns that chiefly informed the GCC proposal and not a desire to promote a civil democratic political system or to address the root causes of unrest and discontent in the country. The focus was on changing the head of the regime through a peaceful transfer of power arrangement. Thus, the critics argue, while the initiative did indeed accomplish this and perhaps spared the country from a dangerous military confrontation between regime loyalists and opponents, it side-lined many of the deep-seated problems that would continue to haunt the country. Also, by guaranteeing immunity to Saleh and key officials in his regime, the initiative jettisoned the principle and process of transitional justice and allowed him to remain politically active in his capacity as the head of the GPC (Fraihat, 2013). Consequently, the initiative failed to end the crisis, as will become clear in the next phases.

### ***Phase 2: Collapse of the National Dialogue and the Houthi-Saleh Alliance***

Early presidential elections were held, as envisioned, on 21 February 2012, although the process was more in the nature of a referendum on a single candidate supported by the ruling GPC and the Joint Meeting Parties: Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi (Kasinof, 2012). The Houthis and the Southern Movement boycotted the elections. So did the revolutionary youth, among whom were many who had opposed the GCC initiative to begin with, precisely because of the immunity it granted Saleh and other former regime figures. It should be borne in mind here that the distinction between the revolutionary youth and other political forces is not so clearcut. Many of the revolutionary youth also belonged to the political parties that participated in the elections (Fraihat, 2013).

Once Hadi was sworn in and the national unity government was formed, preparations began for the agreed-upon comprehensive National Dialogue Conference (NDC) which, after surmounting numerous hurdles, held its opening session on 18 March 2013, bringing together 565 participants representing all segments of Yemeni society (UN News, 2013). The NDC sessions, which were chaired by President Hadi, held as part of the GCC Initiative and supported by the United Nations, met regularly over the following months to discuss a broad range of issues, from the Southern declaration of secession and the civil war in 1994 and the six Saada wars in the north, to the system of government, principles of governance, the new constitution, the army, and national reconciliation. The Southern and Houthi questions proved so divisive that they often hindered progress on other issues (Naji, 2019). However, on 21 January 2014, the Presidential Palace, taking observers by surprise, suddenly convened the NDC's closing session and announced its concluding document (Al Jazeera, 2014c). On that very day, the Sanaa – Saada conflict reared its head again. The Houthi representative to the NDC, Ahmed Sharaf al-Din, was assassinated while on his way to the concluding session. The Houthis withdrew from the conference and refused to sign the document (Al Jazeera, 2014c).

Among the highlights of the closing session was Hadi's announcement of the creation of a committee to draw up the outlines and geographic divisions of a

federal system that would divide the country into six regions (Shuja al-Din, 2019). The Houthis opposed this plan for a number of reasons, but mostly because they believed it would deepen the marginalization and exclusion of the poor in the country (France 24, 2014). The chapter on the federal option deals with their other reasons in detail.

The NDC meetings in 2013 occurred against a backdrop that was both fraught and paradoxical. Even as the political wings of the Houthis, Islah, and the Southern Movement took part in the national conference sessions, Ansar Allah's military wing clashed with some tribes and Salafists affiliated with Islah based in Dammaj in the Saada governorate. By January 2014, the Houthis had driven them out of the Houthi stronghold of Saada (France 24, 2014). In their confrontations with these and other Salafists aligned with the Islah or the Hashid tribe in parts of Saada and Amran, the Houthis proclaimed they were "combatting extremism." These intermittent skirmishes and the concomitant acrimony may help explain the Houthis' frequent boycotts of the NDC sessions (France 24, 2014).

The following year, 2014, brought a major shift in the patterns of alliance. After withdrawing from the NDC, the Houthis obtained the support of ousted President Saleh and his loyalists in the GPC and army and, in the summer of 2014, they launched their march on Sanaa. Anti-Muslim Brotherhood sentiment was high in the region, fuelled by the counterrevolutions that followed on the heels of the Arab Spring revolutions. The Yemeni capital, where Islah's influence had come to dominate the government, seemed ripe for the picking. Also, both partners in the new alliance had no love lost for Islah. To the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood political wing was a religio-ideological enemy while Saleh strongly suspected that Islah had a hand in the assassination attempt against him in June 2011. In addition to sharing a common enemy, both parties had much to gain from their new alliance: stronger military power for Ansar Allah and a chance to reverse the 2011 revolution for Saleh.

The Houthi-Saleh alliance was a remarkable example of the ironies of the shifting alliances in Yemen (Shuja al-Din, 2020). Only a few years back, Saleh had set his top military commander, Major General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar to fight six gruelling wars against the Houthis who then sided with the revolution in 2011. Now the former president and his former Houthi adversaries were leaguings up against al-Ahmar and the forces of the revolution.

### ***Phase 3: The Arab Coalition Military Intervention and the Armed Power Struggle***

After expanding their territorial control in north Yemen, Houthi forces proceeded to storm the capital precinct (Nasr, 2014). As the violence escalated and political and economic protests surged again throughout the country, the UN launched an initiative, known as the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, to restore calm and promote the implementation of the outputs of the NDC. The agreement, which had been facilitated by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Jamal Benomar, was signed in September 2014 in the presence of representatives of the Houthis, the Southern Movement, and other major Yemeni stakeholders. It primarily called

on the president to appoint political advisors from the Ansar Allah and Southern Movement and to appoint an impartial prime minister acceptable to all parties and charged with forming a new government representative of all constituencies. The document also contained a security annex to the agreement, the most important clauses of which called for “the re-establishment of state authority and the restoration of control over all territory” and “an immediate cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire in Al-Jawf and Mareb” governorates. Barely had the ink dried than Hadi accused the Houthis of not respecting the agreement while the Houthis, now in control of the capital, announced their rejection of the outcomes of the NDC (Al Jazeera, 2014a).

The Houthis, their forces now stationed in key points in the capital, sustained pressure on Hadi and the national unity government to exact concessions. Some attributed part of that to the increasing support from Iran for the Houthis after 2011, as it provided them with military and non-military assistance, which affected the internal balance of power in Yemen.

In early 2015, armed elements kidnapped Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, the director of the office of the president, and his bodyguards to prevent him from submitting the draft constitution to the national committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of the NDC outcomes (Shuja al-Din, 2020). Then, on 22 January 2015, President Hadi and the prime minister resigned, but the parliament refused to accept their resignations. A month later, the president fled to Aden, stressing that he would continue to exercise his authorities from there (Reuters, 2015).

Seeing Hadi's survival as the legitimate president as a threat to their control over the government and their political existence, the Houthis escalated, launching a military campaign toward Aden (Reuters, 2015). In early March 2015, the Houthis, supported by pro-Saleh factions in the Yemeni army and the GPC, laid siege to Taiz, the gateway to southern Yemen, and continued onwards toward the strategic southern port city that served as Hadi's temporary capital. This spurred the Saudi-led Gulf states to launch a military intervention under the umbrella of the Arab Coalition. Operation “Decisive Storm,” as the intervention was codenamed, opened on 25 March with a massive aerial bombardment of an array of Houthi and Saleh-affiliated military targets throughout Yemen. Ten countries initially participated in various capacities at the outset: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco, Egypt, and Pakistan (France 24, 2015). With this operation, the Yemeni conflict crossed the threshold from a domestic to an international conflict.

Although the stated purpose of the Saudi-coalition was to counter the Houthi coup and restore the “legitimate authority,” many observers believe that it was mainly motivated by the coalition partners' and, above all, Saudi Arabia's fears regarding Iranian expansion through support for the Houthis. Reports indicate that Iran and pro-Iranian non-state armed actors, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, provided military training to the Houthis while also increasing arms transfers during the period between 2014 and 2015.

These concerns were further heightened by repeated international reports indicating that Iran has provided multifaceted support to Ansar Allah. According to

the Wilson Center (2022), this included drone technology, weaponry, and military expertise that enhanced the group's ability to conduct long-range precision attacks. UN Security Council Resolution 2624 (2022) likewise pointed to Iranian involvement, describing such assistance as a threat to regional and international security. This indirect support—centered on capacity-building rather than overt deployment—is seen by many as part of Iran's strategy to project influence via non-state actors. As a result, many observers believe the Houthis' resilience and manoeuvrability are, at least in part, underpinned by this external backing. Still, the nature of their relationship with Tehran remains debated, with some indications suggesting the Houthis retain independent decision-making in certain local negotiations, yet the rationale behind Tehran's involvement in Yemen extends beyond the dynamics of this relationship. Beyond ideological alignment, Iran's engagement in Yemen appears to reflect broader strategic interests. According to the Wilson Center (2022), support for Ansar Allah is consistent with Tehran's approach of cultivating relationships with local actors to expand its regional presence. The ACRPS (2023) also suggests that Iran's calculations in Yemen are shaped by its wider geopolitical context, including efforts to navigate shifting regional and international pressures.

Another key factor was Yemen's strategic location overlooking the Bab al-Mandab, the vital strait through which passes much of the Gulf states' oil exports to Europe and beyond. The US, under President Barack Obama at the time, declared its readiness to furnish logistical support for the operation. Its stated reason was to "fight terrorism" but, again, analysts argue that Washington's decision was informed by geo-economic and geopolitical calculations related to its fight against Iranian influence in the region and preserving US interests in the Middle East and the Gulf, in particular. Some analysts have suggested that another possible cause was to soften Saudi opposition to the Obama administration's attempts to promote an agreement with Tehran over the Iranian nuclear programme (O'Neill, 2012; Sheline and Riedel, 2021).

Once again, the Yemeni crisis presents us with another paradox. Just before this, Washington had supported Ansar Allah's demand for 30 seats in the national dialogue, yet now it did not hesitate to support the Arab Coalition in its decision to go to war in Yemen against the Houthis (Hasan, 2019). In fact, the US put its full weight behind the coalition and its military option from day one.

After US President Donald Trump took office in January 2017, the Saudi-led coalition doubled its military operations in Yemen (Johnsen, 2019). By this time, the Houthis had lost some Yemeni allies during their bid to expand their territorial control. Eventually, even Saleh turned against them. In late 2017, the former Yemeni allies locked horns in skirmishes that lasted several days, culminating in Saleh's death in December 2017 (Johnsen, 2019b). It is worth noting that in the meantime, specifically on 5 June Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Qatar, an event known as the Qatar blockade. This prompted Qatar to suspend its participation in the Arab coalition and pull its forces out of Yemen. Among the demands placed

on Qatar at the time was the reduction of its diplomatic relations with Iran (BBC News, 2017).

Meanwhile, in the south, long-simmering friction between government and Southern Movement forces erupted into the open. On 11 May 2017, Aidarous al-Zubaidi, whom Hadi had recently dismissed as governor of Aden, founded the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which was supported by the UAE (Al Jazeera, 2017).<sup>1</sup> The support was demonstrated through direct military assistance, including establishing and financing armed groups that operated as independent military forces affiliated with the STC, enabling them to control coastal areas (Johnsen, 2022a).

By mid-2017, three military forces rivalled each other in the south:

1. President Hadi's armed forces under the command of his son Nasser. Most of its members were from Abyan, Hadi's home governorate which is adjacent to Aden. They form the internationally recognized government forces.
2. The Security Belt Forces, also known as the Auxiliary and Support Forces, control the land, maritime and aerial accessways to Aden. Under the command of Hani bin Breik, they are largely made up of Salafis and most of its members belong to the southern Yafa'a tribe.
3. The Aden Security Forces. Backed by the UAE, they are under the command of the city's security director Shalal Shaya and his ally Aidarous al-Zubaidi. Most of its contingents come from the Dhale governorate (BBC Arabic, 2018).

The map of military control on the ground had been constantly shifting between the military forces engaged in the ongoing hostilities in most parts of the country. The aforementioned military groups emerged after the Saudi-led coalition forced the Houthis to retreat from Aden and its surroundings, pushing them northwards into Lahij by the end of the summer of 2015. The proliferation of military and paramilitary formations reflected the security and political vacuum that has plagued Yemen since the revolution. Amid the constantly shifting military landscape, the southern crisis reared its head, pitting the armed factions affiliated with the UAE-backed STC against the Saudi-backed Hadi government forces. It also reflected the growing Saudi-Emirati rivalry in the region. This crisis escalated sharply in late 2019, leading to the expulsion of government forces from Aden, with military support from the UAE. The situation in the south was quite fluid, but mainly the clashes centered around the triangle defined by Dhale, Radfan, and Yafa'a. Also fighting broke out between STC militia factions engaged in power struggles in parts of Aden and other southern governorates (ACRPS, 2021).

In April 2020, UAE-backed STC seized control of and drove government forces from Socotra, which is strategically located in the Indian Ocean near major shipping routes (Al Anadoul, 2020).<sup>2</sup> This development intensified suspicions among pro-government forces that the UAE was plotting the partition of Yemen through its support of southern secessionists (*Sputnik Arabic*, 2019; Anadolu, 2020).

***Phase 4: The US and Shifting Gulf Positions***

In the late 2010s, a growing current in the US Congress began to push for ending American support for the war in Yemen. In April 2019, both houses of Congress passed a bipartisan resolution invoking the War Powers Act, but Trump vetoed it (Landler and Baker, 2019). On 10 January 2021, just before leaving office, the Trump administration announced its intent to designate Ansar Allah a terrorist organization (United States Department of State, 2021). The Biden administration reversed this move a month later, revoking the designation on 16 February in line with his earlier pledge to halt US military support for the Saudi-led coalition (France 24, 2021; Stepansky, 2021). Some viewed this as a break with Biden's record as Obama's vice president, while others described it as a step in the gradual American shift from partisan backing to mediation (Alamer, 2021). Analyst Gregory Johnsen (2019a) argued that the shift reflected not concern for Yemen itself, but broader policy toward Saudi Arabia. "The US never had a particular policy toward Yemen," he noted, explaining that Washington had long relied on drones to fulfil its strategic objectives without needing broader involvement.

A significant turn in the military situation occurred in early 2022 bringing the Houthis into direct confrontation with the UAE-backed forces in Yemen. In mid-January, Houthi drones struck several oil refuelling vehicles in an oil refinery in Abu Dhabi, killing three. Claiming responsibility for the attack, the Houthis demanded the withdrawal of the "aggressor forces" from Yemen. More strikes followed, prompting calls in Washington to rebrand the Houthis as an international terrorist organization. Soon afterwards, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2624 of 28 February 2022 in which the Houthis were described as a "terrorist group."

By this time, the map of territorial control of belligerent forces stood as follows:

- Pro-government forces controlled Hadhramaut, Al-Mahra, Shabwa, Lahij, Dhale, Taiz and Marib.
- The Houthis controlled most of the northern governorates, including Sanaa, Dhamar, Ibb, Raymah, al-Mahwit, Amran, Hudaydah, Jawf, Hajjah, Saada, and al-Bayda.
- The STC fully controlled the Aden governorate, large parts of Socotra, and significant parts of Abyan, al-Dhale and Lahij (Al Anadoul, 2022).

A major regional development would have a profound impact on the course of the Yemeni conflict. The landmark Al-Ula Declaration of 5 January 2021 ushered in a reconciliation between Qatar and the rest of the Gulf states plus Egypt (United Nations Security Council, 2022). The Saudi-sponsored declaration reflected a qualitative shift in the foreign policy approaches of regional powers and their reassessment of their political alignments, especially as pertains to the long intractable regional conflicts and civil strife in some Arab countries. The new outlook paved the way for a series of back-channel communications and mediated talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which would culminate in the historic agreement,

signed in Beijing on 10 March 2023, to restore full diplomatic relations between these long-time regional foes.

These developments coincided with a renewed regional and international push to end the Yemeni conflict. Now in its ninth year, the conflict entered a new phase under the heading of regionally and internationally brokered multi-track negotiations which took place between the direct belligerents, the Houthis based in Sanaa and the Aden-based Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, and between the two major regional powers involved in the conflict, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In large measure, Saudi Arabia's eagerness to promote the restoration of regional calm and stability stemmed from its desire to focus on comprehensive development projects at home. It therefore shifted to a more pragmatic footing to prepare for the coming phase. A crucial factor here was the Russian-Ukrainian war and its impacts on the global economy and energy. In this context, Riyadh's calculations concerning Yemen were informed by Houthi missile strikes against Saudi Aramco oil refinery and export facilities and the consequent threat this posed to global energy security.

Accordingly, in March 2022, Saudi Arabia organized a week-long conference in Riyadh, during which it held consultations with Yemeni political leaders. Then, on 2 April, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, announced a two-month truce between the Yemeni government and Ansar Allah. A few days later, President Hadi, yielding to Saudi and Emirati pressure, transferred his powers to a new eight-member Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) (Johnsen, 2022b), chaired by Rashad al-Alimi, a former Hadi advisor who was closely connected with influential political circles and was on good terms with the Saudis (Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

Under the truce, commercial flights could resume operations out of Sanaa International Airport and the Hudaydah port were reopened. In addition, a number of framework agreements provided for the reopening of the roads to Taiz and for the release of salary payments to all public employees throughout the country.

Although the period saw intermittent skirmishes, the casualty toll dropped considerably. The truce was extended twice, once in June and again in August. However, little progress could be made in the talks on the reopening of the roads to Taiz. A main stumbling block was the Houthis' insistence on retaining control over the last road connecting Taiz with the provisional capital in Aden on the grounds that the Saudis had refused to release payments of salaries to the Yemeni army and security forces. Eventually, the negotiations broke down and the truce ended in October 2022 amid mutual recriminations (Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 2022).

#### ***Phase 5: No War, No Peace***

Despite the foregoing, major hostilities have not resumed. We could therefore say that an informal, de facto ceasefire remained in effect, probably due to the reasons that led to the truce in the first place. The Yemeni government and its Saudi ally faced waves of demonstrations protesting the economic straits and deterioration

in living standards. The Houthis, for their part, faced internal friction and rifts between the commanders returning from the front and officials in Sanaa. The tensions were aggravated by the government's suspension of salary payments to civil servants in the north and the blockage of fuel and other imports, causing conflict over limited resources.

Nevertheless, diplomacy had not ceased. In October 2022, the same month the ceasefire was to be renewed, there were reports of backchannel talks between Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah on a possible prisoner exchange. By the end of 2022, it looked like a deal was immanent and that it might even include final settlement talks facilitated by Oman. Such developments confirmed that both sides and their allies were eager to reduce tensions and promote a settlement. The landmark Beijing agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023 seemed to herald resolutions to regional disputes and conflicts, including the war in Yemen. Some observers argued that reducing Saudi-Iranian tensions was the smart way to lower the political temperatures across the region and wind down the proxy wars in which Riyadh was engaged (*Euronews*, 2023).

The agreement – the product of secret Chinese-brokered negotiations in Beijing – provided for the restoration of full diplomatic relations, the reopening of the two sides' embassies and diplomatic missions in the other country, and the resumption of various long suspended trade, security, and cooperation agreements. If Riyadh's motives for signing were to disengage from the fatiguing crisis in Yemen and to help put US security concerns to rest especially regarding energy, Tehran probably calculated that mending fences with Riyadh would strengthen its hand against Western pressures, especially at a time it was contending with the widespread protests triggered by the Mahsa Amini incident (ACRPS, 2023).

In April 2023, Omani-mediated peace talks between the Saudis and Ansar Allah resumed. One track covered the possible swap of hundreds of prisoners of war from each side. Although no agreement has been reached yet, even on the resumption of the ceasefire, Yemen is experiencing the longest period of relative calm since the start of the war nearly a decade ago. Inspired by the improved climate, the UN Special Envoy Grundberg urged the parties to seize the opportunity for "serious discussions...on the way forward toward ending the conflict." Nevertheless, he stressed that the situation on the ground remained "fragile and challenging" because of "provocative" military actions, displays, and rhetoric. Economic tensions also remained high due to the parallel economic battle involving "the struggle to control revenue-generating ports, trade routes, the banking sector, currency and natural-resource wealth." At the same time, Joyce Msuya, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs reported that the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan prepared by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had only received 29 percent of its required funding and warned of the "grim consequences of this" (United Nations, 2023).

As encouraging as the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement may be for prospects of de-escalation in Yemen, analysts stress that a genuine and durable peace requires an inclusive, Yemeni-Yemeni process (Cafiero, 2023). The Beijing Agreement, while

significant, has not translated into a breakthrough with the Houthis. Although the group dispatched a delegation to Riyadh in a rare move, it made no meaningful concessions, instead insisting on strict conditions concerning salary disbursements, road access, and control over revenues—prompting the Saudi ambassador's return from Sanaa without progress (BBC Arabic, 2023a; 2023b).

According to Cafiero (2023), this stance reflects a degree of strategic autonomy; the Houthis do not appear to treat the Iran–Saudi détente as binding on their own behaviour. The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS, 2023) similarly notes that while Iran may seek regional de-escalation to ease external pressure and advance broader interests, its allies—such as Ansar Allah—often pursue local agendas that diverge from Tehran's calculations. This indicates that the relationship between the two is less that of a proxy under direct control and more of a strategic partnership grounded in mutual, though not identical, interests. Consequently, Iranian support, though central, does not equate to full influence over the group's decisions. Many unresolved issues between the Houthis and the Yemeni government remain, which regional diplomacy alone is unlikely to resolve (Cafiero, 2023). These internal complexities extend beyond the Houthi-government dynamic, particularly in the south, where competing agendas and actors continue to shape the conflict. This regional involvement has also contributed to shaping internal dynamics. While Iranian support to the Houthis has largely remained focused and indirect, Saudi and Emirati backing has extended across a wider range of actors, especially in the south—where overlapping alliances have added further complexity to the conflict landscape.

These challenges are further complicated by the tendency to overlook the Southern Movement dimension of the Yemeni crisis, especially the mounting military activities of the Emirati-backed STC over the years combined with its frequent calls for southern “independence” (Nasser, 2022). Such considerations have led some observers to conclude that the belligerent parties in Yemen see the dialogue proposals made by their adversaries, not as serious peace initiatives, but rather as “mere tactical moves by their opponents that are designed to achieve military advantage” (Nagi, 2023).

Yemen is thus currently mired in a state of “no war, no peace,” while the general economic situation continues to deteriorate, and the humanitarian crisis worsens. Many regional and international bodies involved in various political, economic, and humanitarian aspects of the conflict have been trying to take advantage of the current relative calm to promote breakthroughs to bring humanitarian relief to the needy and distribute resources, secure the release of salary payments to public sector employees, reopen the major roads between governorates, enable airports and seaports to resume operations, and implement certain agreed-upon reconstruction operations. Of course, some third parties are still working to promote a settlement with the Houthis. However, there seems to be a tacit agreement to avoid spoiling the current calm by deferring some of the more sensitive issues related to a durable political settlement. Foremost among those issues are the disarmament of paramilitary groups to secure the state's monopoly on the legitimate recourse to force and a resolution to the Southern Movement question.

Despite the positive contributions, a lasting solution to the Yemeni crisis requires a comprehensive peace process involving all key stakeholders. Nor can sustainable stability be ensured without addressing the main and most sensitive issues and the root causes of the conflict. This is especially true given a situation on the ground that is not as conducive to a cessation of hostilities as one might hope in view of the Houthi threats to resume fighting even more fiercely than before if their difficult conditions are not met and negotiations fail. Also, the tensions are still extremely fraught between the Houthis and the STC and other political and tribal forces which do not necessarily see their interests served in the desired agreement (Al-Arabi, 2023).

Shortly before this chapter was concluded, a Houthi delegation paid its first public and formal visit to Saudi Arabia for talks aimed at ending the conflict. Still, despite reports that the meetings yielded positive outcomes (BBC Arabic, 2023a; 2023b), and the announcement by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, on 23 December 2023, of a commitment by the Presidential Leadership Council and Ansar Allah to a “roadmap” for peace under the auspices of the United Nations (OESGY, 2023), the state of “no war, no peace” persists. This will remain the case as long as a final settlement has not been reached and as long as there remains a possibility that the peace process could collapse.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to contextualize and offer an overview of the current crisis in Yemen, thereby laying the groundwork for the following chapters. This chapter divided the evolution of the crisis into phases according to the most salient turning points that ultimately steered it to its current state. The authors have identified the Yemeni revolution of 2011 as the initiating spark since it led to the pivotal repercussions that triggered the GCC initiative, the beginning of regional interventions, and the emerging polarizations. The second phase shed light on the national dialogue and the fraught and bumpy road that ultimately led to its concluding document. The context, delivery, and substance of this document, in turn, precipitated the unanticipated and problematic alliance between the Houthis and their erstwhile adversary, former President Saleh. There followed the sudden military escalation and the territorial expansion of the Houthis, leading to the third phase: the military intervention by the Saudi-led Arab coalition. This phase brought the expansion of armed struggles over territorial control and realms of influence, as well as further regional military interventions.

The beginning of the fourth phase was marked by the transition from the Trump to the Biden administration in Washington. It ushered in significant changes in the roles of international and regional players, the reconfiguration of political alignments, and shifts in the map of territorial control by the forces on the ground in Yemen. The Al-Ula Declaration and the March 2022 truce agreement in Riyadh were defining features of this phase. The fourth phase helps frame the fifth as the phase of “no war, no peace,” which remains the state of the Yemeni conflict at the

time of writing. That section draws attention to the ongoing tensions, the economic deterioration, and the grave humanitarian tragedy in the country.

This latter phase invites close analysis and discussion of the diverse facets of the Yemeni crisis and ways to address them. Such efforts would include an examination of the roles of the various actors and research and analysis of peace-making initiatives and processes. Looking forward, they would also address aspects of post-conflict reconstruction and development, with particular attention to the prospects and challenges of the disarmament, dissolution, and reintegration of paramilitary forces, as well as the challenges of governance, rebuilding the health care and education systems, and the impacts of climate change.

## Notes

- 1 The Southern Transitional Council (STC), which was supported by the UAE at various levels, advocated a return to an independent sovereign state in the south. President Hadi denounced the STC as a violation of all local and international laws and principles. See: <https://bit.ly/3fhx5Vk>
- 2 Socotra is an archipelago in the Indian Ocean consisting of six islands. It was administratively part of the Hadhramaut governorate until late 2013 when President Hadi declared it a separate governorate. See: <https://bit.ly/3fCeGTj>

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## 2 Federalism in Yemen

### The Prelude to Peace?

*Bakeel Al Zandani and Youcef Bouandel*

#### Introduction

Since the unification of Yemen in 1990, power and the country's resources have been centrally concentrated in the hands of a small political, tribal and military elite. This state of affairs created an atmosphere of tension and mistrust between the different political forces in the country, and resulted in high levels of corruption, attempts at secession, and ultimately a civil war. Hence, the theme of decentralization has been omnipresent in Yemeni's political discourse. Indeed, the first attempt at resolving the problems facing the country came in 1994 with the signing of the "Document of Pledge and Accord" (*Wathiqat al-'Ahd wal-Ittifaq*) in Amman, Jordan. The aim of the Document was to "... promote ... democracy, stability, and construction of a state based on law and order and institutions" (Al-Bab, n.d.). Power sharing was an important element in this process. Indeed, the "majority of participants from all regions favoured decentralizing power to locally elected governors and mayors at the provincial, district and municipal levels," (Day, 2019, 8). President Ali Abdullah Saleh, despite committing himself to the provisions of this document, never implemented them.

The issue was revisited at the turn of the 21st century. With popular pressure on the government to decentralize power, in 2000, Ali Saleh's government introduced the Local Authority Law (LAL). The aim was to give local councils more power. However, Saleh, fearful of conceding power, ensured the non-implementation of this Law. Hence, this issue of power-sharing is not only one of the contributing factors to the 2011 protest, but also one of the most significant challenges facing the country. With the level of violence on the increase, Saudi Arabia, leading the Gulf Cooperation Council, with support from the international community, proposed a road map known as the "Gulf Initiative."

The initiative aimed to find a peaceful way out of the political wrangling that the country was experiencing. As a result of the Initiative, a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was set up in 2013 to debate the most critical issues facing the country. One of these issues was power sharing. Delegates agreed to transform Yemen into a federal state. They were unable, however, to agree on the number of regions, their respective boundaries, resource sharing and distribution of powers between the central government and the federal member regions. A month later, a

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-3

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committee, appointed by President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, announced that the country would have six regions: Two in the South and four in the North.

In theory, federalism is an attractive proposition and a way out of the difficulties Yemen has been facing. However, the reality, we argue, is different and federalism can lead to further instability. Thus, in order to assess this hypothesis, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides a historical setting beginning with the unification of the country and its consequences. We argue that this unification, with continued centralization of power in Saleh's hand, led to the domination of the South by the North. This domination created a feeling of marginalization and calls for power-sharing started to gain momentum. The second section discusses the Gulf Cooperation Council's Initiative, which paved the way for the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) whose task was to propose a way out of the political stalemate. The third section concentrates on the work of the NDC with particular emphasis on its work regarding power sharing and the proposed federalism. In the last section, we assess the shortcomings of the proposed federalism before conclusions are drawn regarding the relevance and suitability of federalism for Yemen.

### **Unification and its Consequences**

The Republic of Yemen is the result of the merger between two separate and sovereign states: North Yemen and South Yemen. The two countries had different political, social and economic systems. Local elites concentrated mainly in the capital Sanaa and the surrounding areas have traditionally ruled North Yemen, known as the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). South Yemen, by contrast, was governed by the former colonial power: the United Kingdom. The British interest in the South was mainly due to the strategic importance of the port of Aden. The British eventually withdrew from South Yemen in 1967 and a couple of years later, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was created. The PDRY was a one party-state along the socialist/communist model in which the Yemeni Socialist party (YSP) played the leading role. Given their ideological differences and foreign support, the two states experienced violent clashes repeatedly. The US and Saudi Arabia, among others, the YAR, whereas the former Soviet Union provided support for the PDRY.

Internally, the YAR was much more stable than the PDRY. The latter saw frequent disagreements and internal strife among the party's leadership. In 1986, this wrangling culminated in a bloody civil war after the assassination of several high-ranking politicians, including the vice president and the minister of defence during a meeting of the YSP Politburo by the bodyguards of then President, Ali Nasser Mohammed. The conflict, which lasted for a couple of weeks, claimed the lives of an estimated 1,000 people and changed the political dynamics in the South. The civil war resulted in a winning side represented by the governorates of Al-Dhali' and Lahj, and a losing side that included the governorates of Abyan and Shabwa. President Ali Nasser Mohammed, who was on the losing side of the civil war, survived, and fled with a number of his supporters, including current president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to the YAR (Al-Hamdani and Lackner, 2020).

Ali Salem Al-Beidh, a member of the YSP's Politburo and survivor of the assassination attempt became the Secretary General of the YSP and head of state. Soon after he came to power, he pressed for unification with the North. A combination of internal and external factors led to this decision. Internally, unification was seen as a means to neutralize the threats posed by high-ranking officers from Al-Dhali' and Lahj governorates, who were victorious in the civil war. Externally, the former Soviet Union was undergoing a process of reforms under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev before the eventual break-up of the country, and support for its satellite states, including the PDRY, shrunk. For Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the YAR since 1978, unification was appealing because it meant access to the whole territory and perhaps, more importantly, access to all the natural resources in the South. As a result converging interests, unification happened very quickly. Following a meeting in November 1989, the two leaders, Saleh and Al-Beidh, agreed to full union and by 1990, the Republic of Yemen (RY) came into being with Saleh as the President and Al-Beidh as the Vice President. The merger agreement was less than two pages long and was rushed by the two leaders. The declaration of the Republic of Yemen, made in Sanaa in May 1990, set an official transitional period of 30 months to finalize the unification of the two systems. Despite some opposition, especially in the South, Yemenis generally welcomed unification throughout the new country as they looked forward to reaping the rewards such union would bring. Nonetheless, the union of the two Yemens was on paper only.

Despite this unification, the two countries maintained their distinct identities and the rivalries that characterized their relationship remained. For instance, even though the unification took place in 1990, both currencies were valid for the first six years of the RY. During the years following unification, each side was trying to seize the power and authority at the expense of the other. Indeed, the armies of the two countries did not merge. Given that the balance of power was in favour of Saleh, his side was more successful in this task. Southerners saw subsidies they enjoyed under the previous regime lifted. The results were a sudden rise in food prices and a continuous decline in their living standards. This led to the deterioration of relations between President Saleh and members of the YSP, who were in the government. Multiple assassination attempts against YSP leaders exacerbated tensions between the two sides.

The legislative elections of 1993, which was initially scheduled for 1992, not only confirmed the domination of the General Peoples' Congress (GPC), Saleh's party, but also relegated the YSP to third place. The Islamist party Islah came in second (Carapico, 1993). This state of affairs, dominance of Northerners and marginalization of Southerners, led to resentment. Southern leadership called for secession, and Al-Beidh, then Vice President, attempted to revert to the pre-1990 situation by attempting to form a new independent state in the South.

The unification of Yemen in 1990 and the centralization of power in Saleh's hands that followed left Southerners bitter and marginalized. As far as many Southerners were concerned, the North is nothing more than an occupying power that appropriates South Yemen's natural resources for its benefit. Despite a significant portion of Yemeni oil coming from the governorates of Hadhramaut and

Shabwa, formerly part of the PDRY, Yemenis in general and Southerners in particular, were not benefiting from their country's wealth. Indeed, in May 2023, the 33rd anniversary of the unification, a Southern fighter stated that whenever unification "is mentioned, it reminds us of occupation, repression and injustice. We will not allow this to continue" (The New Arab, 2023). Saleh did not distribute revenues fairly throughout the country; he used them to accumulate his personal wealth and that of his family and tribal sheikhs that the Northern system relies upon. By favouring his patronage network in order to sustain his position, Saleh overlooked the rest of the country, a strategy that would eventually backfire. Feelings of marginalization and resentment were not only felt in the south but also in the country as a whole. Poverty, poor provision of services, unemployment and underdevelopment were problems that were not only confined to the south, but the majority of Yemenis throughout the country were suffering from. The use of force by Saleh's security forces to silence any dissent intensified these feelings. Indeed, in 2007 Saleh's forces started to suppress the demands of discharged former Southern officers for higher pensions. This oppressive policy led to the birth of the Southern Movement, better known as *Al-Hirak Al-Janoubi*. Since then, demands for secession were publicly revived and have been gathering momentum.

In addition to the above, at the heart of this public discontent is the centralization of power in the hands of Saleh and his close entourage. Indeed, in February 1994, Saleh, leaders of the YSP and the Islah Party, signed a Document of Pledge and Accord (DPA) in Amman, Jordan. This document called for, among other things, a "local administration ... to be based on new administrative units" where "factors of population, geography, economic and social conditions and services etc., [are taken] into account." The document stresses that "local government is based on direct and equal elections" and declares that "local authorities are responsible in a full way for managing the affairs of the geographical unit." Finally, the document insists, "financial decentralization is a basic component of local government" (Al-Bab, n.d.). This document provided a roadmap for loosening Saleh's grip on power and afforded local councils and elected mayors the opportunity to manage peoples' affairs in the geographical units in which they live. It would have alleviated, at least in theory, some of the grievances people felt toward Sanaa. Nonetheless, despite signing the document, Saleh did not honour its provision. Therefore, the document in effect failed to resolve the dispute over the decentralization of power. This led Southern politicians to declare independence, with Al-Beidh, the former President of the former PDRY, declaring himself the acting president of the Democratic Republic of Yemen (Dostal, 2012, 79). Consequently, the country descended into a bloody civil war. In the span of three months (May – July 1994), the civil war, which claimed the lives of an estimated 377,000 people, ravaged the country. The fighting was mainly in the south as Saleh's forces ruthlessly crushed the rebellion and prevented the secessionists from creating their independent state, albeit temporarily. Once Aden was captured in early July, Saleh ensured that his adversaries, especially in the military, were discharged from active duty. Nonetheless, those factions of the Southern military who were on Saleh's side were integrated in the country's

military. Coincidentally, these were on the losing side of the 1986 civil war. He also appointed Hadi, a Southerner who fled to the North in 1986, as his Vice President (Al-Hamdani and Lackner, 2020). With the civil war over, Saleh's grip on power was to strengthen and he abandoned his earlier "commitment" to decentralization and power sharing. Furthermore, this situation enabled him to continue without any strong opposition to allocate positions of power, both military and political, based on kinship. Indeed, it is this network that helped Saleh keep his position for this long. Another consequence is the continuous resentment and hostility by Southerners toward the north. The former's defeat in the civil war did not extinguish their aspirations for at least power sharing, if not full-scale independence. It merely postponed them until the situation on the ground changed. This resentment, as we shall see later, provided the impetus for the Southern *Hirak* from 2007 onwards (Williams *et al.*, 2017, 6). Nonetheless, pressure on the government to decentralize continued and in February 2000, Saleh eventually secured the enactment of the Local Authority Law 4/2000 to regulate decentralization in Yemen. This Law was never implemented since Saleh feared conceding power to other units and always equated calls for decentralization as "treason against the nation" (Day, 2019, 9).

The centralization of power, which was blamed for the lack of economic development, corruption, increasing inequality and declining government/public investment, played the most decisive role in the intensification of opposition to Saleh. With events unfolding in Tunisia, starting from December 2011, and then, moving to Egypt, Libya and other parts of the Middle East in what has come to be known as the "Arab Spring," people in Yemen followed suit. In March 2011, demonstrators took to the major cities in Yemen, such as Aden and Sanaa, calling for the end of corruption, political reforms and most importantly, perhaps for President Saleh to "go." As far as demonstrators were concerned, Saleh's regime was responsible for all the ills the country had been suffering from. In response to these peaceful protests, Saleh ordered his forces to fire at protestors. Many innocent civilians were killed (Finn, 2011). Sanaa became the scene of armed hostilities between Saleh's forces and his opponents, some of whom were either his military commanders who defected to the opposition after the massacre of civilians or influential allies, such as Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar and Sadiq Al-Ahmar. This episode marked the turning point in the gradual erosion of Saleh's grip on power as the country spiralled into violence. Different groups throughout the country tried to take advantage of Saleh's weaknesses to assert themselves. Indeed, the Houthis took over the governorate of Saada and the Southern Movement<sup>1</sup> sought to return to the pre-1990 situation by reinstating independence. What was more worrying was the fact that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was following these developments very closely. With Saleh's forces fighting on many fronts, Al Qaeda seized control of the southern Yemeni governorate, Abyan, the home of Vice President Hadi (Al-Madhaji, 2016). In order to end this crisis, the GCC, led by Saudi Arabia, with cooperation from the international community, brought together the major political players in Yemen. Negotiations resulted in the signing of an agreement known as "the GCC Initiative."

### **The GCC Initiative**

This initiative, brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with the support of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and the European Union, represented a blueprint for Yemen's peaceful political transition. In other words, it was a roadmap to find a political settlement and avoid civil war. In the build-up to this initiative, conflict between President Saleh and his allies against almost every other political force in the country, such as the Islah Party, the Southern Hirak, the Youth movement and Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, was escalating. This put an end to Saleh's 33-year presidency. Saleh and his allies were guaranteed immunity from prosecution for whatever crimes they committed during their tenure of office, most recently the killing of innocent protestors. He, then, handed over the reins to his vice president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Although Saleh used several tactics to delay signing the document and committing himself to its provision, he signed it on 23 November 2011, and the process of transition began in earnest.

The initiative outlined a two-year transitional period and called, among other things, for an inclusive national dialogue to work out the future of the country, including the writing of a new constitution and the election of a new president by 2014 (Bennett, 2013, 10). While in theory, this road map had the potential to put the country on the road to peace, the reality, however, suggests otherwise. In trying to implement the provisions of this initiative, the new Yemeni leadership would be walking through a minefield. Given the deep divisions that exist in Yemen, the complexity of the issues to be ironed out, the Houthis' condemnation of the initiative, and the influence of Saleh, who despite being out of office, was not finished, the early signs were not encouraging.

The transition consisted of two main phases. The first began with the opposition choosing a Prime Minister. Two weeks after this appointment, a government of national unity, whose decisions are taken by consensus, was installed. Perhaps the major component of this national unity government was the establishment of a "Committee on Military Affairs for Achieving Security and Stability." The main aim of this was to "end division in the armed forces and address its causes, end all of the armed conflicts" (paragraph 16). The duties of the Committee extend beyond the first phase. It was tasked with working "to create the necessary conditions and to take the necessary steps to integrate the armed forces under unified, national and professional leadership in the context of the rule of law" (paragraph 17). The second phase consisted of calling for a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) to discuss the major issues facing the country. This phase would be completed once a new president is elected.

### **The NDC and the Proposed Federalism**

The NDC played the most significant role during the planned two-year transitional period. It functioned from March 18, 2013 to 25 January 2015, where it saw the participation of 565 delegates from different political parties and civil society organizations. The NDC was a novel idea that offered different groups,

some of which were previously excluded, the chance to debate the major issues facing the country, such as the causes of continuous tensions and conflict in Yemen, the Southern issue, transitional justice and state-building, to name just a few, and take part in the decision-making process. The NDC was structured into nine separate working groups.<sup>2</sup> Each group made proposals on one issue, and each of these proposals were incorporated in the NDC's recommendations. About 1,800 proposals were made, which would be included in the new constitution. The focus of this chapter will be on the State-Building Group, which addressed federalism.

The work of the State-Building Group was the most controversial and divisive of any of the sub-groups of the NDC. Delegates to the NDC agreed about dismantling Saleh's system based on the centralization of power, but disagreed on the future structure of the Yemeni State. The centralization of power, over the tenure of Saleh, in general, and since unification, in particular, led to frustration and the feeling that injustice has been the driving force behind calls for change. Southern separatists, for instance, called for the country to be divided into two regions. In other words, a return to the pre-1990 situation. It is during these discussions that the idea of federalism came to the forefront as the most likely scenario.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the NDC marked, at least in theory, the official beginning of Yemen's transition from a unitary state to a federal form of government. Without any details about how the proposed federation would operate, several political parties rejected the decision. Understandably, members of Saleh's party, the Islamist Islah, as well as the Nasserite parties were mostly against any division of the country. The Houthis, on the other hand, fluctuated between keeping the status quo and their readiness to accept a form of federalism as long as the new division guarantees them access to a port on the Red Sea.

The reasons for the NDC's adoption of federalism are not hard to understand. Perhaps the most important drive for federalism is to put an end to the concentration /centralization of power that characterized Saleh's rule and led to frustration, exclusion and violence. In federal systems, there are at least two levels of government: federal/central and state. Furthermore, at the state level, there may exist lower tiers of government. This devolution of power ensures inclusiveness, accountability and better democratic governance. Secondly, federalism was perceived as the only option to keep the country together. Given the calls for secession by Southerners, a federal form of government would, in theory, satisfy the minimum of their demands. Thirdly, federalism is a solution to countries like Yemen undergoing internal strife by addressing grievances of diverse political groups and communities (Clausen, 2018). Examples are plenty from the region. Indeed, Iraq, given its internal strife, opted for federalism after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the idea is being discussed for Libya. Ahmad Daghar, head of the Yemeni Shura Council and former Prime Minister, argued, "This form of government [federalism] could keep the country united and hinder the accumulation of power and wealth with one part or one group" (*The New Arab*, 2023). While these reasons are appealing, federalism is not without its dangers. When a country transitions from a unitary to a federal system, the interests of those who have been privileged for decades can be exposed and threatened. Furthermore, the new structure may

not meet the aspirations and satisfy the grievances of all the disparate groups and regions. In these cases, federalism could trigger renewed tensions, if not even violence. Therefore, the transition process needs to be carefully negotiated to ensure it overcomes these potential problems.

When it came to the representation of the south in the NDC, many influential factions simply rejected any participation in the proposed conference. This rejection was based on two separate, but mutually inclusive reasons. The first is their desire for secession and the establishment of their independent state. Given that secession was not an option and was perceived, by the Gulf Initiative, as a destabilizing factor, Southerners felt their participation in the proposed dialogue was simply a waste of time. Secondly, with potentially no Southern voice in the NDC, which would question the legitimacy and representative character of the national dialogue, Hadi, a Southerner, appointed less influential members from his faction to the Conference. While this move might have temporarily addressed the issue of Southern participation in the dialogue, it would lead to further problems in the future. The most significant of these problems is the legitimacy of the participants to speak on behalf of the south, and how the outcome of the Conference can be implemented in the south (Charles Schmitz, 2014, 9).

While the official close of the NDC on 25 January 2014, was fast approaching, delegates did not agree on the number of federal regions. Some delegates from the south pressed for a two-region federal state, Northerners, in general, and President Hadi, in particular, rejected this proposition. They felt that a two-region federal state is nothing more than a return to the pre-union and Hadi's former political adversaries, especially Al-Beidh, would return to power. Furthermore, the prospect that "tribes from highland mountains between Sanaa and Saada province would inevitably dominate any northern region of a two-region federal state" compelled Northerners from other provinces such as Taiz, Hudaydah and Marib, to name just a few, to call for "a three- or four-way way division of the northern lands" (Day, 2019, 14). Given the deep divisions and mistrust that characterized the NDC, the decision on how many federal regions would the new Yemen comprise was left to a later stage. This decision enabled Hadi, who extended his transitional term in office by one year, to conduct the final ceremony of the NDC. It was left to President Hadi to establish and supervise two committees: one to decide on the number of regions in the new federal state of Yemen, while the other was tasked with writing the federal constitution based on the NDC's recommendations (Day, 2014). When these two committees complete their tasks, as per the GCC Initiative, a referendum would be held to approve the constitution, and the election of a new president marks the end of the transitional period. Such a move was viewed with suspicion and "the closing session descended into chaos with the Houthis, the YSP and a number of independent representatives objecting and withdrawing their delegations from the NDC before the final agreement could be signed" (Al-Deen, 2019). Nonetheless, despite its conclusion without firm plans for the future structure of the united country, apart from a broad idea about a federal system, Hadi and his supporters hailed the as a success. On evaluating the work of the NDC, a Yemeni sarcastically stated that it "resolved all of Yemen's problems – except for the secessionist strife in the south,

the Saada conflict in the north, national reconciliation, transitional justice and state building” (Thiel, 2015). In other words, the National Conference completely failed in its mission and might have made the situation even worse.

Hadi personally chose the membership of the committee on “federalism” which he chaired. Given the internal disagreement seen during the NDC debate, the Committee’s task was already complicated. Furthermore, this situation became more difficult given the fast-approaching deadline: according to the Gulf Initiative, the transitional period expires in mid-February 2014. Hence, on 10 February 2014, the Committee announced its decision: Yemen is to be a federal state consisting of six regions, four in the north and two in the south. Furthermore, Sanaa the country’s capital would be a “federal city not subject to any regional authority” and the constitution would “guarantee its neutrality.” Similarly, the city of Aden would have a special status and be given “independent legislative and executive powers” (BBC, 2015). The regions and their governorates are shown in Table 2.1 below.

While, in theory, this decision represented a relative compromise between the Southerners’ demands for secession and the Northerners who opposed devolution from the center, there was, however, no agreement on it. Public discontent over the decision was on the increase. The popular perception is that this Committee was just a smokescreen to confer legitimacy upon a decision taken elsewhere before this Committee was even established. Al Deen reports that “[s]uspicious were earlier raised by a leaked telephone call publicized by the Houthis that supposedly took place between Hadi and his former Chief of Staff and the Secretary General of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), Dr Ahmed bin Mubarak. During this alleged call, bin Mubarak reportedly informed Hadi “we need a week for the committee to make it look like as if it actually discussed and thought about divisions” (2019, footnote 12). Furthermore, the fact that the “Committee defined the six regions along the boundaries of existing provinces” (Day, 2019, 15), and taking less than two weeks to come up with a proposal on one of, if not the most, divisive issue in Yemen, gives credence to this allegation. Thus, several groups rejected this plan. Undoubtedly, the strongest critics of the six-region plan are the Houthis, who argued that under this plan, the proposed Azal region, of which, the Houthi-dominated governorate of Saada would be a part, would not have access to a port on the Red Sea. It should be noted that Saada did not have access to the Red Sea before this proposal. Secondly, the federal plan was drawn outside the NDC,

*Table 2.1* The proposed regions and governorates

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Governorates</i>
Azal	Sanaa, Amran, Dhamar, Saada,
Sheba	Ma’rib, Al-Baida, Al-Jawf
Janad	Taiz, Ibb
Tihama	Al-Hudaydah, Raymah, Al-Mahwit, Hajjah
Aden	Aden, Abyan, Lahij, Al-Dhali‘
Hadhramaut	Hadhramaut, Mahra, Shabwah, Socotra

by a small group handpicked by Hadi and with neither outside consultation or referendum nor a clear roadmap of how these regions would be administered, how power would be divided and allocated, and to how many layers of government, and, most importantly, how revenues are collected and distributed. The modalities of how this federal system would operate were left to the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). Finally, despite the proposed six regions, the federal system confirmed the north-south division that existed before unification. Indeed, all the proposed six regions are either in the north or the south without any cross-boundary region that potentially helps defuse the north-south divide.

Almost a month later, on March 8, 2014, President Hadi issued a decree creating a 17-member Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). It was tasked with writing a constitution to be ratified in a popular referendum. The process should take one year to complete. As soon as the Committee came into being, mass protests erupted in different parts of the country. Despite the fact that the CDC recommended a thirty-member committee and each member should have at least ten years' experience in constitutional law. The reality, however, was different. Indeed, out of the 17 members, only one had a background in constitutional law, but did not meet the ten years' requirement. Once again, this deviation from the NDC recommendations suggests that Hadi and his entourage did not take the transition from a unitary to a federal state very seriously. Furthermore, when writing the Constitution, especially the articles about federalism, members of the Committee seemed to be learning on the job. To be sure, a Committee member said, "we figured out that the outcomes of the NDC have only indicated guidelines, devoid of any details" (Steinbeiser, 2015, 26). On 17 January 2015, shortly before the draft constitution was released, the Houthis, who had been staunch critics of the proposed federation, kidnapped Ahmed Awad Mubarak, Hadi's Chief of Staff and permanent member of the CDC.

### **Federalism in Yemen and its Shortcoming**

Federalism requires a government at the center willing to work with all the political forces in the periphery regardless of their affiliation. Similarly, federalism requires governments in the periphery to recognize the legitimate role of the government in the center and abide by its decisions in matters that are reserved for it (Al Rawhani, 2019). In other words, federalism is a process of negotiations that requires both concessions and cooperation, which results in consensus among the different groups. Unfortunately, neither of these conditions are present in Yemen. The NDC can be described as an arena of self-help where every group was looking after its interests with complete disregard to other groups' aspirations and needs. In other words, each took the position of "my way or no way." To be sure, "the HIRAK have repeatedly walked away from the NDC negotiation table, because of the Northern reluctance to offer their territories the status of a single state in the proposed federal system" (Lewis, 2014). Furthermore, as we have seen earlier, the most influential groups and individuals from the south did not take part in the NDC, and President Hadi was compelled to bring in some of his allies to give the semblance of a southern presence in the "dialogue." Consequently, most people

in the south simply did not recognize decisions made by the NDC, and together with the Houthis, did not accept the recommendations to divide Yemen into a six-region federal state.<sup>4</sup> Southerners continued to press for an independent state. Sanaa, the proposed federal capital of Yemen, was so weak and its authority did not extend to the whole country. Indeed, after the Houthi takeover of Sanaa in September 2014, President Hadi resigned, went into exile in Saudi Arabia before making Aden his temporary capital. Therefore, given the diametrically opposed views and the rift, at times violent, between the different groups and parties, it was impossible for this proposed system to operate.

A move from a unitary to a federal state, Al Deen (2019) argues, “was outside the scope of the transition plan and would have required a national referendum to have legitimacy, as per the Gulf Initiative.” Nonetheless, the overall negative reaction to Hadi’s federal proposal was due to its perceived shortcomings. Perhaps the most significant issue that the proposed federalism overlooked was devising a formula whereby Yemen’s natural resources would be allocated to the different regions in the federal system. This is one of the major sticking points in any transition toward federalism. Certain geographical areas were richer in oil and gas compared to others. Will the federal government collect the revenues and distribute them evenly between the different regions in this new federation? On the other hand, will the distribution take into account the population density? In other words, sharing the revenues equally between the different regions might disadvantage the most populous regions and would lead to more discontent. What would the reaction of the richer regions be when they see that their wealth is being taken elsewhere, with the centralized nature of Saleh’s regime fresh in their minds? The richer regions might see federalism as an opportunity to have full control over their natural resources.

By overlooking this significant factor, the proposal would intensify the problems facing the country instead of resolving them. Regions with natural resources within their borders would want to keep control over their resources. Hence, this plan would create disparities between regions: less populated regions with a concentration of natural resources compared with densely populated regions with little resources. To be sure, the proposed Azal region, which includes the federal capital Sanaa, albeit an independent unit in the proposed federal system, is a good example. While it lacks any natural revenues, the majority of its population work in the non-productive government sector, such as the civil service and the security services, including the military. Thus, financing these important institutions will depend on revenues from other regions/governorates. Given the already volatile situation in the country and the negative perceptions of Sanaa held by other regions, especially in the South, discord on finances may naturally lead to further instability.

Revenues from other oil-rich governorates under Saleh’s regime previously funded the civil and security services. The new proposed plan would essentially deprive the Azal region and its elites from all the privileges they had been accustomed to under Saleh. By contrast, two oil rich governorates, Marib and Al-Jawf, were placed in the same region, Sheba. This region would have a population of about 1.5 million inhabitants. Similarly, the Hadhramaut region, rich in oil and gas has a population of

about 2 million. Therefore, taken together, these two proposed regions, which would hold much of the country's oil and gas resources, would have about 13 percent of the population (Al-Deen, 2019). By contrast, the proposed Al-Janad region, comprising the governorates of Taiz and Ibb, would be the smallest of the regions with the highest population density. Compared to other proposed regions, Al-Janad would have high levels of economic, namely commercial and agricultural, output and boast one of the highest levels of education. Nonetheless, governorates in these rich proposed regions were not rewarded with positions of power under the previous regime. Finally, access to ports and the potential revenues from them was also a point of contention. As we have seen earlier, the Houthis rejected the proposal on the grounds that it did not grant them access to the sea.

One can safely argue that the NDC proposal to divide Yemen into a six-region federal system was the torch that ignited the ongoing violent conflict in the country. When President Hadi, through the NDC and the Executive Committee, put forward this federal plan, he aimed to put an end to the enduring grievances toward the central government in Sanaa and, in turn, put the country on the road to a peaceful future. Because of the history of centralization of power that resulted in uneven development in Yemen and fed the sense of injustice in other parts of the country, the proposal had the opposite effect. It deepened divisions and strengthened the demands for autonomy and secession. Nonetheless, the federal system has its supporters among some of the governorates that benefit from the proposal such as Marib and Hadhramaut. President Hadi continued to defend his proposal, arguing that it would eventually lead to peace and stability in the country. He stated that "all of Yemen's problems can be resolved through a federal design," insisting that the federal system is designed "with the aim of getting rid of regionalism and sectarianism" (Day, 2014). Similarly, federalism has its opponents. Given the severe opposition to the federal roadmap in its present form from different powerful groups in the country, such as the Houthis, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, to implement this proposed plan.

The violence that has ravaged the country, particularly since 2015, changed the balance of power among the different groups and the realities on the ground. The unity of Yemen has been hanging in the balance, and the proposed six-region federal state became nothing more than an impossible objective. This is particularly true given the increasing call from Southerners for at least autonomy. Furthermore, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a United Arab Emirates-backed group calling for independence, is more powerful than the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) in Aden, the temporary capital of the Yemeni internationally recognized government. The PLC took over the reins of the internationally recognized government from Hadi in April 2022 is fraught with deep disagreements among its eight members.

Furthermore, while the conflict has been unfolding, the resource rich governorates, such as Hadhramaut, have achieved a high level of sovereignty over their natural resources, such as oil and gas. Hence, the population in these governorates benefiting from the control over their natural resources, would resist any suggestion of a restoration of their previous situation.

## **Conclusion**

Since unification in 1990, Yemen has been suffering. The unification of the country played into the hands of Saleh who used the revenues from the south to strengthen his grip on power and buy loyalty. The country's revenues were not distributed evenly between the different parts of the country and power was concentrated in the hands of Saleh and his inner circle. Positions in the military and government administration depended on kinship. This state of affairs nurtured feelings of marginalization in the south and calls for secession were voiced just a few years after the union was declared. After pressure on Saleh to share power, a number of attempts to decentralize power were made, but these were not taken seriously and Saleh ensured that these laws were never applied. It was only after the Arab Spring that Saleh's grip on power was eroded, and he ended up leaving office. His successor, Hadi, tried, through the NDC, to address one of the most sensitive issues in Yemeni politics: decentralization. The NDC opted to transform the country from a unitary state to a federation of six regions.

Furthermore, one, if not the most flagrant, error President Hadi made regarding the future of Yemen was the speed with which the decision was made without considering the internal divisions and tribal conflict in the country. Such a move would at best take years of planning and adjustments to create the best possible conditions for it to work. While some delegates withdrew from the NDC before its conclusion, others were very critical of its outcome. It was clear by the time of the NDC's closing ceremony that disagreements between the delegates were irreconcilable. The situation was made worse by the absence of any details for further committees, such as the CDC, to work with. Furthermore, other factors on the ground represented significant obstacles toward the establishment of a federal state. On the one hand, governorates and regions that have long suffered under Saleh's regime saw in the federalism proposal an opportunity to have a say and control over their natural resources. On the other hand, those with close ties to the central government took the opposite view. These diametrically opposed positions put the two sides at loggerheads. The latter feared that the regions' potential control over their natural resources would automatically mean a reduction in their entitlements. This, in turn, represented an existential threat to them. Furthermore, support for this proposal has been losing momentum. The precipitous fall in the quality of life – economic, social as well as stability – of ordinary citizens was blamed on Hadi's government. One of the major weaknesses of the transitional government has been its inability to impose its will on the military and security services.

Although many supporters of federalism in the Yemeni leadership still believe that the proposed federation provides a way to improve the socio-economic conditions of Yemenis and perceive it as a way to resolve the conflict, the situation on the ground suggests otherwise. Not only have some of the main players in Yemen's domestic politics, most notably the Houthis and the Southerners, rejected the proposal, but a decade of violence has fundamentally changed the character of the country and its regions. As stated earlier, due to the strong opposition to the federal plan, the military losses of the internationally recognized government's forces

and the increase in the powers of a number of governorates, Hadi's proposed federation remains an idea to be pursued but never obtained.

## Notes

- 1 The Southerner Movement is a front that agrees on the fact that the south was disenfranchised under Saleh and that seeks independence. There are variations within the movement on how to achieve that goal. They range from complete and instantaneous independence to a gradual and incremental transition that would lead to independence within a prescribed period.
- 2 The nine working groups are as follow: The Southern issue; the Saada issue; transitional justice; State building; good governance; the armed and security forces; special entities; rights and freedoms; and development.
- 3 Federalism is not a new proposition for Yemen. Indeed, South Yemen, under British Protection was for five years (1962-67) known as the Federation of South Arabia (FSA). Since then, the idea of transforming Yemen to a federation was discussed.
- 4 Mohammed Ali Ahmed, a former South Yemen interior minister who returned from exile in March 2012, stated that “[w]hat has been announced about the six regions is a coup against what had been agreed at the dialogue” (BBC, 2015). Furthermore, Mohammed Abdel Salam, official spokesperson of the Houthi movement, stated “[w]e did not sign this document and we consider it does not represent a solution, not to the issue of the South or to the unresolved national issues, and the division was in accordance to the political whim” (Dostal, 2012, 12).

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# 3 Navigating the Yemeni Quagmire

## The Evolution of Saudi and Emirati Intervention from Synergy to Strife

*Mahjoob Zweiri and Nesibe Hicret Battaloglu*

### Introduction

In July 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) unilaterally announced its withdrawal from Yemen's Hudeidah port as part of Abu Dhabi's "Strategic Redeployment." While the UAE's decision can be viewed as a calculated exit strategy for the Emirates in war-torn Yemen, it brought to the surface the diverging approaches and intentions toward Yemen between the two main coalition members of Operation Decisive Storm, which commenced in 2015: Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This chapter endeavors to trace the initial Saudi and Emirati motivations to intervene, their strategies and tactics on the ground, and the setbacks they encountered in Yemen.

Various theoretical frameworks offer explanations for diverging strategies and rationales for Saudi Arabia and the UAE's military intervention in Yemen. Based on individual level threat perceptions, Parker (2021) suggests that the Saudi Crown Prince initiated a military intervention in northern Yemen based on material threat perceptions, aiming to defeat the Houthis and restore Yemen's internationally recognized President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi to power. On the other hand, his Emirati counterpart Mohammad bin Zayed (MbZ), undertook a military intervention in southern Yemen driven by ideational threat perceptions from Islamists to back southern separatists in a reformative approach (Parker, 2021). Similarly, Öztürk (2023) argues that ideological differences between Saudi Arabia and the UAE toward al-Islah party, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and different visions for political unity in Yemen are the root causes of diverging Saudi and Emirati policies in Yemen. On the UAE's policy change in Yemen, Dogan-Akkas (2021) offers a two-level realist perspective on the UAE's strategies in Yemen as "buck-passing" the burden of the anti-Houthi war to Saudi Arabia determined by Emirati national interests, domestically and externally. On the other hand, Juneau (2020) argues the UAE's main motivation to intervene in Yemen was driven by maintaining good relations with Saudi Arabia as a foreign policy objective, and its recalibration in 2019 reflects the UAE's cost-benefit calculations to maintain this balance. Yet, the literature highlights particular aspects of divergences between the two Gulf monarchies, zooming in on isolated points of contentions. This chapter argues, and tries to demonstrate, that the Saudi-Emirati strife has its roots in their

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-4

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initial motivations embedded in not only seemingly incompatible threat perceptions and historical encounters with Yemen, but also in their interests and foreign policy visions of their respective ruling elites, which have resulted in a bedeviled situation in Yemen.

The chapter also seeks to address an analytical gap by investigating the implications of diverging Emirati and Saudi motivations and policies in the Yemeni war for the political future of Yemen as a nation. The principal contention posits that variances in priorities, motivations, and intervention strategies between Saudi Arabia and the UAE have deepened localized grievances and instigated additional schisms, thereby exacerbating challenges pertaining to political stability and national unity within the Yemeni context.

### **Historical Background**

The Yemen conflict, sparked in 2011 during the Arab Spring political upheavals in the Middle East, began with protests against President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Opposition groups, including the Houthi movement and southern secessionist Hiraq, united against Saleh (Darwich, 2018). Saleh faced defections, and central authority eroded, allowing Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to fill the power vacuum in some areas such as al-Mukalla. In 2011, a transition plan brokered by Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the US aimed to transfer power to Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. The National Dialogue Conference in 2014 addressed grievances but stalled over state structure disagreements. The GCC-brokered transition plan's failure led to a renewed conflict with the Houthis and armed forces loyal to Saleh seizing Sanaa in 2014 and forcing Hadi's resignation in 2015. The conflict escalated, turning Yemen into a battleground with significant external intervention.

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia started bombing Houthi targets, announcing a few hours later that it launched Operation Decisive Storm in response to Hadi's request to restore a legitimate government. President Hadi's warnings regarding Iranian interference in Yemen prior to the intervention (Atlantic Council, 2014), coupled with his commitment to combat Iran's influence after relocating from Sanaa to Aden in 2015 (France 24, 2015), further galvanized the Saudi-led operation aimed at curbing Iranian influence. Saudi Arabia secured considerable support from other GCC states (except for Oman), Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, and Morocco and formed "the largest coalition of autocrats the Middle East has ever seen" (Darwich, 2018: 128). The US also announced its support for the Saudi-led international coalition with logistical and intelligence backing. Although Riyadh secured political support from a range of countries, the UAE was Saudi Arabia's main partner in the military operation in Yemen (Mason, 2018). The coalition mostly relied on air strikes against Houthi targets. It also deployed ground troops and imposed a naval blockade on Yemen. In April 2015, Saudi Arabia announced that Operation Decisive Storm achieved its goals and the start of Operation Restoring Hope, signaling a shift toward a more political engagement in Yemen, despite continued military operations (Reuters, 2015). By 2016, Saudi Arabia pushed back the Houthi

expansion from Aden and Marib to the north and west, respectively, until the fronts settled into a deadlock (Al Jazeera, 2023). In the south, an Emirati-led offensive drove AQAP out of Mukalla and Aden in April 2016 and by 2020 the group retreated to al-Bayda governorate (Carboni and Sulz, 2020).

Divergences within the coalition became highly visible on the ground as early as 2017. Beginning in April 2017, Hadi's dismissal of UAE-aligned officials critical of his rule triggered a series of events. The secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) was formed in May 2017 with the support of the UAE (Salisbury, 2021). Tensions heightened as STC-aligned forces clashed with Saudi supported-Hadi loyalists in Aden in January 2018 and later took over the city in August 2018. This power struggle spread to various southern regions, leading to an inconclusive situation. The conflict was eventually resolved through the Riyadh Agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia in November 2019, establishing a framework for governance in the south (Jalal, 2021). The same year, the UAE also started to drawdown its military presence in Yemen reporting that it "was not a last-minute decision" and had been discussed extensively with Riyadh (Al Yaakoubi, 2019). Reportedly, Riyadh had put significant effort to dissuade its Emirati counterparts from this decision (Harb, 2019). Discussions proved to be unsuccessful as, in February 2020, the Emirati leadership launched a military ceremony at Zayed Military City to commemorate its phased withdrawal from Yemen (Jalal, 2020).

### **Diverging Saudi and Emirati Motivations in Yemen**

In 2015, the coalition unequivocally expressed their aims as restoring the legitimate rule of Hadi, rolling back Houthi expansion and extremist groups and containing Iran in Yemen to "bring back its security and stability" (*The National*, 2015). The regional security atmosphere was steeped in a sectarianized international media narrative surrounding Iranian expansion, extending from Baghdad to Sanaa (Nakhoul, 2015). As an elite-level study, discourse analysis conducted between 2014 and 2015 reveals that Saudi Arabia was promoting an exaggerated narrative about Iran's connections with the Houthis to justify its intervention in Yemen (Walsh, 2023). This securitization narrative gained momentum in Saudi and Emirati discourses toward Tehran, especially with Iran receiving a perceived "green card" from the US through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), creating an exceedingly alarming situation for Sunni Gulf monarchies. This is reflected in UAE analyst Sultan al-Qassemi's explanations as: "This deal is the grand bargain Kerry is denying it is. It is giving Iran carte blanche in exchange for empty promises. Iran is on the ascendant. Iran has the winning hand in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen" (Nakhoul, 2015). Looking into the intervention in Yemen from 2015, Saudi and Emirati narratives and threat perceptions toward Iran seemed to converge in Yemen, portraying a synergy between the two young crown princes, Muhammad bin Salman (MbS) and MbZ, as the most influential actors in their countries' foreign policy decisions (Ulrichsen, 2018)

As a significant body of literature and official statements claim, balance of power and Iranian threat arguments appeared as unifying motivations for Saudi Arabia and

the UAE to intervene in Yemen to curb Iran's expansion into the Arabian Peninsula. In the post-2011 period, Gulf attention was diverted from keeping Yemen a stable yet weak country to fears of total disintegration of state system, which enables Iran and non-state actors to exert their influence in the Arabian Peninsula. Concern about Iran stepping into directing Yemen's domestic political scene after 2014 appears as the main motivation for Saudi Arabia to launch a large-scale military intervention in 2015, as "a reflection of the kingdom's increasing frustration with Iranian expansion in the Arab world, including Yemen" (Zweiri, 2018).

The UAE responded to a changing regional landscape marked by a rising Iranian threat, the withdrawal of the US as the main security provider, and the emergence of Islamist groups, all crucial for safeguarding state survival (Juneau, 2020; Hokayem and Roberts, 2023). The Houthis ascent with overt Iranian support, the Obama administration's Middle East policy shifts and the endorsement of a nuclear agreement with Iran (US Department of State, 2015), and the 2015 Al-Qaida insurgency in Yemen's Mukalla city (Robinson, 2023) were key factors prompting Emirati intervention. Additionally, a shift in power distribution, enhancing the UAE's relative power, provided opportunities for a more assertive foreign policy as a middle power (Gilpin, 1981).

While regional structural factors are crucial to understanding events in Yemen, their explanatory power is limited in clarifying divergent Saudi and Emirati motivations and their impacts. Despite experiencing similar regional shocks, Gulf monarchies displayed varying foreign policy preferences in the Yemen war. Yemen holds a lower priority in Iran's regional clout, and alleged ties between Iran and the Houthis remained undocumented until 2017, undermining structural balance of power arguments.

As seen in the Yemen conflict, Saudi and Emirati motivations diverged, reflecting distinct threat perceptions, national interests, and visions. Saudi Arabia prioritized Yemen's unity and weakening the Houthis foothold, cooperating with groups, including Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, and intensifying efforts in the north. In contrast, the UAE focused on the south, forming alliances with separatist groups against Al-Qaida and Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, securing control over strategic points, ports, and waterways. These differences highlight the nuanced policies of Saudi and Emirati leaders in Yemen.

Individual level analysis and leadership changes in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia is a compelling angle to explain diverging motivations by bringing external, internal, material and ideational elements into foreign policy-making processes toward Yemen. It suggests foreign policy actions reflect leaders' decisions filtered through their personal and political backgrounds (Özdamar and Canbolat, 2023). Actors' types and preferences in international politics are not static and leadership change can lead to a change in state actions (Balzacq and Jervis, 2004). This chapter grounds its stands on an actor-specific foreign policy analysis (FPA) that leaders are in charge of foreign policy decisions and are influenced by interaction of several variables, both material and ideational (Breuning, 2007). A role theoretical framework posits that "theoretical models must simultaneously take into account the state's material capabilities and the perceptions of decision makers, who bring

their own biases and ideas (or maybe ideals) to the task of shaping foreign policy” (Breuning, 2019). As such, it allows scholars to integrate ideational factors with material ones, enhancing the comprehension of foreign policy decision-making across various states, including small states and emerging powers.

History and geography seem to carry important ramifications on geopolitics and foreign policy. Historically and geographically, Yemen occupies a “special” place in Saudi foreign policy with a 1307 km shared border in its south. Saudi Arabia has long been the most influential external actor in Yemen’s political affairs and the kingdom’s motivations to launch a military campaign in Yemen have some roots in geopolitical and historical trajectories that influence Saudi foreign policy-making. Anecdotally, King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia, warned his sons that “the good or evil for us will come from Yemen” (Burke, 2012). Although this story needs confirmation, it is important to illustrate how Yemen occupies a place in Saudi policymakers’ perceptions historically.

In the past, Riyadh pursued the policies of containment, engagement and intervention through supporting different factions at different times to have advantage in domestic affairs in Yemen. Until the border dispute settlement between the two countries in 2000, Saudi Arabia followed pragmatic policies of keeping Yemen weak (Stenslie, 2013; Salisbury, 2015). Between November 2009 and February 2010, Saudi Arabia undertook Operation Scorched Earth, intervening directly in the conflict against Houthi rebels (Hokayem and Roberts, 2023), and for the first time, the kingdom’s army “has crossed its borders without an ally” (Yamani, 2009). Saudi Arabia also managed to exert influence into Yemen’s domestic politics via a Special Committee, a body of pro-Saudi Yemeni tribal leaders and politicians (Nagi, 2022). Those particular instances underlie the historical tendency toward Yemen “as a security file to manage” in Saudi foreign policy and its motivations to militarily intervene in 2015 against the Houthis.

Despite lacking a direct border with Yemen and having historically less involvement in Yemeni politics compared to Saudi Arabia before 2011, the UAE shares historical ties with Yemen, particularly in business, migration, and security. The founding president of the UAE, Zayed Al Nahyan, established relations with Yemen’s Saleh, and one of the UAE’s initial overseas projects involved the restoration of a dam in Mareb, claimed to be Al-Nahyan’s ancestral homeland (Salisbury, 2020). President Zayed’s visits to both North and South Yemen in 1977 underscored the historical connection, marked by an official ceremony emphasizing ancestral roots (Hellyer, n.d.). The UAE also fostered business links with South Yemeni merchants, notably from the Hadhramaut region. In the 1960s, after the socialist takeover in the south, many Yemenis migrated to the UAE, assuming roles in business, police force, and military sectors (Salisbury, 2020). However, the UAE faced setbacks in 2012 when Yemen cancelled a joint venture deal with DP World, the UAE-owned port operator, over failed investment projects, posing a threat to UAE’s maritime and economic interests in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea (Reuters, 2012). Understanding these historical perspectives on UAE-Yemen relations is crucial for comprehending Emirati motivations and tactics in Yemen, highlighting the interconnectedness of actions in 2015.

The Saudi-led operation in Yemen took place following King Salman's accession to the throne in late 2015. The operation took place under significant leadership changes in the kingdom. The new king recast the line of succession by appointing his son MbS as the Minister of Defense and Deputy Crown Prince in 2015. MbS has been considered the de facto ruler of the Kingdom since then. In April 2015, Adel Al-Jubeir, former Saudi Ambassador to the US, was also appointed as foreign minister by King Salman, a rare occasion for someone from outside the House of Saud. These transformations in the generational leadership and intra-elite composition have had repercussions on Saudi foreign policy and Yemen became a symbol or showcase of this change in 2015. The state formation and domestic governance structures in Saudi Arabia reveal that the role of individuals among Al-Saud princes has been a driving factor in foreign policy and changes in leadership in 2015 "have brought with them new approaches to policy making and also a more assertive foreign policy" (Ehteshami, 2015). More centralized foreign policy decision making under King Salman and MbS has been a repercussion of these changes (Karim, 2017).

The differences between Emirati aspirations from its neighbors', as well as its inclination to intervene in Yemen, also bring the issue of agency and leadership dimension to the heart of any assessment of Emirati motivations in Yemen. A considerable body of literature on UAE foreign policy emphasizes the role of the UAE ruler MbZ as the driving force behind the assertive Emirati foreign policy since 2014 (Ulrichsen, 2017; Mason, 2018; Darwich, 2020). MbZ did not immediately inherit Abu Dhabi's rulership after his father's death in 2004. However, MbZ's political acumen led him to become the de facto ruler of Abu Dhabi and the UAE after his elder brother Sheikh Khalifa, the actual ruler had a stroke in January 2014. A deeper focus on MbZ's worldview appears as a key to bridge different structural, domestic, material and ideational factors and concrete foreign policy motivations and preferences in Yemen (Shahrour, 2020). His vision for the UAE as a nexus and an influential state that developed niche economic and military capabilities, and the leadership's antipathy toward Muslim Brotherhood, reflect the initial Emirati motivations and explain its strategies during the course of military intervention in Yemen.

Both ideational and material factors play crucial roles in shaping the motivations for Saudi Arabia and the UAE leaders to intervene. However, a closer examination reveals a nuance in how these factors are articulated in the motivations of the two countries. In the case of Saudi Arabia, material elements are seen as threats, while ideational elements are perceived as opportunities to intervene in Yemen. Conversely, the UAE exhibits an opposite scenario: material factors present opportunities, while ideational elements heighten threat perceptions, influencing the decision to intervene.

Material threats pose significant challenges for Saudi Arabia in Yemen, encompassing both security and economic considerations. The perceived threat of drone and missile attacks from the Houthis plays a pivotal role in Saudi Arabia's decision to undertake operations in Yemen (Parker, 2021). In a 2016 interview, MbS addressed these material threats and outlined his motivations for intervening

in Yemen, marking a key moment in shaping the narrative surrounding Saudi Arabia's involvement in the region:

“I have surface-to-surface missiles right now on my borders, only 30-50 km away from my borders, the range of these missiles could reach 550km, owned by militia, and militia carrying out exercises on my borders, and militia in control of warplanes, for the first time in history, right on my borders, and these war planes that are controlled by the militia carry out activities against their own people in Aden. Is there any country in the world who would accept the fact that a militia with this kind of armament should be on their borders?”

*(The Economist, 2016)*

The historical and geographical factors previously discussed in this chapter further amplify this material threat perception in the eyes of Saudi policymakers. Border security, territorial incursions, and the growing Houthi hegemony in Yemen pose perceived material threats to Saudi Arabia, more significantly than they do for the UAE.

Economically, Riyadh faced a substantial threat due to the instability and potential disruptive actions by the Houthis in the vicinity of Bab al-Mandab—a crucial waterway linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (Walsh, 2023). The control and stability of this vital route are of paramount concern to Saudi Arabia. Bab al-Mandab holds significance for Riyadh on two fronts: firstly, as a critical waterway facilitating the flow of Gulf oil and global southbound tanker traffic (Bender, 2015); and secondly, as a strategically vital area for the realization of multi-billion-dollar mega projects like NEOM and Red Sea Global, integral components of Saudi Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2023). Embedded as the flagship initiative of MbS, the successful implementation of Saudi Vision 2030 is intricately tied to ensuring security and stability in the Red Sea region. The activities of the Houthis have posed a tangible and material economic threat to MbS, particularly since 2015, serving as a motivating factor to swiftly address and mitigate these challenges.

Ideationally, Saudi leadership saw double reputational opportunities in intervening in Yemen. Domestically, MbS considered intervention in Yemen as a symbol of his assertive foreign policy, a crucial element in solidifying his position as defense minister and his authority amid significant internal challenges. It should be noted that “the intervention was initially popular within Saudi Arabia and as such presented an opportunity to project an image of strong and decisive leadership and Mohammed bin Salman as a man of action” (Clausen, 2019: 77).

Externally, the intervention reflects MbS' vision for Saudi Arabia as an influential actor in the international system, a regional leader with will and capabilities (Salisbury, 2018). From 2015, official documents and media reporting reveal that Saudi Arabia increasingly projected itself as a capable power and was vocal in its bid for leadership in the region and dissatisfied with kingdom's regional status in the last decades. Yemen presented an ideational opportunity for the Saudi leadership to realize higher status ambitions for the kingdom (Darwich, 2020).

The UAE's intervention in Yemen is driven more by ideational threats than opportunities. MbZ's ideational threat perception, particularly toward political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, significantly influences Emirati operations in Yemen (Parker, 2021). The UAE's reluctance to engage extensively with the Iranian-backed Houthis in the north and its support for anti-Brotherhood groups in Yemen align with its overarching motivation to curb the influence of political Islam, particularly Islah, reflecting MbZ's antipathy toward the Muslim Brotherhood over the last two decades (Wikileaks, 2004). Notably, the UAE embassy in Sanaa actively encouraged other Yemeni activist groups to counter Islah's influence during the transitional period after 2011 (Salisbury, 2018). Documented views of Emirati officials on political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood as security threats (Salisbury, 2018) underscore the ideological motivations guiding the UAE's intervention in Yemen.

Material elements present military and economic opportunities for Emirati involvement in Yemen. Capital accumulation from hydrocarbon exports between 2011–2014 facilitated a substantial military build-up, empowering a more autonomous Emirati foreign policy (Young, 2015; Juneau, 2020). In 2014, the UAE ranked as the region's second-largest military spender at \$24.4 billion (Tian et al., 2018). Viewing the Horn of Africa as crucial for influence, the UAE strategically extended its military outreach, focusing on key waterways like the Gulf of Suez, Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab Strait, and Gulf of Aden (Salisbury, 2018). Military interventions in Yemen, notably in port cities like Aden, Mocha, Mukalla, and Perim Island, serve as material motivations for Emirati military presence, with Socotra Island's strategic location reinforcing this commitment (Vertin, 2019).

Furthermore, the UAE's economic development model, centered around Dubai World Ports as a logistical hub, emphasizes the importance of maritime security from the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea via the Gulf of Aden (Henderson, 2017; Juneau, 2020). This geo-economic aspiration, positioning the UAE as a maritime-mercantile power, plays a crucial role in shaping intervention strategies, occasionally leading to tensions with Saudi Arabia (Baabood, 2023). Controlling vital areas in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, the UAE has positioned itself as a key player in the region, effectively becoming a "kingmaker" (De Waal and Gebrehiwot, 2024). The intervention in Yemen has not only served strategic economic interests for the UAE but has also aligned with MbZ's vision to extend influence beyond national borders, particularly during a period when geopolitical limitations did not fully resonate with this vision. The Emiratis emerged as a significant interlocutor not only in Yemen but also across the broader Horn of Africa, leveraging its intervention to shape regional dynamics.

### **Diverging Strategies of Intervention**

The Saudi-Emirati strategies of intervention in Yemen demonstrate a mix of remote and direct warfare, with a special, albeit different from each other, blend of agency and reliance on proxies on the ground. The choice of strategies deployed is also illustrative of diverging Saudi and Emirati motivations in Yemen.

Since the beginning of Operation Decisive Storm and later Operation Restoring Hope in 2015, Saudi Arabia deployed the bulk of the coalition's air strikes against the Houthis. According to the Yemen Data Project, the coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched more than 25,000 air raids between 2015 and 2022, which were the heaviest during first months of the war (Yemen Data Project, 2023). Saudi led coalition forces also took control of Yemeni airspace and inbound air traffic and implemented a maritime blockade in the ports of Aden, Mocha and Hudaydah (Pollack and Knights, 2016).

The geographical distribution of the air bombardments can be a useful indicator for understanding Saudi motivations in Yemen. As the Yemen Data Project (2023) suggests, most of the coalition air raids between 2015 and 2022, 5576 in total, took place in the northern Saada province, the Houthis' stronghold, as part of attacking Houthi targets and supporting Saudi troops on the Saudi-Yemeni border. It reflects Saudi Arabia's historically security-centric perceptions toward northern Yemen and its leadership's willingness to use air force superiority. A considerable number of air raids also concentrated around the Red Sea coast provinces of Hajjah, Al Hudaydah, and Ta'iz, indicating Saudi economic interests in securing the Red Sea and controlling important Yemeni ports. Control of Yemeni ports is also linked to Saudi Arabia's motivation to remain as an influential actor in Yemen in the long run through controlling the transit and access points for aid and trade, thus enabling Riyadh to expand its patronage network and to limit the influence of external actors, most notably the UAE and Oman (Fenton-Harvey, 2019).

Saudi Arabia also engaged in limited proxy war and provided military and livestock supplies to the Hajour tribes in Hajjah province against the Houthis in 2019 (UN, 2020). Yet, the overall proxy strategy of Saudi Arabia has been to emphasize supporting the Government of Yemen with weapons, military support and salaries, signaling Saudi motivations for a restored political authority under Saudi control in Yemen (Stoddard and Toltica, 2021). Saudi Arabia's support for Saleh's former vice president, Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, who has strong tribal and Muslim Brotherhood ties, proves the Kingdom's pragmatism in Yemen to this end. Saudi Arabia even downplayed AQAP's territorial advancements in the southern Arabian port city of Mukalla against the Houthis and the Al Qaeda branch in Yemen occupies a lower place in the order of priorities for the Saudis (Stoddard and Toltica, 2021).

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia showed less appetite for direct deployment of ground troops, and Saudi troops have been concentrated in the border region with Yemen where the border clashes with the Houthis took place. It mostly relied on proxy groups, central government forces and Sudanese troops under Saudi command and control deployed in the northern and western parts of Yemen (Stoddard and Toltica, 2021). By refraining from a direct invasion of Yemen, Saudi decision makers hope to avoid being labelled as occupiers and to limit potential counterproductive effects for the political future of Yemen, in which Saudi Arabia certainly aims to carve a space for itself. The tactics and strategies of Saudi Arabia in Yemen resonate with its long-term material threat motivations for intervention in Yemen. Saudi Arabia locates itself as the main external actor in political processes toward a unified

Yemen, in which the kingdom can control and navigate the threats emanating from its southern neighbor and advance its political-economic vision in the region.

The UAE strategies and tactics in Yemen differ from Saudi Arabia's in terms of more direct deployment of special ground forces and developing an effective network of proxies to have a sustained influence that would enable the UAE to achieve its aims in Yemen. Emirati motivations also dictate a geographically distinct focus toward southern Yemen, reflecting its material military and economic motivations.

Compared to Saudi Arabia, the UAE's contribution to airstrikes in Yemen remains limited. The UAE's low-risk air campaigns are mostly concentrated against AQAP in coordination with the US and against the Houthis in the Red Sea coast (Knights, 2018). In August 2019, the UAE also engaged in direct airstrikes against the Saudi supported Government of Yemen in Aden (UN, 2020). The first and only Emirati airstrikes against the Saudi supported government in Yemen show the extent of Emirati assertiveness when securing its strategic interests and motivations.

The UAE temporarily deployed limited ground forces, around 3500 troops, in Yemen, which played a key role in recapturing Aden from the Houthis in 2015, capturing the port of Mocha in 2017, and during the battle of Hudaydah in 2018 (Stoddard and Toltica, 2021). In 2020, the UAE announced completing its military withdrawal from Yemen, but its influence remained solid due to its cultivated and continuing relations with its proxies (Jalal, 2020).

In Yemen, the UAE takes the lead in arming, funding and training local groups in ground operations and, by 2018, the UAE army had already run two camps in Hadhramaut region, where its troops have trained some 25,000 local fighters (*The Economist*, 2018). The strong ties with Southern tribal members, who fled to the Emirates during 1960s and served in UAE police and security forces, enabled the UAE to recruit, train and equip local fighting groups such as the Hadramawt Tribal Confederation and Mukalla-based 'inside resistance' which are composed of "a patchwork of nearly 4,000 tribal rebels" (Knights, 2016). In coalition-controlled areas near Aden, the UAE trained local forces in field and battle skills and internal security (The Emirates News Agency, 2015), including training Yemeni pilots in Al-Anad airbase who were also furnished with UAE purchased strike aircraft. The UAE also deployed around 450 Colombian mercenaries and 400 Eritrean soldiers in Yemen (The Economist Intelligent Unit, 2015). The UAE has also been accused of using American mercenaries in Yemen to launch assassinations against Islah members, including Anssaf Ali Mayo, the leader of Islah in southern Yemen in 2015 (Roston, 2018). Although denied by the UAE, a recent BBC investigation alleged that the UAE hired Spear Operations Group, a US security company, to train local Yemenis to conduct around 160 assassinations between 2015 and 2018, most of whom were Islah members (Al Maghafi, 2024).

As of 2020, it is reported that the UAE had trained and had control over 90,000 fighters in Yemen, by providing direct training, capacity building, logistics assistance, and salaries (Jalal, 2020). The Shebwani Elite Forces (SEF), Haydrami Elite Forces

(HEF), Abu Al Abbas Forces, and West Coast Forces are reported by the UN to be under direct UAE command, signaling long-lasting Emirati influence in Yemen for the foreseen future (UN, 2020). Since 2015, the UAE also provided financial and logistical support for Salafi groups, such as Giants Brigades and Abu Al-Abbas faction, in the city of Taiz. They proved effective in fighting against the Houthis in Taiz, Hudaydah and later in Shabwah (*Middle East Eye*, 2022). Yet, selective Emirati support for anti-Islah Salafi groups since 2015 reflects the UAE's ideational threat motivation against the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated forces in Yemen.

### **Challenges Facing Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the Future of Yemen**

As of late 2023, the intensity of the Yemen conflict between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia had declined following the UN-sponsored truce (*The New Arab*, 2023). Despite positive developments such as normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran and direct dialogue between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia (Sanaa Center, 2023), progress toward a political resolution has been slow. This chapter contends that the divergent motivations and subsequent distinct intervention strategies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE since the 2015 intervention started have resulted in sub-optimal outcomes for coalition members and complicated Yemen's political and humanitarian situation. The Saudi-led coalition's inability to address Houthi security challenges stems from differences in motivations, agendas, and intervention tactics between Saudi and Emirati leadership. Supporting different groups that act on cross-purposes, thus, drew significant resources away from the fight against the Houthis, and exacerbated challenges for Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The challenges for Saudi Arabia appear more pressing as the kingdom failed to achieve its initial goals to curb the Houthi attacks, to ensure stability in the Red Sea and to maintain the political unity of Yemen. Despite the heavy bombardment of Houthi targets that lasted for years, the recent drone attack by the Houthis on Saudi Arabia on September 2023 that killed four Bahraini soldiers (*The New Arab*, 2023) reveals the continuing border security concerns for Riyadh. In 2021, the Houthis launched at least 33 missile and drone attacks against Saudi Arabia, mostly concentrated around the kingdom's southeastern cities and along the Red Sea coast (Jones et al., 2021). These continued attacks indicate that Saudi Arabia has failed to address its material threat motivations against the Houthis in its intervention in Yemen. In fact, the group has shown increasing irregular warfare capacity and will to launch attacks against the kingdom. Further, effective Houthi attacks against merchant vessels travelling to Israel after the Gaza war since 7 October 2023 (Edwards, 2023), show that maritime security along the Red Sea and around the Bab al-Mandab strait is still a matter of significant material challenge for Saudi Arabia and the goals of MbS' Saudi Vision 2030. Indirectly, but importantly, the enhanced irregular warfare capabilities of the Houthis damage the reputation of the Saudi leadership, externally and domestically. Any successful Houthi strike reveals the kingdom's vulnerability despite its growing capabilities, assertiveness and ambitious vision. Rather than being an ideational opportunity to boost his image, the intervention in Yemen now poses a significant challenge for

MBS' reputation. Furthermore, maintaining the coalition dynamics and ensuring the unity of Yemen seem to pose pressing challenges for Saudi Arabia amid the renewed independence calls by the STC (Biller, 2023).

The UAE leadership has also faced challenges in maintaining alliances and their security. Throughout the crisis, the UAE has maintained a delicate balance. On the one hand, it, rhetorically, maintained a formal commitment to its Saudi partner. However, by backing southerners, like the STC, Salafis, former Hadi cabinet officials, and tribal militias, the UAE was effectively undermining the power of Saudi-supported President Hadi and Saudi Arabia's allies. The Emirati motivations and intervention strategies, particularly the 2019 withdrawal, in Yemen created "extreme irritation" among the Saudi leadership (Reuters, 2019); marking an end to compatible relations between the two countries' leaders. Contentious and competitive relations with Saudi Arabia seem one of the challenges that the UAE leadership have to navigate in Yemen and in the region.

Despite Abu Dhabi's comparatively lesser commitment against the Houthis and Iran in Yemen, the Houthis perceived the UAE and its proxies as threats, executed drone attacks, and launched ballistic missiles targeting Abu Dhabi in 2022, marking the first successful strike against the UAE (*The Economist*, 2022). These attacks occurred in response to the UAE-backed Giant Brigades' successful assault aimed at expelling the Houthis from the energy-rich southern province of Shabwa in the same year. The material costs of the attacks were relatively mild, resulting in three casualties and six injuries near an oil refinery in Musaffah and Abu Dhabi airport (Ghantous and Cornwell, 2022). However, their impact goes beyond mere casualties, posing a significant reputational challenge to the UAE as a financial and touristic hub synonymous with peace and stability. Despite the official withdrawal in 2019, the Emirati strategies of cultivating proxy relations with specific Yemeni factions during its intervention have enabled the UAE to maintain its influence as a key interlocutor in Yemen. Nevertheless, these same relations and strategies render the Emirates susceptible to challenges arising from rival factions, both materially and ideationally.

Considering the future of Yemen, the diverging Saudi and Emirati motivations and strategies of intervention in Yemen have resulted in coalition fragility, fostered separatism in the south, and contributed to a fragile state in Yemen. The abrupt withdrawal created a power vacuum and increased divisions, adding a layer of complexity to an already intricate situation. This fragility not only strained relations between the UAE and Saudi Arabia but also heightened tensions between various factions within Yemen, resulting in fostering self-governance claims, empowering non-state actors and militias, aggravating the prospects for fragile and failed state and enduring humanitarian suffering in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia's approach to forming coalitions within Yemen involves pragmatically engaging significant groups, most particularly Al-Islah and its affiliates, to restore legitimate government in Yemen as a unitary state with a limited Houthi power. On the other hand, the UAE leadership's aversion to the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates and their lesser prioritization of the Houthi threat to their security and interests let the Emirates promote the STC, which has sought self-rule in southern

Yemen. Over the last decade, different anti-Houthi coalition forces backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE grew too powerful to compromise among themselves for a viable political future in Yemen. Paradoxically, the coalition ended up being too weak to forge a balancing force against the growing influence of the Houthis in negotiations (Mundy and Mulroy, 2023).

The anti-Houthi coalition, known as the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), has grappled with internal divisions and a lack of a cohesive vision for a power-sharing arrangement. In 2022, the PLC was co-constituted by the Saudis and the Emiratis as an eight-member executive body, including representatives from the former Yemeni government, Al-Islah, STC, Giants Brigades, and tribal leaders. Despite the PLC's representation of current Yemeni realities on the ground, being more inclusive than the former Hadi government, internal conflicts and competition among the anti-Houthi factions persist. The absence of a clear stance on crucial issues, such as southern independence and the status of oil-producing provinces, hampers the council's capacity to participate effectively in meaningful intra-Yemen dialogues.

The structure of the council, itself, is a manifestation of how empowered non-state actors and factions are a norm in Yemeni politics, weakening any unified state and society project. This challenge arises from the conflicting military tactics employed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which aim to bolster factions aligned with their respective interests in Yemen (Ali-Khan, 2023).

Second, the UAE's financial aid and investments to southern Yemen fostered the claims for independence, acting at cross-purposes with objectives and interests that Saudi Arabia have been trying to maintain since the beginning of the intervention, namely the unity of Yemen. Geographically, the Emirati interests and interventions in Yemen encompassed the Red Sea coasts from Aden to the Socotra, where the UAE cultivated multiple independent militia forces accounting for around 90,000 fighters, creating states within states (Ahram and Alaaldin, 2022). Emirati economic development and aid strategies also exacerbated the challenge posed by forces calling for an autonomous southern Yemen since the early stages of the intervention. As early as 2016, a total of \$908 million in Emirati grants were distributed in ten coalition-controlled governorates, eight in south Yemen (Parker, 2021). The UAE also granted \$110 million to Socotra Island mostly for infrastructure projects since 2015 (*The National*, 2021), in line with the claim publicized by the UAE that around 75% of the Emirati aid to Yemen was invested in infrastructure projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2016). However, Emirati aid to Yemen reflects its interests, deepens the tensions among the anti-Houthi coalition, and derails the prospect for a unified Yemen. Indeed, senior members of the former Hadi government accused the UAE of undermining the government's authority through its aid, investments and funding the militias in the southern areas (Al-Ahmadi, 2020).

The diverging interests and strategies between Saudi Arabia and the UAE contributed further to the fragility of the state in Yemen. Perhaps the most significant implication is the unintentional strengthening of the Houthis. Addressing

this unintended consequence is imperative for any comprehensive approach to resolving the Yemeni conflict. Despite the fact that direct talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis in late 2023 following Saudi-Iranian normalization have raised hopes for the end of conflict in the north, a political settlement in Yemen seems a far possibility. However, achieving real progress remained difficult, and the inaugural official Houthi visit to Saudi Arabia since the conflict commenced on 14 September 2023, produced little more than hopeful platitudes (Nagi, 2023). This is partly due to the empowerment of the Houthis in Yemen and their uncompromising position in negotiations with the Saudis and other Yemeni factions after eight years of external intervention and civil war. The Houthis seek international recognition as a legitimate party in Yemen, 75% percent of the oil revenues to be deposited in the central bank in Sanaa, compensation for the families of people killed in the Saudi-led coalition's military operations, and money for post-war reconstruction (Nagi, 2023). Saudi Arabia, seeking an urgent and face-saving exit from Yemen, is now hard pressed to make a deal with the empowered Houthis in a more politically fragile structure in Yemen.

## **Conclusion**

The diverging motivations and policies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE have far-reaching implications for Yemen. From localized grievances to political instability and the unintentional strengthening of the Houthis, these implications underscore the urgency of coordinated international efforts to address the complex dynamics and forge a path toward a more stable and unified Yemen. Diverging objectives and strategies between these two Gulf states have resulted in a slew of complicated implications that must be carefully considered for Yemen's future trajectory and the stability of the larger Middle East.

This chapter delved into the divergent motivations of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen, as manifested through nuanced perceptions of threats and opportunities at the leadership level since 2015. The primary impetus behind the kingdom's intervention in Yemen stemmed from a perception of tangible threats posed by the Houthi rebels and the ideational/reputational opportunities to enhance the domestic and international image of Saudi leader MbS. Conversely, the UAE's involvement in the Yemeni conflict was propelled by material opportunities aligned with the leadership's vision of establishing itself as a maritime-mercantile power in the region, coupled with ideational threats emanating from Islamist political groups. These motivational disparities dictated distinct tactical and geographical strategies of involvement, ultimately resulting in the empowerment of diverse military and political factions with competing and conflicting agendas in Yemen. Three main results resulted from this situation: coalition ineffectiveness, fostering secessionist aspirations, and a politically more fragile state in Yemen. It is obvious that the situation is dynamic and evolving and the concrete repercussions of differing Saudi and Emirati motivations in Yemen and beyond have yet to be fully revealed.

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## 4 Evolving Dynamics

### US Foreign Policy and the War in Yemen

*Khalil Fadh Osman*

#### **Introduction**

When an Al Qaeda suicide bomber driving a small boat on 12 October 2000, detonated his payload alongside the USS Cole, a US Navy frigate, while she docked at the Port of Aden for refueling, killing 17 crew members and injuring 39 others, he sent a wake-up call for Washington decisionmakers about the importance of a new US foreign policy approach toward Yemen. Until then, Yemen, in large part due to being a resource-poor country and the presence of the British in southern Yemen which secured the Bab al-Mandab Strait, had been relegated to the margins of the broader US global Cold War grand strategy and foreign policy toward the Middle East. Washington's policy toward Yemen was conceived as ancillary to its policy toward Saudi Arabia and its abundant oil resources. Yet, if the USS Cole attack brought home to US policymakers that Yemen had become a stronghold for Al Qaeda, the 9/11 attacks became a harbinger for turning the country into a theatre in Washington's "war on terrorism." As US involvement in countering Salafist jihadism in Yemen deepened in the 2000s, Washington had to contend with the implications of the escalating revolt led by the fervently anti-US, anti-Israel Ansar Allah Movement, a Zaydi Shi'ite revivalist group commonly known as the Houthis seeking to redress communal Zaydi grievances and roll back the spread of Salafism in its stronghold in northern Yemen. The perceptions of threat emanating from Yemen heightened among US policymakers as the country plunged into a brutal civil war in 2014 pitting the Houthis and their allies against their Yemeni political adversaries. The civil war drew a Saudi-led military intervention in 2015 that received various forms of significant US support, including intelligence sharing, mid-air refueling, and weapons sales. Weathering the coalition's attacks, the Houthis remained firmly in control of the capital, Sanaa, and within a year the war descended into a stalemate. Houthi attacks on Israel and Israeli-linked merchant ships in the Red Sea following the latter's war on Gaza precipitated by Hamas's unprecedented assault on Israel on 7 October 2023, raised alarms over implications for international maritime trade. In response, the US cobbled together a multinational naval coalition to carry out Operation Prosperity Guardian aimed at deterring the Houthis and protecting ships navigating through the southern Red Sea.

This chapter examines the evolution of the US foreign policy toward Yemen, particularly since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This investigation involves dissecting the impact of the framing of Yemen as a security threat on shaping and directing the US foreign policy decisions and strategies on Yemen. Outlining how Yemen evolved into a central focus of the US “war on terrorism,” the chapter delves into the US efforts to counter the growing influence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen. It further discusses the US’s role in Yemen’s transition following the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011 which set the stage for the Saudi-led military campaign against the Houthis. The US, while not directly engaged in the conflict, has actively provided various forms of active support to the Saudi-led coalition. The chapter then takes stock of the US’s shift to a more direct and hostile stance toward the Houthis with the establishment of a US-led naval coalition under the declared policy objective of safeguarding the navigability of the important maritime lane through the Red Sea and Bab Strait for all international ships, including Israeli-linked vessels. Informed by the mounting international relations literature on securitization, this chapter demonstrates how the US’s Yemen policy has, over the years, been consistently securitized. Threat perceptions have provided a common thread running through the US’s highly reactive policymaking toward Yemen. However, privileging security over other aspects, especially development, comes at a cost. As will be seen in the following discussion, a foreign policy obsessed with security considerations loses sight of the deeper root causes of conflict and instability in Yemen.

### **Securitization Theory and Foreign Policy**

Security discourse has always been prominent in US foreign policy. In the post-Cold War period, the protection of human rights was wedded to the traditional rhetoric of defense of democracy and national security. In a pivot that was to accelerate since 2001, counterterrorism has also occupied pride of place in US foreign policy discourse. The correlation between how US decision-makers articulate foreign policy matters through the lens of security and threats, and the subsequent elevation of these issues within Washington’s foreign and security policy, remains largely uncharted territory.

Securitization theory has made significant contributions to security studies as well as the broader field of international relations theory. Developed within a strand of research called the Copenhagen School, the theory of securitization draws attention to the social construction of security. As a conceptual tool, it provides a framework for understanding the process through which states frame issues as existential threats. Conceptually, securitization theory combines elements of constructivism and realism. Inasmuch as it argues that security threats are of the making of decision-makers, it intersects with constructivism’s notion of the interdependency of agency and structure. While the structure of the international system and developments in the international arena shape actors’ policies, actors also shape the nature of international politics by virtue of their actions and interactions (Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1992). However, in its focus on states, their everlasting pursuit

of security, and the preoccupation of leaders with security concerns, the theory shares with realism its state-centrism, pessimistic view of international politics, and underlying belief in the inevitability of inter-state struggles for power in the anarchic international system (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). In the words of a leading exponent of securitization theory, “*neither individual nor international security exists*. ... The concept of security refers to the state” (Wæver, 1995: 48–49, emphasis in original). For securitization scholars, security is not a mere ontological condition, but also, and more importantly, a speech act. Posing the question “What then *is* security?” Wæver (1995: 55) contends that, “With the help of language theory, we can “regard” security as a *speech act*. In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance *itself* is the act.”

Introduced by Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin (1962), and subsequently articulated and refined by American philosopher John R. Searle (1969), speech act theory posits that language serves not only an assertive function or as means to communicate information, but also as a tool for performing actions. The theory distinguishes between two kinds of utterances: descriptive statements and performative statements, i.e., utterances that perform actions. Accordingly, securitization depends on how an issue is defined. Issues are likely to be securitized, that is to move from the realm of normal politics to the realm of emergency, when elites label them as security concerns or threats. Securitizing an issue justifies the implementation of extraordinary measures to deal with them. As Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde (1998: 26, emphasis in original) have maintained, “by labeling it as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means.”

Securitization is a three-stage deliberative process. First is the speech act itself, which employs a “grammar of security” in a bid to formulate a narrative that “includes existential threat, point of no return and a way out” (Buzan et al., 1998: 33). Yet, casting an issue in the idiom of security is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the securitizing act to take place. While discourse or articulation can set the agenda, for a security act to take place a critical mass in the audience targeted by the articulation needs to agree with the framing of the issue as a threat as well as with the extraordinary measures that need to be taken to address it (Balzacq, 2005; McDonald, 2008). The audience is conceived as an active agent with potentially meaningful impact on the construction of the security narrative (Côté, 2016). Securing the acquiescence, consent, and/or support of relevant audiences paves the way for the third stage in this process, i.e., translating the securitization discourse into a securitizing act where extraordinary or emergency measures are adopted and applied. Here is where the process of securitization reaches a point of no return and moves to find a way out of the securitized threat (Buzan et al., 1998).

Accordingly, securitization is not a mere isolated speech act but rather “an inter-subjective and negotiated process of legitimation.” It could involve competition for hegemony between different discourses or “multiple texts that *represent* something as an existential threat” (Wilhelmsen, 2017, emphasis in original). At the same time, the theory recognizes the importance of power relations in the process of securitization (Balzacq, 2011). The concern here is with how political elites, namely state

officials, frame an issue as a security or existential threat. State officials are the primary enunciators or articulators of threats. They are better positioned to assert more effective claims regarding threats and to formulate and apply extraordinary measures to deal with threats. In the words of Buzan and his associates (1998: 32), the securitizing actors or agents need “to hold a position from which an act can be made.”

Context matters in the process of securitization. The reconstruction of threat perceptions takes place within a social, political, economic, historical and cultural context which furnishes “the conditions, in which securitization itself becomes possible” (McDonald, 2008: 572). The articulation of issues as security threats is, therefore, embedded in “broader discursive contexts” (Stritzel, 2007: 360). Accordingly, securitization frequently occurs as an integral part of a broader and far-reaching reframing of security threats and discourse. It is commonly intertwined with the development or emergence of a larger narrative shaping perceptions of security concerns (Rothe, 2015). This dynamic interaction highlights the interplay between securitization processes and the overarching framework of security discussions among foreign and security policymakers that feeds the formulation and articulation of a state’s grand strategy (Posen, 1986; Goddard and Kerbs, 2015). Some major domestic or international events can act as impetuses for a much larger rearticulation of a wider security discourse and order (Jackson, 2005; Croft, 2006). In this context, and as will be seen in the discussion below, the transformations engendered by events such as the Cold War and the “war on terrorism” became milestones in a wider process of securitization that set off radical transformations of and shaped US foreign policy toward certain issues or countries, including Yemen.

### **Unravelling Early US-Yemen Relations**

For far too long, Yemen was a strategic backwater in US foreign policy. It was not until March 4, 1946, that the US recognized the Mutawwakilite Kingdom of Yemen. This was conveyed in a letter by President Harry S. Truman to Imam Yahya bin Muhammad Hamid al-Din, the King of Yemen. Before that, only a handful of Americans, comprising merchants, adventurers, missionaries, and scholars of antiquity, had any interaction with Yemen (Abadi, 2021: 308–309). In mid-April 1946, the US Minister to Saudi Arabia, William A. Eddy, headed a special diplomatic mission to Sanaa, where he spent nearly three weeks engaging in talks with Yemeni officials, who looked askance at foreigners entering their country. The talks resulted in the signing of an agreement focused on diplomatic relations, commerce and navigation (Lippmann, 2008). In Article I of the agreement, signed on 4 May by Eddy and Yemen’s Deputy Foreign Minister Al Qadi Abdul Karim Mutahhar, the two sides agreed to “exchange diplomatic representatives and consular officers.” While Article IV accorded mutual “conditional and unrestricted most-favored-nation treatment” to each other’s goods and products, Article V stipulated that there shall be no arbitrary discrimination by either Party against the subjects, nationals, commerce or navigation of the other Party” (“Text of the Agreement,” 1947).

While the confirmation of the recognition was delayed until January 1950 owing to differences over a US condition that Yemen commit to respect all international agreements, the two countries forged ahead with the establishment of diplomatic relations. In September 1946, “J. Rives Childs presented his credentials as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Yemen.” However, Childs had double accreditation in Saudi Arabia and was resident in Jeddah. A full US Embassy was not established in Yemen until 1963, when a US Legation set up in Taiz, then the capital of the Kingdom of Yemen, in 1959 was upgraded to Embassy Status. In 1966, it was relocated to Sanaa, where the republican regime which toppled the monarchy in 1962 moved the capital. However, between 1962 and 1967, when Yemen severed diplomatic ties with the US over Washington’s support of Israel during the Six-Day War, the Embassy was headed by a *chargé d’affaires ad interim* – a sign of the relative insignificance of Yemen to US foreign policy. Diplomatic relations were restored, and the US Embassy reopened in Sanaa in July 1972 (US Embassy in Yemen, n.d.).

Yemen slowly gained the attention of US policymakers in the context of the dynamics and strategic alliances of the Cold War era. A sense of threat loomed large from the very beginning. Concerned about the spread of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser’s pan-Arab ideology and influence in southern Arabia as it prepared to withdraw from the region, the British government warned Washington of the “serious consequences” a success for Nasser in the region would, in the words of a Foreign Office memorandum, have “for Western prestige throughout the Middle East” (Abadi, 2021: 311–312). US policymakers, who at the time saw Nasser as a pro-Soviet leader, grew concerned about possibility that the Soviets, who had signed a military aid agreement with Yemen in 1956, be able to disrupt the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf by blocking the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The growing Soviet penetration in the region prompted American diplomat Loy W. Hendersen to warn that the situation in Yemen “had become alarming” (Abadi, 2021: 312). Still, the US kept itself at a distance from direct involvement in Yemen.

However, that stance of non-involvement would change following the coup which toppled the monarchy in Yemen in September 1962. The Egyptian intervention in the civil war precipitated by the coup raised alarm bells in Washington about its possible dire implications for Saudi Arabia, which supported the royalists. It also effectively ended President John F. Kennedy’s attempt to improve relations with Cairo. While Washington recognized the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), it sought to limit Egyptian and Soviet influence, especially as thousands of Soviet technical advisers were deployed in the country, and to avert the spread of internal revolts to Saudi Arabia and Jordan, both pro-western countries. This heightened concern led to discussions in Washington on the viability of armed intervention. Yet, the possibility of intervention was dismissed amid warnings that it could, as put by the US Consul General in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, make the “US Government accomplice in action against (YAR) which it had recognized” (Abadi, 2021: 314).

Having ruled out a US armed intervention and fearing that the Egyptian intervention would deepen Nasser’s dependence on the Soviet Union, the Kennedy Administration called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Yemen. Hopes

in Washington that all sides would realize that Yemen was a no-win situation and be receptive to its call for troop pullout were dashed and the stalemate continued. The Saudis were not willing to compromise, and Nasser had legitimate concerns that the US favored his Saudi adversary (Ahmad, 1982: 74). In fact, a State Department telegram dated 23 December 1963, stated explicitly that the “US undertook Yemen policy primarily as means to protect Saudi Arabian integrity” (Abadi, 2021: 315–316). Egypt would be forced to withdraw its forces from Yemen in August 1967 in the wake of the Six-Day War of June 1967 – a war which also prompted Yemen to sever diplomatic relations with Washington.

The British withdrawal from Aden in 1967 increased Yemen’s value for the US. The withdrawal paved the way for the division of Yemen into North Yemen, officially known as the Yemen Arab Republic, with its capital in Sanaa, and South Yemen, initially named the People’s Republic of Yemen until 1969 when it was changed to the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), with its capital in Aden. Concerns about US security interests in the region emerged in Washington as the PDRY drifted into the Soviet orbit and was branded a state sponsor of terrorism in 1979. These concerns were exacerbated by mutual tensions between Saudi Arabia, the PDRY, and the YAR. But these tensions produced opportunities and challenges for US policymakers. As the PDRY severed its relations with the US in 1969 over suspicions that Washington worked with Riyadh to destabilize its government, tensions between the YAR and both Riyadh and Aden prompted the former to cultivate better relations with the US, including the restoration of diplomatic ties in 1972 which paved the way for the flow of American aid and arms supplies to the YAR (Abadi, 2021: 320–323). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the discovery of oil in the YAR and Sanaa’s increased reliance on Soviet arms supplies to counter Saudi influence and mounting armed opposition by PDRY-supported groups would lead to calls in Washington to funnel substantial military aid to the YAR in a bid to roll back Soviet influence in southern Arabia (Haliday, 1984; Abadi, 2021: 325).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Socialist Bloc had profound implications for Yemen. As the PDRY lost the support of its tumbling socialist patron, it sought a way out of its tribulations in unity with the larger north in May 1990. However important these shifts may have been, the end of the Cold War did not put to rest Washington’s security concerns in Yemen. During the Gulf crisis of 1990–1991, Yemen, which was a rotating member of the Security Council, resisted US pressure from President George H.W. Bush’s administration, including threats to cancel a \$70-million US aid package, to support efforts to form a coalition to oust Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait. For the US and its Saudi allies, Yemen’s support of an “Arab solution” and voting against UN resolutions authorizing the use of force against Iraq amounted to siding with Saddam Hussein. In retaliation for President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s seemingly pro-Iraqi position, the US and its Western and regional allies took measures that weakened Yemen’s government, including significantly slashing development assistance. The Saudis adopted an approach that threatened Yemen’s fragile unity and stability. They created massive economic disruptions by expelling nearly

800,000 Yemeni expatriate workers – many of whom returned to Yemen having imbibed Wahhabi Salafist beliefs – and supported a failed shot-lived secessionist armed insurrection in southern Yemen in 1994 (Hudson, 1995; Koshy, 1997). The ensuing instability and dislocations, such as the loss of significant flows of remittances, would compound the negative effects of Saleh’s policies, including reliance on Islamist fighters and returning Yemeni *mujahidin* from Afghanistan to fight southern socialist rebels, ultimately feeding the rise of radical non-state armed actors, including Al Qaeda, that would turn Yemen into a battleground in the “war on terrorism” in the new millennium.

### **The “War on Terrorism” and Yemen**

US-Yemeni relations would move out of the post-Gulf War nadir by the late 1990s as evidenced by increased US engagement with Yemen in military assistance and cooperation, which included an agreement for refueling US Navy ships in Aden. The 1999 naval refueling agreement would have significant implications for US engagement in Yemen. The attack on the USS Cole in October 2000 brought to US and world attention the reality of growing presence of international terrorism and transnational jihadism in Yemen. US direct involvement in investigating the attack created friction between the US and Yemen. The FBI, which deployed scores of FBI agents and forensic experts to investigate the attack, complained of insufficient cooperation by Sanaa, even though Yemeni authorities arrested and put on trial the perpetrators of the attack (Prados, 2005: 18).

However, following September 11 attacks and the US declaration of a “war on terrorism,” relations between the US and Yemen crossed a Rubicon. While Saleh came out publicly in support of America’s “war on terrorism,” he was reluctant to take on the jihadists in Yemen whose support he had enlisted during the 1994 civil war. However, under pressure by Washington, including a threat by Vice President Dick Cheney that the US would move against Al Qaeda in Yemen “with or without” Sanaa’s approval, Saleh would move out of his initial lackluster cooperation with the US on counterterrorism. In return, the US resumed economic and military assistance to Yemen (Prados, 2005: 18; Rugh, 2010: 110). As Yemen’s government escalated its operations against Al Qaeda, the US deployed military advisors, FBI experts and Special Forces units to provide counterterrorism training and operational assistance to Yemeni security forces and to conduct covert operations against Al Qaeda, including Predator attacks on suspected Al Qaeda operatives (Prados, 2005: 18–19).

Counterterrorism cooperation was often rocky. There were numerous episodes when Saleh’s efforts to reconcile counterterrorism cooperation with domestic sensitivities, dealing with internal discontent, including a long-running on-again off-again war against the Zaydi Shi’ite insurgency led by Ansar Allah Movement in the far north of the country, and balancing complex tribal and factional interests put strains on Yemeni-US relations (Johnsen, 2013). For instance, when Saleh, in 2007, commuted the sentence of and released Jamal Badawi, an Al Qaeda operative convicted of playing a key role in the USS Cole bombing, the US halted a

planned development assistance package (Rugh, 2010: 111). Badawi would be killed in a US airstrike in Marib governorate in 2019. Another significant episode in the up-and-down security cooperation between Sanaa and Washington revolved around a US request to extradite Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, a prominent Islamist cleric who was designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in February 2004 on charges of funneling arms and funds to Al Qaeda. Yemen rejected the request, citing Article 44 of its constitution which prohibits the extradition of Yemeni citizens to foreign countries (Terrill, 2011). Such disagreements nurtured distrust in Washington in the ability of Saleh's government to effectively deal with radical and jihadist elements in its territory. This distrust perpetuated and intensified a perception, among US policymakers, of threat emanating from Yemen – a threat deemed necessitating sustained proactive military action on the part of the US.

US-Yemeni counterterrorism cooperation did not stem the Al Qaeda threat in Yemen. The jihadist group continued to conduct spectacular attacks, some of which against Western targets in the country, such as the suicide attack on French-flagged tanker *Limburg* in the port of Mukalla in October 2002 (Prados, 2005: 19). Another complex attack occurred when two suicide cars attempted to breach the security barriers outside the US embassy in Sanaa to open the way for gunmen dressed in military uniforms in September 2008. The death toll stood at 19 people, including six attackers ("Yemen arrests 30," 2008). More ominously, escalating counterterrorism operations did not prevent Al Qaeda from taking root in Yemen, turning the country into a base where attacks against the US and other Western nations originated. Concerns in this regard deepened in Washington following two attacks in the US that were linked to Al Qaeda in Yemen. US Army psychiatrist Nidal Malik Hassan, who carried out an attack at an army base in Texas in November 2009 that killed 13 people, had links to US-born, Yemen-based jihadist cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. Moreover, the 23-year-old Nigerian responsible for the botched attempt to blow up a Detroit-bound commercial airplane on 25 December 2009, admitted to investigators that he was trained and directed by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen. With more attention devoted to Yemen, US Senator Joseph Lieberman warned: "if we don't act pre-emptively, Yemen will be tomorrow's war" (Fabian, 2009).

Recognizing the seriousness of the growing threat presented by Al Qaeda in Yemen, President Barack Obama, who took office in January 2009, made counterterrorism a cornerstone of his Yemen policy. Obama's assumption of office coincided with the merger of Al Qaeda's branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia to form the Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which US policymakers would, for years to come, view as a lethal threat due to its ability to inspire and direct attacks in the West. Obama's light-footprint counterterrorism strategy for Yemen was two-pronged: 1) propping up and working with Saleh's security forces, which included a comprehensive assistance programme to build up Yemen's counterterrorism capabilities; and 2) intensifying the US air campaign, heavily centered on the use of drones, against Al Qaeda targets, initiated by President George W. Bush in 2002. Faced with challenges such as divided loyalties and inefficiency of Yemen's forces and limited Yemeni government cooperation

on counterterrorism activities, the US took the lead in fighting AQAP (Hartig, 2022). Estimates for the number of airstrikes and fatalities sometimes vary slightly. According to one estimate, 185 airstrikes were carried out in Yemen during Obama's two terms. Some were conducted to assist Yemeni counterterrorism operations but others, especially under Saleh's rule, without Yemeni government cooperation. Upon taking office, Trump relaxed restraints on counterterrorism operations and pursued Obama's drone-centric counterterrorism strategy in Yemen more actively. Attacks spiked significantly during Trump's first year in office, with the US Central Command (CENTCOM) reporting that it conducted more than 131 attacks in 2017. The number of strikes continuously dropped afterwards, with 41 attacks in 2018, 11 in 2019, and 4 in 2020. This declining pattern continued under President Joe Biden's administration, with 2 airstrikes recorded in 2021, 0 in 2022, and 2 in 2023 (Bergen et al., n.d.).

America's drone-centric counterterrorism strategy grew out of interest in minimizing US military losses as well as growing fascination with the targeting precision afforded by new technologies, including robotics, precision munitions and drones. But America's far-reaching airstrike campaign in Yemen raised troubling questions about its human rights and humanitarian implications. It also triggered a debate in both academic and policymaking circles on the effectiveness of leadership decapitation as a counterterrorism tactic (Jordan, 2009; Price, 2012). Attacks carried out with insufficient or no coordination with the Yemeni government raised concerns about the violation of state sovereignty and, by extension, had detrimental effects on regime legitimacy. More portentously were concerns about civilian collateral damage. The strikes hit and eliminated many AQAP facilities and high-value targets, including AQAP top and senior operatives such as American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, Nasir al-Wuhayshi, Qassim al-Raymi, and chief bomb-maker Ibrahim al-Asiri. Nevertheless, the associated collateral civilian toll has been sizable. One tally put the number of civilian deaths due to American strikes from 2009 to 2021 at between 125 and 151 out of a total number of fatalities estimated between 1,390 and 1,779, i.e. 8.5-9 percent (Yayboke and Reid, 2022: 3). Ultimately, while proponents have touted sustained airstrikes as having degraded terrorist groups in Yemen, these attacks have neither dismantled nor written the epitaph of jihadist groups in Yemen. If anything, due to their high unpopularity among Yemenis, their political costs to the Yemeni government have been significant (Terrill, 2013). Moreover, the anger bred by civilian casualties might have facilitated jihadist recruitment efforts. As one US military thinker and former senior Marine Corps officer aptly put it: "AQAP is not a snake that perishes when its head is cut off; rather, AQAP is more like a hydra whose decapitation produces two new heads in its place" (Cigar, 2018: 5).

The escalating chaos following the launch of the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm on March 26, 2015, provided Al Qaeda with an opportunity to expand its foothold in several parts of the country, especially in the south where Yemeni army units stationed there disintegrated. At the same time, the Islamic State began to make its presence felt in Yemen. As if that was not enough, relations between the Houthis and Iran expanded after the Saudi-led intervention. As Ansar Allah

tightened their grip on parts of northern and central Yemen, they eliminated jihadist strongholds in these areas (Cigar, 2018: 14–15). Increasingly cognizant of the inadequacy of airstrikes alone in dismantling and destroying jihadist organizations, the US expanded its cooperation with the Emirati forces and their allies in southern Yemen, where the jihadists had made significant gains. In the end, ground operations by the UAE's southern Yemeni allies succeeded in rolling back the jihadists, rooting them out from swathes of territory under their control, including foremost jihadist strongholds in Hadhramaut, Shabwa and Abyan provinces (Cigar, 2018: 80; Hartig, 2022: 315). These gains notwithstanding, the jihadist organizational structures in Yemen were not completely eradicated. Some disparate jihadist outfits were won over by either Saudi Arabia, the UAE or pro-Arab Coalition Yemeni forces, who use them against their Yemeni adversaries. The willingness of Arab Coalition members and Yemeni forces enjoying their support to deal with the jihadists seems to have been a pattern in the Yemeni conflict (Cigar, 2018: 15–16, 50–60). Other jihadists found refuge in remote, sparsely populated tribal areas or blended back into the population. Accordingly, the specter of a jihadist resurgence in Yemen remains.

### **The Arab Spring and its Aftermath**

While US drone strikes continued unabated, the Arab Spring brought new challenges to the US engagement in Yemen. In meeting these challenges, the US demonstrated remarkable continuity in its foreign policy approach toward Yemen based primarily on a perceived alignment and congruence of interests with Saudi Arabia. Months of demonstrations demanding regime change forced Saleh in 2012 to resign after receiving immunity from prosecution for corruption and mismanagement for himself, senior aides, and members of his family. The power transition facilitated by a Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, with US support, brought Saleh's vice-president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi to power. Hadi was more prone to cooperate with the US on counterterrorism than his predecessor. In return, Washington rewarded him with a wide-ranging security assistance programme (Hartig, 2022: 310). The primacy of security assistance in the US aid programme to Hadi directs attention to a tendency to militarize foreign aid in counterterrorism. The other side of the coin is Washington's reluctance to allocate sufficient resources and make long-term commitment for the reforms necessary to lift Yemen out of endemic difficulties, such as poverty, mismanagement, and bad governance. Despite successes in capturing territory from AQAP, US military efforts, complemented by Yemeni ground operations, fell short of rooting out the jihadists, who regrouped and undertook organizational and tactical adaptations, including refining their guerrilla tactics, to fight another day (Hartig, 2022: 311).

The attempt to set up a post-Saleh government, in which the US played a facilitating role, was fraught with difficulties, controversy and heated factional rivalry. Excluded from the transitional governing coalition, the vehemently anti-US and anti-Israel Ansar Allah and their allies toppled the government in Sanaa in September 2014 and marched on Aden, where they detained President Hadi

who would manage to escape and request Saudi intervention. The ensuing military assault by the Saudi-led coalition on Yemen in March 2015 received significant indirect support from Washington. The trajectory of the US assistance to the Saudi-led coalition's war effort in Yemen has been through twists and turns. However, despite mounting opposition and many legal and policy questions raised, especially regarding the coalition's breaches of international humanitarian law, some form of US support, short of direct military action, remained indispensable to the coalition's campaign all along. Significant opposition, including in the US Congress, failed to put a complete end to US support.

The Obama administration provided logistic and intelligence support to the Saudi-led coalition, including the provision of armaments, munitions, mid-air refueling, aircraft maintenance, and targeting data. In fact, as the war unfolded, it emerged that the coalition's military operations relied heavily on information gathered through US surveillance. The US assisted the Saudis in assessing targets and the attacks' potential risks of civilian casualties. In 2016, US advisers were deployed in Yemen to support coalition and Hadi troops in operational planning, intelligence gathering and analysis, and logistics (Cigar, 2018: 69; Hursh, 2020: 124–125).

Despite initial successes in dislodging the Houthis from some of their positions, the Saudi-led campaign ground to a stalemate and created a critical humanitarian crisis, including severe food shortages. The colossal humanitarian crisis stoked a policy debate in Washington, mainly in the Congress, on limiting the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia. While Congress repeatedly failed to pass a resolution to that effect, concerns about civilian casualties prompted Obama to scale back support to the Saudi-led coalition, including limiting intelligence sharing and suspending the sale of precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia. However, President Donald Trump would reverse course. He increased military assistance to the coalition, resumed support to targeting operations and reinstated the sale of sophisticated weapons to Saudi Arabia (Hursh, 2020: 125–126). Pressure mounted on the Trump administration after Congress passed a bill in April 2019 to end US support to the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. Trump vetoed the bill and the Senate failed to muster a two-thirds majority to override the veto (Demirjian and Ryan, 2019). In the face of growing accusations of US complicity in the human rights violations committed by the Saudi-led coalition, the Pentagon declared, in December 2018, that its personnel on the ground “have neither observed nor been complicit in any cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of detainees in Yemen” (Johnsen, 2019: 15). To deflect criticism, Trump increased US support to the UN humanitarian effort in Yemen. But the US involvement remained heavily weighted toward supporting the Saudi-led coalition's military campaign against the Houthis. In the words of former US Ambassador to Yemen Barbara K. Bodine (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019):

We provide billions of dollars of weaponry and armaments to, particularly, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. We are part of the naval blockade at Hodeidah Port and we, along with the British and the French and others, are very much if not actively involved ... We are part of the intelligence centers that determine

bombing and we have also provided unstinting political support to the coalition in what they're trying to do.

So on one hand, we are deeply complicit in what is going on militarily and the destruction in Yemen, which has led to the famine and the cholera. We also support the UN Special Envoy for Peace. We also provide funding for humanitarian [assistance].

Moreover, in an 11th hour decision on 19 January 2021, the last day of the first Trump administration in office, Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, designated Ansar Allah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

Hopes for a break with the business-as-usual securitized foreign policy approach toward Yemen were raised following President Joe Biden's election victory. Biden campaigned on a promise to stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, which he labelled a "pariah" and accused of "murdering children" and "innocent people" with its airstrikes in Yemen (Johnsen, 2022). He also wrote: "We should also end our support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen" (Biden, 2020). However, Biden the President did not live up to his grandiose campaign rhetoric on Yemen. Instead, he sent mixed signals that confused observers and threw doubts about his commitment to a stark reset of the US foreign policy on Yemen. In the end, rather than taking US policy toward Yemen in a pathbreaking direction, Biden slid back to the same securitized approach of his predecessors. The degree to which Biden's policy approach toward Yemen has been securitized can best be seen in his National Security Strategy released in October 2022. The document mentions Yemen only twice, and on both occasions in relation to terrorism. Yemen is classified among "terrorist sanctuaries" on a par with Syria and Somalia, and as a country where work is needed "to prevent the export of terrorism or mass migration" (White House, 2022: 30, 42).

In his maiden foreign policy speech, in February 2021, Biden listed ending the war in Yemen as a major goal and announced the appointment of a special envoy for Yemen to "work with the UN envoy and all parties of the conflict to push for a diplomatic resolution." But rather than halting all weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, Biden committed to terminate US assistance for "offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales." Biden also pledged "to continue to support and help Saudi Arabia defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity" in the face of "threats from Iranian-supplied forces in multiple countries" (Biden, 2021).

At the same time, the Biden administration removed Ansar Allah from the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. It also continued the policy of supporting humanitarian aid to Yemen. For example, in 2021, the US government allocated humanitarian aid to Yemen in excess of \$711. In March 2022, the US made a \$585 million pledge in humanitarian assistance to Yemen (US Department of State, 2022).

However, as the war dragged on, the Biden administration reverted to the same playbook of its predecessors. In October 2021, it approved a \$500-million arms deal with Saudi Arabia to provide training and maintenance support for Saudi attack and transport helicopter fleets despite their previous deployment in

offensive operations in Yemen (Kirchgaessner and McKernan, 2021). In early 2022, Ansar Allah launched a spate of ballistic missile attacks on Abu Dhabi. This came in response to the UAE's redeployment of units of the Giants Brigades, an elite Emirates-supported Yemeni army force, from the Red Sea coast to energy rich Shabwa and Marib provinces, where they retook areas seized by Ansar Allah in October 2021. At least on two occasions, the US military stationed at Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi fired Patriot interceptor missiles to stave off the Ansar Allah attacks. Following a visit to the UAE on the heels of the attacks, USCENTCOM Commander-in-Chief, General Frank McKenzie, pledged to help the UAE. "with the replenishment of interceptors. We'll do everything we can to assist UAE. in defending themselves." The Pentagon also announced that it was deploying a guided missile destroyer and F-22 fighter jets to the UAE, while the Treasury Department imposed new sanctions on members of an alleged network involved in financing Ansar Allah (Stewart, 2022; US Department of the Treasury, 2022).

Moreover, the US Special Envoy for Yemen has been criticized for focusing his activities on working with Saudi Arabia and the UAE and offering support for the UN Special Envoy, while failing to develop "a uniquely American peace plan" (Khoury, 2024). Hence, when the UN, in April 2022, brokered a two-month truce that helped reduce hostilities in Yemen, the US remained enmeshed in the conflict on the side of the Saudi-led coalition. Renewed twice in June and August 2022, the truce expired in October 2022. However, the truce has mostly held despite its expiration. Meanwhile, Omani-mediated official talks between Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah have been ongoing since April 2023.

Israel's ground offensive in Gaza following Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, brought a new and grave dynamic to the US engagement in Yemen. The reverberations of the war were felt very strongly in Yemen. On 19 October, Ansar Allah, declaring solidarity with the besieged Palestinians in Gaza, began a series of attacks on Israel's Port of Eilat which Saudi Arabia and US naval forces in the Red Sea intercepted and shot down. A month later, on 19 November Ansar Allah changed their tactics and began to also attack ships in the Red Sea they believed to be linked or sailing to Israel in a bid to force the Israelis to halt their offensive and lift the siege on the Gaza Strip. Attacks later expanded to target Israeli-affiliated shipping in the Arabian Sea. The attacks forced major shipping lines and companies to reroute their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope. The reroute, which prolonged shipping journeys, put pressure on the Israeli economy and raised the prospects of global inflationary pressures due to shipping price hikes. Repeated interventions by US navy vessels to intercept Houthi missiles and drones directed at ships deepened Washington's confrontation with the Houthis, who responded by expanding their attacks to include UK- and US-affiliated merchant ships and engaging directly with the two countries' naval vessels with ballistic missiles and drones (Khoury, 2024).

As it became clear that US interventions had failed to curb Ansar Allah attacks, the US, on 18 December, announced the formation of a multilateral naval force to protect shipping in the Red Sea. In announcing the establishment of the coalition,

codenamed “Operation Prosperity Guardian,” US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said that “recent escalation in reckless Houthi attacks originating from Yemen threatens the free flow of commerce, endangers innocent mariners, and violates international law” (US Department of Defense, 2023). This was followed, on 17 January 2024, by designating Ansar Allah as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Group (White House, 2024). Wary of getting embroiled in large-scale ground combat in Yemen, the Biden administration opted for a course of action centered on utilizing US forward naval presence in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean to launch air and missile strikes from ships and submarines. Accordingly, on 12 January 2024, the coalition began a series of airstrikes, carried out by the US and UK, against military facilities and assets affiliated with Ansar Allah. But the strikes have failed to neutralize, preempt, or deter Ansar Allah’s attacks. The expansion and escalation of Ansar Allah attacks in response to the strikes also indicates that the strikes failed in attriting the group’s missile and drone capabilities. This has been acknowledged by several top Biden administration officials, including the President himself, who pledged to continue with the strikes, nonetheless (Khoury, 2024).

Ansar Allah halted their attacks against Israel and Israeli-linked shipping with the coming into effect of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas on 19 January 2025. However, additional US measures continued to be directed against them following Trump’s second inauguration. On 22 January, only two days into his administration, Trump signed an executive order instructing that “the Secretary of State shall, after consultation with the Director of National Intelligence and the Secretary of the Treasury, submit a report to the President, through the National Security Council, concerning the designation of Ansar Allah as a foreign terrorist organization” (White House, 2025). On 4 March, the State Department designated the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (Rubio, 2025). The redesignation makes any individual or entity that interacts with or provides support to the Houthis subject to prosecution by the United States. It also enables the US Secretary of the Treasury to oblige US financial institutions to block all transactions with the group. This was followed, on 16 March by a series of large-scale US strikes across Yemen that set in motion a cycle of retaliation and escalation that continues to spiral at the time of writing (Burke, 2025).

The tempo of the US and UK strikes against Houthi-linked targets is noteworthy, especially when compared to the tempo of strikes on jihadists in Yemen. Between 2002 and 2023, the US carried out a total of 377 strikes against jihadists in Yemen, while Ansar Allah spokesman Daifallah al-Shami put the number of US and UK aerial strikes against his group in the five weeks between 12 January and 15 February at 203 (Bergen et al., n.d.; Samaei, 2024). But military pressure was not effective in forcing Ansar Allah to desist from their attacks. To the contrary, Ansar Allah remained defiant and demonstrated willingness to escalate their attacks. The confrontation between the powerful US and the much weaker Ansar Allah and Yemeni army units linked to them has in fact won the latter popular support and respect within Yemen and beyond. In the words of one Yemeni analyst: “The Houthis’ actions so far have primarily served to reinforce their solidarity with the

Palestinian cause and the Iran-aligned “Axis of Resistance,” to regain waning popularity, and to bolster their reputation among the Yemeni and Arab populations” (Al-Goidi, 2023). This was echoed by another analyst who averred: “Even the Houthis’ sworn enemies are with them as long as they are standing for Palestinians” (Salhani, 2024). Moreover, this confrontation demonstrated that a hybrid force combining both irregular and conventional armed components, enjoying a high degree of moral factors, and entrenched in vast swathes of urban and rugged mountainous territory can present serious tactical and strategic problems for a first-rate coalition of conventional armies. Meanwhile, the sustainability of a significant US deployment in the region remains uncertain, particularly as new crises arise around the globe and strain Washington’s resources.

### **Conclusion: Pitfalls of Securitized US Policy Toward Yemen**

This survey of decades-old US engagement with Yemen has shown that, whether intentionally or unintentionally or some combination of both, the US never developed a policy toward Yemen that conceives of the country as important by its own right. Successive US administrations lacked a clear guiding strategy to navigate the tortuous shoals of evolving dynamics in Yemen. US policy toward Yemen has been largely subsumed within broader frameworks of foreign and security policy. As Yemen was downgraded to marginal and secondary importance compared to wider US geostrategic and security concerns, US policy toward Yemen became amenable to securitization. As we have seen in this survey, at various critical junctures in the US engagement with and in Yemen, the tendency of US policymakers has been to construe issues as threats and, therefore, lift them above the realms of politics and diplomacy. Accordingly, statements by US policymakers provided rhetorical justification for security and military responses as the only ways to eliminate the threats. Ultimately, US policy toward Yemen has been ensnared in a web of multiple and cumulative securitization processes.

Undue attention was paid to developments in Yemen that had potential security implications for the US or its regional allies. Primacy was given to safeguarding Saudi interests all along. The Manichean logic that prevailed in the US foreign policymaking establishment during the Cold War nurtured a policy approach that privileged blocking the spread of the influence of the Soviet Union or its regional allies, such as Egypt under Nasser, to Yemen. While the end of the Cold War removed superpower rivalry, security concerns remained a crucial factor shaping and determining the foreign policy of successive US administrations toward Yemen. Foremost among these concerns have been the fight against terrorism and protecting the interests of US regional allies from potential threats emanating from Yemen. Following the Saudi-led coalition’s intervention in Yemen, the US became embroiled in a complex setting defined by a terrorist threat, internationalized civil war, regional rivalry, and severe humanitarian crisis. Yet, US strategy toward Yemen continued to be reactive and to prioritize security. Indeed, a security-focused approach has been the hallmark of US policy toward Yemen. Especially since the turn of the millennium, military solutions have been the option of choice

for US policymakers in dealing with Yemen, while the political dimension of engagement has effectively been relegated to a subordinate role.

The increasing securitization of US engagement in Yemen has had serious implications for both Yemen and US foreign policy. Over the years, US decisionmakers had tended to prioritise security concerns. Yemen was treated in US foreign policy as a security issue, if not even patent threat, which required urgent response, or even outright military action. The framing of Yemen as a significant security threat, moreover, has impacted public perceptions and policy debate surrounding US foreign policy decisions toward Yemen. As we saw in this survey, US policy toward Yemen during the Cold War, which prioritised military assistance and arms sales, deepened the rift between the two Yemens. Similarly, in the post-Cold War era, the US tendency to defer to the interests of regional allies, primarily Saudi Arabia and Israel, exacerbated internal divisions. US support to Saudi policy toward Yemen fed civil war in the 1990s and the ongoing prolonged internal conflict (Henderson, 1994). The increased US focus and resources devoted to security, such as intelligence capabilities and military operations, effectively led to deeper military entanglements in Yemen while detracting from engagement on other priority areas, such as rampant corruption, a wilting economy, and the depletion of water resource, which impacted the livelihood and welfare of the majority of Yemenis. Prioritising security concerns with respect to Yemen overshadowed diplomatic and other forms of non-military engagement aimed to address issues that had serious impact on stability in Yemen, such as Saleh's autocratic style of governance and massive economic troubles. The securitization of US foreign policy toward Yemen has effectively exacerbated extant vulnerabilities, internal divisions and conflict.

The long-term effects of the securitisation of US policy toward Yemen have been nothing short of destabilising. A primary negative effect of this has been the lack of sustained commitment in Washington to allocating sufficient resources to addressing the many problems afflicting Yemen, including political grievances, human rights violations, lack of accountable government, and limited and unequal access to basic needs, such as water, healthcare, employment and education. Nor has Washington demonstrated a sustained commitment to promoting a negotiated settlement that produces an inclusive post-conflict government representative of all Yemeni. A paradigm shift toward the de-securitisation of the US foreign policy might not necessarily be a cure-all for Yemen's multiple crises, problems, and tribulations. However, it would certainly be a step in the right direction toward successful post-conflict reconstruction and future stability in Yemen.

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# 5 Peace Process in Yemen

## Lessons Learned from Previous Attempts

*Shoqi Al-Maktary*

### Introduction

Yemen's long-standing conflicts, shaped by local and national tensions, have often necessitated a combination of local negotiations, external mediation, and interventions by regional and international actors, including the UN. This chapter focuses on peace processes in Yemen since 2011, a critical period marked by increased regional and international involvement following the unity agreement between the North and South. It aims to extract lessons from these processes to refine current and future peace efforts in Yemen.

Understanding the iterative nature of Yemen's conflicts, this chapter recognises the importance of learning from past peace processes. Despite varied outcomes, these experiences offer valuable insights into the crafting of high-quality peace agreements—those that not only cease hostilities but also address root causes, ensure inclusivity, incorporate transitional justice, and promote long-term development and reconciliation (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007). The evolution of peace agreement assessment from immediate conflict cessation (Licklider, 1995) to a more comprehensive and long-term evaluation (Darby and Mac Ginty, 2008) underscores the need for a holistic approach to peacebuilding.

This shift toward high-quality agreements is further informed by large-scale databases like the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Peace Accords Matrix (PAM), which allow for comparative analysis and identification of patterns in peace process success and failure. Additionally, the growing emphasis on local ownership and inclusivity in peace processes (Bell, 2015) reflects an understanding that agreements involving a broad spectrum of society, including marginalised groups, are more likely to yield just and sustainable peace.

The chapter tackles four critical questions to deepen the understanding of Yemen's conflict dynamics and peace process challenges. Firstly, it explores key historical events that have shaped the Yemeni conflict, acknowledging the complexity of determining a starting point for analysis, as evidenced by debates during the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Secondly, it examines the internal and external drivers of the Yemeni conflict, probing into political, social, and ideological factors. This analysis is crucial for crafting comprehensive peace agreements that address deep-rooted causes.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-6

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Thirdly, the chapter evaluates the effectiveness of different mediators and peacebuilding efforts, aiming to identify factors that contribute to the success or failure of peace agreements. This includes an assessment of the quality and suitability of peace processes and agreements.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a synthesis of lessons from past peace-making efforts, outlining areas for improvement in future peace processes. This involves evaluating peace processes from 2011 to 2022 against criteria such as inclusivity, process design, agreement quality, implementation, and outcomes. The chapter culminates in proposing strategies and recommendations for transformative approaches to Yemen's complex conflict landscape, advocating for peace processes that are more inclusive, well-designed, and resilient.

### **Yemen from Uprising to Intervention**

Yemen's journey from 2011 to 2022 is characterised by unyielding conflict, a variable political landscape, and unwavering endeavors for peace and stability (Salisbury, 2016). Persistent and profound instability has elicited consistent global efforts to restore peace and stability in the country. Underscoring the global commitment to reinstating peace in Yemen, United Nations envoys, despite confronting towering challenges, have continually strived to mediate and facilitate a possible resolution to the ceaseless upheaval (Lackner, 2019). In this section, major milestones of the Yemen conflict and the corresponding peace efforts are outlined in further detail.

#### ***2011–2012 Yemeni Uprising***

Yemen's 2011 Uprising, a part of the broader Arab Spring, was fuelled by socio-economic frustrations and corruption, leading to widespread protests against President Saleh's 33-year rule (UN, 2011). Despite a violent crackdown, Saleh resigned in February 2012 under significant pressure. However, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative for a peaceful transition failed to bring stability. The National Dialogue Conference (NDC), though a landmark effort for reform, faltered due to implementation challenges and marginalisation of key factions like the Houthis and southern secessionists (Gaston, 2014; Jalal, 2022).

#### ***2012–2015 Houthi Insurgency***

The period following Saleh's departure saw a rise in the Houthi insurgency, culminating in their seizure of Sanaa in 2014. This event shifted the internationally recognized government to Aden. Despite Jamal Benomar's tenure as UN Special Envoy (2012–2018), a peaceful resolution remained elusive (*The Guardian*, 2015).

#### ***2015–2022 Saudi Arabian-led Intervention in Yemen***

A Saudi-led coalition intervened in 2015 to reinstate the ousted government, viewing the Houthi movement as aligned with Iran (Jamal, 2015). This intervention

escalated the conflict, resulting in a severe humanitarian crisis marked by widespread displacement and loss of lives (ACAPS, n.d.).

### ***Peace Talks in Switzerland (2015)***

In 2015, aiming to lay the groundwork for a potentially more comprehensive and enduring peace process in Yemen, United Nations-brokered peace talks were conducted in Switzerland. Unfortunately, these talks did not yield the desired results, ultimately leading to a significant impasse, and the protracted conflict between the Houthi rebels and the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) persisted. However ineffective they turned out to be, these negotiations did shed light on two crucial dimensions essential for understanding the ongoing Yemen conflict.

First, the talks highlighted the potential role of the European Union (EU) as a perceived neutral mediator in the Yemeni conflict. The EU's involvement signaled the need for a neutral convener (Lackner, 2020). The EU's status as a neutral party allowed it to serve as a mediator trusted by both the Houthis and the IRG. This trust was essential for creating an atmosphere conducive for negotiation, even if the talks did not succeed.

Second, after the failed talks in Switzerland, the Houthis' reliance on Iran for not only military support but also for political guidance and advisory assistance became more pronounced (Cerioli, 2018). This occurred because the failure to secure a favorable outcome through diplomatic means may have reinforced the Houthis' dependence on external backers, such as Iran, as a means to advance their political agenda and military capabilities. Similarly, IRG's reliance on GCC support and guidance also increased, which allows for greater influence of regional actors in Yemen conflict dynamics.

### ***Kuwait Peace Talks (2016)***

Another significant attempt to end the Yemen conflict was made in 2016. This endeavor was prompted by the escalation of clashes between the Iran-backed Houthis and their allies, ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh and a substantial portion of his political party, the General People's Congress (GPC), and the IRG with the support of the Saudi-led coalition. In these negotiations hosted in Kuwait, a perceived neutral intermediary in the region with longstanding ties to various Yemeni actors and the Gulf states, the UN re-assumed its role as a mediator.

In the years preceding these talks, Kuwait had already played a crucial role in the Yemen conflict by offering logistical support to peace processes while avoiding direct political involvement to prevent being entangled in what many Kuwaiti politicians and analysts regarded as a senseless war. The 2016 Kuwaiti peace talks turned out to be the longest-running negotiations in the Yemeni conflict and had an immediate positive impact on the ground. One of the immediate improvements included the reopening, albeit under specific arrangements, of Sanaa's airport,

which allowed Saudi Arabia to control the flow of people and goods in and out of Yemen through a stopover at a Saudi airport for inspection.

Initiated with the hope of catalysing a peaceful resolution to the Yemeni conflict, the Kuwait talks at first sparked optimism among various stakeholders. However, due to the IRG's insistence that the Houthis relinquish their territorial gains and disarm – a demand that the Houthis strongly opposed and the negotiations eventually stalled (Al-Maktary, 2023c). This deadlock underscored the deep-rooted divisions between the parties to the conflict and marked a significant setback in the peace process in Yemen.

However pivotal for generating momentum toward a peaceful resolution, the Kuwait peace talks inadvertently presented the conflict parties, especially the Houthis, with an opportunity to regroup and strengthen their military capabilities (Salisbury, 2017). The Houthis strategically used this period to amass weapons and fortify their ranks, effectively using the ceasefire to prepare for further hostilities. For instance, the Houthis and Saleh formed the presidential council to consolidate and formalise their control.

Moreover, the nature of these talks exposed a critical vulnerability in peace negotiations – namely, that warring parties were able to exploit ceasefires or pauses in active conflict. The Houthis, with their sophisticated network and support, were particularly adept at using this period for military consolidation (Salisbury, 2017). This phenomenon is not unique to the Yemeni context: in fact, it is a broader strategic tactic observed in various conflict zones, where warring factions use peace talks as a breathing space to prepare for further escalation (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). What the above suggests is that future peace processes should incorporate mechanisms to monitor and restrict military build-ups during negotiations, which can be a very complex process.

Another important observation was the limited participation – or, as some experts described it, exclusion – of southern Yemeni factions from the discussions. This exclusion pushed southern powers, primarily the Southern Transitional Council (STC), to adopt more hardline positions vis-à-vis the IRG. As a result, the STC's actions limited the IRG's presence and authority in areas under their control, most of which were in the southern parts of Yemen (Nasser, 2023).

### ***Stockholm Agreement (2018)***

Another critical juncture in the Yemen conflict was the Stockholm Agreement signed in 2018. Amid the escalating clashes on the ground, including a coordinated offensive led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) aimed at gaining control over western Yemen's coastal regions, especially the governorate of Hudaydah and its strategic northern harbor, a particularly important role was played by Martin Griffiths, the newly appointed UN envoy. Griffiths brokered peace talks in Sweden that ultimately led to a historic ceasefire agreement that specifically targeted the Yemeni key port city of Hudaydah. Along with having an immediate impact, this agreement also established a ceasefire-monitoring mechanism, which was a genuine milestone in Yemen's recent history. For the first time, an international military monitoring

mechanism was put in place, thus paving the way for the potential deployment of similar arrangements to monitor ceasefires in other parts of Yemen in the context of potential future peace agreements (Sharp and Brudnick, 2015).

The primary achievement of the Stockholm peace talks was halting the advance of coalition troops toward Hudaydah city and port, the primary gateway for humanitarian aid and essential goods reaching millions of Yemenis in the northern part of the country. This development was instrumental in averting a looming humanitarian catastrophe.

However, the dynamics that unfolded during the Stockholm peace talks should also be noted. Specifically, the UAE attempted to gain control over Yemen's western coastal areas, and new armed groups and alliances within Yemeni power structures were formed. Significant roles in these developments were played by actors like Tariq Saleh, the former head of Yemen's central police and a relative of ex-President Saleh (*The New Arab*, n.d.). With the support of groups such as the Tihama Elite Forces and Salafi groups under UAE-formed troops known as the "Giants Brigades," Tariq Saleh seized control of various areas of the country. This led to the emergence of new actors in the Yemeni political scene, adding overall fragmentation and complexity to the conflict.

Another notable observation from the Stockholm talks was the increased dominance of Houthi representatives in the negotiations. This shift reflected the altered political landscape after the collapse of the alliance between the Houthis and Saleh, which led to a growing political experience and influence on the part of the Houthi faction (Baker, 2019).

Overall, while the Stockholm Agreement of 2018 represented a pivotal moment in the Yemen conflict, above all by preventing a potential humanitarian disaster in Hudaydah and introducing a significant development in the form of the ceasefire monitoring mechanism, it also reshaped the political dynamics within Yemen, leading to the emergence of new armed groups and alliances and resulting in the increasing prominence of Houthi representatives in peace talks.

### ***Ongoing UN Mediation Efforts (2019–2022)***

During his tenure as the UN Special Envoy for Yemen from 2018 to 2021, Martin Griffiths faced significant challenges in building upon the Stockholm Agreement of 2018 and even fully implementing the original agreement. As discussed earlier, the Stockholm Agreement established a status quo along the western coast of Yemen, resulting in limited clashes in that region. However, Griffiths encountered difficulties in advancing beyond this point, including a persistent lack of commitment from the involved parties to adhere to the terms of the Stockholm Agreement fully. In addition, prisoner exchanges, opening humanitarian corridors, and ceasing hostilities were frequently delayed. Each side would then accuse the other of violating the terms, creating a cycle of blame that hindered progress. Another concern was regional dynamics—particularly the misalignment between Saudi Arabia and the UAE and the growing influence of Iran. Regional actors' geopolitical interests frequently influenced the actions of the warring parties in Yemen. One more challenge

that added yet another layer of complexity to Griffiths' efforts was that the warring sides, the Houthis and the IRG, faced internal divisions that were difficult to bridge or narrow before engaging in broader negotiations. Finally, although the key component of the Stockholm Agreement was the ceasefire and mutual withdrawal of forces in critical areas like Hudaydah, actual implementation of these measures was fraught with difficulties, such as disagreements over interpretation of the terms and monitoring of ceasefire violations.

Mr. Hans Grundberg, Griffiths' successor in the role of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, inherited this situation in 2021. However, owing to his previous role as the European Union (EU) ambassador to Yemen, Grundberg had the advantage of having prior knowledge and engagement with the conflict parties. This allowed for a relatively smooth transition between Griffiths' and Grundberg's diplomatic efforts and helped to maintain existing relations with the conflict parties, preserving some of the previously achieved momentum.

Among Grundberg's notable achievements was brokering a ceasefire agreement between the Houthis and IRG, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) playing a behind-the-scenes role in facilitating the negotiations. While some analysts attribute this agreement to the apparent stalemate of the war and the growing international interest, particularly from KSA, this agreement represented a significant step toward de-escalation. The ceasefire was initially renewed several times, and although it continued without formal renewal, it remained at a relatively stable level of calmness across various fronts (*UN Press*, 2023).

### ***Local Mediation Efforts (2015–2022)***

Amidst the formal processes aimed at resolving the Yemen conflict and the protracted war that broke out in 2015, it is crucial to acknowledge the presence of numerous informal and localised peace initiatives and negotiations that unfolded throughout the period of 2015–2022. These initiatives were instrumental in addressing a range of local issues that emerged as a direct consequence of the ongoing war dynamics. One prominent example is the exchange of prisoners of war, which many observers reported to be more effective than UN-led efforts. These local efforts succeeded in achieving a significantly higher number of prisoner exchanges as compared to those facilitated by the UN (Kleemann, 2019).

Such informal and localised initiatives were pivotal in addressing pressing concerns at the grassroots level, fostering goodwill between rival factions and building trust among local communities. Frequently focused on practical issues such as prisoner releases, access to humanitarian aid, and local ceasefires, all these initiatives had tangible impacts on Yemeni civilian lives in conflict-affected areas.

Furthermore, offering a bottom-up approach that reflected the complex and multifaceted nature of the Yemen conflict, these grassroots efforts complemented the formal peace processes, thus providing a platform for community leaders, tribal elders, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to play a direct role in conflict resolution, leveraging their local knowledge and relationships to broker agreements and mitigate violence.

## **Why Previous Peace Efforts Failed**

The repeated failures to achieve enduring peace in Yemen since 2011 necessitate a comprehensive analysis to unveil the root causes of these persistent failures. Accordingly, based on various peace processes and agreements spanning the years 2011–2022, this section explores three critical dimensions. The first dimension is the internal dynamics, where the focus is on how the peace processes, primarily those within the scope of the NDC, were executed and how they contributed to their ultimate failure. This part of the analysis involves assessing the scope of topics covered during negotiations, comprehensiveness of agreements, parties involved, inclusivity of dialogue, sequencing of discussions, timing of peace initiatives, and the efficacy of implementation strategies (Lederach, 1997). Additionally, logistical arrangements and the capacity to address deeply entrenched grievances within Yemen's complex social fabric are also examined (Phillips, 2011).

Second, the analysis in this section reviews the external dynamics that expand to the broader context of the Yemeni crisis. This involves an analysis of the factors such as parties' external alliances and the influence of economic and social conditions on their positions, as well as their readiness to negotiate a concept commonly discussed in mediation and peacebuilding studies as "ripeness" (Zartman, 2000). Similarly, the alignment, alliances, and interventions of external actors in the Yemen conflict are also assessed with regard to their impact on peacebuilding efforts (Juneau, 2016).

Finally, the role played by UN envoys, who mediate and structure these peace processes, and the support mechanisms deployed by the UN in support of the corresponding peace processes, would be evaluated (Hatto, 2013). Key factors considered here include mediators' ability to bridge divides between conflicting parties, maintain impartiality, and facilitate constructive dialogue (Frazier and Bercovitch, 2007).

A holistic understanding of these three dimensions provides a comprehensive view of the multifaceted challenges and intricacies that have impeded peacebuilding in Yemen in the period of 2011–2022 and offers nuanced insights and pragmatic recommendations for shaping future peace efforts in Yemen.

### ***Internal Dynamics***

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC), conceived as a pathway to democracy and stability in Yemen, encountered several challenges that impeded its goals (Salisbury, 2015). Key among these was selective participation, where important issues like the Southern question were addressed, but others were overlooked, leading to questions about the conference's representativeness (Zyck, 2014). The 50/50 north-south seat allocation and overlapping group mandates led to deadlocks on critical matters, like state structure, delaying progress (Hoetjes, 2021).

The conference's design, while incorporating diverse groups, fell short of creating a comprehensive federalism model, often marginalizing grassroots and non-elite participants (Hill, 2017). Moreover, certain grievances were systematically

excluded, and some groups, including the Houthis, were engaged without adequate concessions.

Concerns about representation arose with the inclusion of certain parties over others, reflecting internal power dynamics and the interests of President Hadi and the NDC Secretariat. Furthermore, the brief ten-month timeframe, also reflected in the GCC agreement's transition period, led to a rushed process, insufficient for developing thorough governance, wealth distribution, and grievance redressal plans.

Although the NDC strived for balanced representation, the 565 delegates' selection was seen as superficial, allowing major conflict actors to dominate discussions. This led to agreements on secondary issues like gender quotas, while significant topics like governance structure were inadequately addressed (Salisbury, 2015).

Inclusivity was another shortfall; the representation of critical factions like the Houthis and the Southern Movement was limited. The inclusion of youth and women, though commendable, was often symbolic and lacked a substantial impact on decision-making (Gaston, 2014). Delegates tended to avoid contentious topics, leading to rushed conclusions and delegating critical decisions to the president, which provided grounds for Houthis and Saleh to challenge the process.

The UN's support for the NDC, including technical assistance and delegate coaching, had its limitations. Efforts to engage the Yemeni public were limited, especially on key issues, leading to a lack of public support and empowerment of NDC stakeholders (Radwan, 2019; Al-Maktary, 2023b). The UN's focus on the NDC's internal processes at the Mövenpick Hotel and the failure to address actions by Saleh and the Houthis that diverged from the political process further undermined the NDC's effectiveness (Jalal, 2022).

Following the failure of the NDC and the launch of the Saudi-led coalition in March 2015 to reinstate the Hadi government in Sanaa, the period from 2015 to 2022 witnessed several peace processes, as illustrated in an earlier section; however, none of these efforts succeeded in ending the Yemeni conflict. While each of these initiatives encountered specific obstacles, several common lessons can be drawn from their collective failure. Major lessons are outlined below.

### *Limited Inclusivity*

The failure of Yemen's peace processes can be largely attributed to the lack of meaningful and genuine inclusivity. This shortfall played a critical role, as the peace dialogues consistently excluded key stakeholders. The principle of inclusivity is vital for the success of any peace process. Without it, the legitimacy and effectiveness of these initiatives are seriously undermined (Transfeld, 2019). In the Yemeni case, such exclusion only deepened divisions and perpetuated the ongoing conflict.

Legitimacy was another factor related to the lack of inclusivity. As argued by Willis (2018), determining which groups or entities have the constitutional authority or legitimacy to speak on behalf of Yemenis has frequently been a significant stumbling block in the peace process. Because of Yemen's fragmentation, encompassing various political parties and factions, complex questions arose about who would legitimately represent the interests of the Yemeni people. This struggle

over legitimacy frequently acted as a deal-breaker, further complicating efforts to achieve a lasting resolution in Yemen.

### *Neglecting Root Causes*

A key shortcoming of previous peace initiatives in Yemen was their inability to address the fundamental causes of the conflict. These root causes include historical grievances, economic disparities, and regional divisions. Such neglect allowed the conflict's core drivers to persist, posing a challenge to the achievement of a lasting resolution (Salisbury, 2015). Except for the NDC, which aimed to delve deeper into these root causes, most peace processes did not adequately allow conflict parties to articulate options and outline mid- and long-term steps to address those issues. This oversight was typically driven by the reluctance to expand the scope of negotiations, the limited mandate of the peace process, or, at times, by the parties' refusal to move beyond the immediate dynamics of violence that triggered the peace process. These dynamics typically represent just the tip of the iceberg in a complex array of issues that both the parties and mediators are frequently unprepared to address comprehensively (Hamidaddin, 2021). None of the peace processes reviewed in this chapter were comprehensive; even the NDC, which came closer to the discussion of some underlying issues driving conflict in Yemen, was not granted adequate time or resources to conclude a workable framework for any of the issues or to articulate an implementable solution.

### *Fragmented Political Landscape*

Yemen's political scene is characterised by profound fragmentation, proving to be a significant hindrance to peace initiatives. The removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, amidst the fervor of the Arab Spring demonstrations, produced a power vacuum and subsequent contention. This power dynamics eventually led to Yemen's splintering into several rival factions. This segmentation persisted and evolved, creating a constantly shifting environment that necessitated a swift incorporation of emerging stakeholders. Simultaneously, there was an inherent risk in peace dialogues that could inadvertently motivate further fragmentation. This was inevitable as different groups strategically positioned themselves to gain a seat at the peace negotiation table, hoping to capitalise on the benefits of such inclusion (Al-Dawsari, 2012).

### *Limited Communication*

A common feature of the peace processes in Yemen was the inadequate dissemination of information to the public. Mediators did not prioritise informing Yemenis about the ongoing developments and negotiations. This lack of transparency resulted in a widespread lack of understanding among the Yemeni population regarding the details and progress of the negotiations (Zyck, 2014). Limited communication about the peace process fostered mistrust among Yemenis, undermining the initiatives' legitimacy and allowing conflicting parties to shape narratives about the process and assign blame for its shortcomings.

*Time Limitations*

Peace processes in Yemen frequently failed to acknowledge the necessity of allowing sufficient time for peace to develop organically. For instance, the brief transition period outlined in the GCC agreement provided limited time for the NDC to unfold effectively. This resulted in hurried discussions that prevented the involved parties from reaching a consensus. Consequently, unresolved issues were deferred to President Hadi, leading to a situation where the parties in disagreement with the NDC's outcomes had justifiable reasons to oppose its results (Hill, 2017).

Another consequence of the imposition of unrealistic timeframes was rushed and superficial discussions that lacked depth and thus were destined to fail to address key issues. This not only hampered the peace process but also imposed the risk of delegitimizing the outcomes, as stakeholders felt their concerns and perspectives were not adequately considered. Finally, limited time disallowed the formulation of new alliances among the involved parties that could have shifted existing balance of power structures.

*Humanitarian Crisis*

The protracted conflict in Yemen resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises globally. Ongoing violence, blockades, and the destruction of infrastructure left millions of Yemenis in dire need of food, clean water, and medical assistance. Overshadowing peace efforts and diverting resources from peacebuilding, this humanitarian catastrophe created an urgent need for immediate relief, further complicating the resolution of the conflict. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2023), as of 2023, over 23.7 million people in Yemen needed humanitarian assistance. This situation previously allowed conflict parties to use the situation to blame others and to create an environment for the rapid growth of the war economy, which became so lucrative over the years of war that it started to de-incentivise conflict parties and their allies benefiting from it from engaging constructively in peace processes (Transfeld, 2019). Conversely, the international community and regional powers did not effectively leverage economic incentives to encourage parties to engage in and commit to the peace process. While, in theory, peace processes often involve discussions and plans concerning the economy, in the Yemeni case, none of the previous attempts succeeded in bringing about immediate economic improvements that could strengthen and incentivise the peace process in the country (Pugh, 2005).

*External Dynamics**Regional Power Struggles*

Yemen's conflict has been exacerbated by the involvement of regional powers, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE leading a coalition of Arab states in support of the IRG. However, while both nations ostensibly shared the goal of restoring the government, their strategies and objectives often diverged. Saudi Arabia's primary

focus was on countering Iranian influence, represented by Tehran's support for the Houthi rebels. By contrast, driven by an interest in securing maritime trade routes and countering extremist groups, sometimes even those aligned with the Yemeni government (Parker, 2021), the UAE showed a multifaceted involvement; in one way, the UAE communicates the desire to push for peace while sabotaging it on the ground.

This misalignment and sometimes competition between the UAE and KSA introduced an additional layer of complexity to the conflict. While both countries were part of the same coalition, their differing priorities led to actions that sometimes contradicted or undermined each other's efforts. This disunity not only prolonged the conflict but also complicated peace negotiations (Younes, 2019). In addition, the disparate goals of these regional actors frequently hindered international efforts to broker peace. Each time a potential resolution seemed imminent, the varying objectives of the UAE and KSA would result in a lack of cohesive support for the peace process. The Yemeni people have borne the brunt of this geopolitical tug-of-war. The misaligned strategies of the UAE and KSA exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, making it difficult to establish a unified front necessary for a lasting peace agreement. In summary, the competing interests of these regional powers, prioritizing their strategic goals over the stability of Yemen, significantly impeded the progress of peace talks and the resolution of the conflict.

### *Ineffective International Mediation*

The international community's role in mediating the Yemeni conflict can be characterised as inefficient. While various initiatives, including UN-led peace talks, were launched, they frequently failed to produce meaningful results. The lack of a unified international approach and the absence of effective mechanisms for enforcing agreements undermined the credibility of these efforts. As a result, the international community's inability to facilitate a coherent and enforceable peace process contributed to the conflict's persistence (Salisbury, 2020). Another challenge to international mediation was the absence of effective mechanisms for enforcing agreements. Even when the warring parties did reach an agreement, there was no guarantee that they would adhere to its terms. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms undermined the credibility of the peace process, making it more difficult to achieve a lasting resolution to the conflict.

### *Mediators and Mediation Process*

#### *Role of the Mediator*

The pivotal question in any peace process revolves around the role of the mediator. Indeed, the mediator stands at the heart of peace negotiations, with their unique characteristics and influence frequently serving as the decisive factor in the ultimate success or failure of the peace initiative. This critical role of the mediator is vividly exemplified in the case of Yemen during the tumultuous period from 2011 to 2022. Over this timeframe, four distinct UN envoys were appointed to

facilitate the peace process in the country, each bringing their own set of strengths and weaknesses that directly and indirectly influenced the outcomes of the various attempted peace processes during this tumultuous period.

Examining the types and characteristics of these mediators offers valuable insights into the contribution of mediator attributes to successful peace agreements. Moreover, a comparative analysis between the mediators who achieved progress and those who did not can provide a more nuanced understanding of the mediator's role in shaping the trajectory of peace negotiations in Yemen. Accordingly, in what follows, the envoys' strategies, engagement with conflicting parties, and mediation tactics are discussed in further detail.

Appointed on January 18, 2011, Jamal Benomar was the first UN envoy to engage in the Yemeni political turmoil amid the Arab Spring protests, facing the challenge of navigating a rapidly evolving situation with limited groundwork. Despite Benomar's early involvement and extensive knowledge of Yemen's political landscape and tribal dynamics, his deep understanding sometimes led to accusations of bias, complicating his negotiation-focused diplomatic approach. During his tenure, Benomar achieved mixed results: along with facilitating the GCC Initiative and the NDC, he also faced criticism for perceived biases and was unable to prevent the Houthi takeover of Sanaa in 2014.

The next UN envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, was appointed on 25 April 2015, bringing to his post his significant experience in conflict mediation and his strong diplomatic track record. Showing resilience in persistently engaging with conflicting parties despite numerous setbacks and ceasefire violations, Ould Cheikh nevertheless had to confront immense challenges in achieving a sustainable ceasefire and comprehensive peace agreement, with frequent ceasefire violations and mistrust among parties.

Following Ould Cheikh, Martin Griffiths, appointed on 16 February 2018, came with a diplomacy and conflict resolution background. Aiming to minimise civilian casualties, Griffiths focused on regional dynamics and humanitarian concerns. Despite his frequent engagement and numerous negotiations, Griffiths faced challenges such as ceasefire violations, political fragmentation, and the reluctance of key actors to make concessions, resulting in limited progress toward a comprehensive peace agreement.

Finally, Hans Grundberg, the UN envoy appointed on 6 August 2021, has leveraged his regional knowledge and established relationships as the EU Ambassador to Yemen, achieving a notable ceasefire between the Houthi rebels and the IRG. However, his tenure was not devoid of challenges: despite the ceasefire, sustaining peace agreements has proved to be difficult due to deep divisions and repeated ceasefire violations.

Along with these mediators' characteristics, another factor to look at when comparing the UN envoys appointed to Yemen is their origin. In this respect, two of the four envoys assigned were of Muslim-Arab descent, which enabled them to engage directly with the conflict parties. Their familiarity with traditional and Islamic narratives gave them unique negotiation tools. This cultural and religious affinity is frequently viewed as an asset in bridging communication gaps. However, concerns were voiced over the perceived neutrality of these envoys, especially considering

the influential role of regional powers like KSA (Al-Maktary, 2023a). In fact, there is a broad agreement that envoys of Arab descent might face challenges garnering robust support from their home nations, which might affect their influence on negotiations. Conversely, subsequent envoys like Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Grundberg, while lacking proficiency in Arabic and a deep understanding of Arabic and Islamic cultures, are generally perceived to bring a heightened sense of impartiality, particularly concerning the KSA and other Gulf nations. Accordingly, some experts view those envoys' potential linguistic and cultural barriers as counterbalanced by their neutrality, though the actual impact remains a topic of discussion (Al-Maktary, 2023a).

### **Five Pillars for Moving Forward**

The Yemen conflict is located at the intersection of historical divisions, regional influences, and global strategic interests. The many and varied layers of complexity have significantly contributed to the continued unrest and the persistent failure of peace initiatives. During the period reviewed in this chapter, the established peace processes arguably did not delve deep enough to address the true driving forces of conflict in Yemen, which eventually led to the failure to achieve a sustainable resolution. As of now, Yemen remains mired in a deeply entrenched crisis that requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach to achieve a lasting resolution (Salisbury, 2017). The failures of peace processes between 2011 and 2022 highlight several critical lessons that must be heeded in future peacebuilding efforts. In the remainder of this chapter, these lessons are briefly reviewed, and five areas of improvement are proposed.

#### ***Inclusivity***

The first lesson learned from previous peace efforts is that inclusive peace processes that engage all relevant stakeholders, including marginalised groups and key factions, are essential. Who should decide Yemen's future? While a simple answer would be that the Yemeni people should do that, the reality of the peace process is that those with guns are the ones talking. Inclusivity in peace processes is an ongoing struggle, to say the least. To put it bluntly, those who can use violence would secure a seat at the negotiation table, and the bigger their guns, the more leverage they would have. Some accuse peace processes of inciting more violence, fragmenting warring groups, and motivating non- or less-violent groups to escalate their violence as a ticket to get a seat at the table. This implies that strategic considerations regarding participant inclusion and timing are critical for enhancing the inclusivity of the Yemen peace process. Incentivising conflict parties' openness to inclusivity is a key lesson learned in peace mediation.

#### ***Addressing Root Causes***

An effective resolution of the Yemen conflict undoubtedly requires addressing the underlying causes, including historical grievances, economic disparities,

and regional divisions. Neglecting these root issues can lead to the persistence of the conflict. The roots of the Yemen conflict are embedded in many factors, including but not limited to regional and religious divisions, economic instability, and concerns regarding representation and governance. The Houthi movement, one of the prominent actors in the conflict, has its origins in feelings of marginalization among the Zaydi Shi'ite population, further exacerbated by economic neglect and underdevelopment in the northern regions of Yemen (Egel et al., 2021). Accordingly, a thorough understanding of the root causes of the conflict, coupled with a commitment to addressing these issues, is a fundamental pillar for future peace initiatives. What this requires is adopting a holistic approach to the peace process, acknowledging and addressing the conflict's historical, economic, and social dimensions that would help to achieve sustainable and enduring peace in Yemen.

### *Navigating Regional and International Dynamics*

The involvement of regional and international actors in Yemen's conflict requires a diplomatic approach that would factor in all external players' interests and rivalries. Coordinated international efforts are essential to prevent external interventions from exacerbating the situation. While it is not disputed that Yemen's destiny has always been influenced, if not controlled, by external factors—geopolitics, alliances, and social and religious movements—the closer those factors are to home, the more potent they are. Yemen's neighbors have had much to say in Yemen's past, present, and will certainly have their say in the future. Even during the “relative stability” of the Saleh regime, Gulf countries, headed by the KSA, affected Yemen either via financial assistance or political manipulation and alliances, sometimes through the regime itself, and other times forging direct relations with political players or social and tribal figures.

In recent years, the influence of several countries has become the most significant. Unfortunately, each neighboring country has its own interests that frequently either counterbalance or undermine each other. In order of their influence on Yemen, these are the KSA, UAE, Iran, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. Each of these states deploys a unique set of tools to influence Yemen, with the first two (KSA and UAE) having more control than influence, while Iran has a soft influence and guidance role, mainly with the Houthis, but goes even beyond that. This influence is normally highlighted in response to any episode of tension between Iran and the KSA or the US.

Overall, the Yemen conflict highlights the UAE's extended influence on Middle East dynamics. What appears to be close coordination and alignment with KSA's announced objectives of reestablishing IRG control over all of Yemen goes hand in hand with supporting southern and other powers that compete with the IRG, as well as undermining its authority (International Crisis Group, 2023). The UAE's support and creation of parallel military groups across southern Yemen and the western coast directly feed into the fragmentation of the IRG and inflame calls for separation spearheaded by the STC. This additional fragmentation adds to the complexity of achieving a common vision among conflict parties and increases the possibility of local violence among different newly formed armed groups (Willis, 2018).

As for Oman, previous research showed that Oman has a strong influence along its border and is sensitive to any competition in that region from other Gulf countries such as the KSA or UAE (Koshaimah et al., 2023). Concurrently, Oman has also positioned itself as the exclusive go-between between the KSA, Houthis, and Iran. It has also built credit with the West through a series of successes in facilitating the release of Western nationals kidnapped in Yemen over the past period (Reuters, 2016).

Qatar's interest in Yemen reflects its competition and rivalry with the UAE and KSA. However, at the onset of the conflict, Qatar framed itself as a possible mediator, particularly considering the recent successful Qatari mediation in Sudan and its good relations with the Islah party; the latter put it in a clash with the UAE that works to uproot Islah, who the UAE primarily sees as the Yemen version of the Muslim Brotherhood (Patrick, 2017). In its turn, Qatar's influence is more based on financial mechanisms—whether through humanitarian aid or through supporting some political actors, mostly Islah and some independent activists. Additionally, we should not overlook the important role of Qatar's media outlets, specifically Al Jazeera, in influencing public opinion and exposing the atrocities of conflict parties. Some GCC countries did not take this influence lightly and this contributed to the GCC rift in 2017 (Qaed, 2020).

To date, Kuwait has remained the friendliest country for Yemen among the Gulf countries and has continued to be a broker for Yemen's peace and development. Here, the biggest mistake Yemen—or, let us say, the Saleh regime—made was supporting (or what was correctly perceived as supporting) Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. That juncture changed the relationship between Yemen and Kuwait, and by extension the Gulf at large, thereby causing a huge economic setback that can be claimed to be a key contributing factor to igniting and fueling the civil war between the North and the South and planting the seed of a growing contempt for unity. This suggests that what these neighbors want and how they would respond to the future of Yemen cannot be ignored.

### ***Humanitarian and Livelihood Implications***

The dire humanitarian situation in Yemen necessitates concurrent efforts to provide immediate relief and facilitate peacebuilding. War generates its own economy and beneficiaries; for some conflict parties, instability, violence, and war are essential for survival. History has taught us that the transformation of armed groups into peaceful groups can be a very painful process, as these groups tend to see a meaningful existence in war, not peace. The longer a conflict continues, the more elaborate and rooted the conflict economy becomes, beneficiary networks expand, and new realities and beliefs emerge. Unfortunately, humanity's ability to adapt can backfire. People get used to a dramatically bad situation to the extent that it becomes their new norm, which makes getting into a new "stable" situation with all its regulations, new power structures, and limitations far from easy. This is where Yemen is at the moment, but is still not beyond the point of no return. In the case of

Yemen, the economy could become a great peace incentive for Yemenis and other conflict parties alike.

Specifically, economic growth and opportunities could drain the war dynamics and allow the war economy to gradually transform into a peacetime economy. Giving people a taste of the value of peace through more job opportunities and improving living conditions and services can effectively prevent conflict parties from promoting war and violence (International Crisis Group, 2022). Furthermore, if used smartly, the economy could provide the glue and venue for collaboration among different parts of Yemen, giving rise to the opportunity for maintaining some form of unity. The economy is also strongly linked to Yemen's neighbors and what they want for Yemen, since they are the main agents in funding economic initiatives and programmes, and also, importantly, since some of their interests in Yemen are economic and a prosperous Yemen might be ultimately in their interest.

### ***Long-Term Commitment***

Achieving sustainable peace in Yemen is a long-term endeavor that would require steadfast commitment from all parties involved. Quick fixes are unlikely to lead to a lasting resolution. At the same time, new breeds of conflicts and structural violence growing in Yemen are much more damaging than the war itself. Sectarian divisions, which are a new trend in Yemen, can be fatal. Among the few significant risks that should be addressed NOW and not when the humanitarian mandate is over are also territorial marginalizations and a growing culture of violence—and yet it is clear that attaining this goal could take years, if not longer. Accordingly, development should start now with a strategic vision for peace and stability. A successful peace process in Yemen will require a sustained commitment from all internal and external stakeholders. In summary, achieving lasting peace in Yemen demands a long-term, multifaceted approach that would adequately address its root causes, involve all relevant parties, and navigate the complex regional dynamics while prioritizing the well-being of the Yemeni people.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the following five key areas to reinvigorate future peace processes in Yemen can be identified. First, inclusivity is crucial. It is essential to ensure the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, such as the Houthis, southern secessionists, and marginalised groups. The design of inclusivity should be dynamic and capable of involving more actors in the process progresses.

Second, the process design and structure should be tailored to Yemen's dynamic war context. This involves creating a flexible process with a clear roadmap and milestones for peacebuilding. Selecting achievable early wins could be a path to follow so as to build trust and experience among conflict parties. Equally important is keeping the population informed about the process, as doing so would also generate public pressure on the parties to stay committed and implement the agreed decisions.

The third essential area is the quality of the agreement. All prospective agreements should comprehensively address all aspects of the conflict's root causes (e.g., historical grievances, economic inequality, and regional divisions) and the outcomes manifested during the last decade of war. As discussed earlier in this chapter, ignoring major issues or postponing dealing with them is a sure path to disaster and could sow the seeds for future conflict.

The fourth key element embraces implementation steps, monitoring, and a full understanding of the complexity of the situation. Mitigating external interferences—especially those coming from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran—is critical. Part of the solution involves openly engaging these nations in the process as conflict actors, thereby limiting their ability to influence events from behind the scenes.

Fifthly and finally, of paramount importance are the efforts aimed at reducing violence, improving living conditions, and ensuring long-term stability. Adequate support for post-conflict reconstruction and development would allow the Yemeni people to experience the benefits of peace and transition the war economy into a normal economy, which underscores the importance of anchoring peace in Yemen through economic stability.

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## 6 Trust Building Through Bias?

### A Comparison of Conflict Mediation in Yemen: Local, Regional and International Efforts

*Arwa Mokdad*

#### Introduction

Throughout the internationalised civil war which started in 2015, UN mediation in Yemen has been marked by missteps. Conversely, local and regional conflict mediation has, on several occasions, aided in de-escalation between the warring parties (Mokdad, 2023). This begs the question: *why are local and regional conflict mediation efforts more effective than UN mediation?* While theories of international relations privilege great powers (Bull, 1977), with the United States characterised as the “only regional hegemon in modern history” (Mearsheimer, 2001, 41), regional security complex theory has sought to emphasise the importance of centering regional actors, thus analysing regions based on their own attributes and unique geopolitical realities (Buzan and Wæver, 2003).

To understand why certain actors have been more effective in conflict mediation, I conducted fieldwork in Sanaa, Muscat, and New York. This entailed conversations with political elites, particularly Yemeni politicians, Omani experts, and UN officials. I conducted 10 interviews with Yemenis engaged with mediation from across the political and social spectrum – including Ansar Allah (Houthi) negotiators, Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) officials, tribal leaders, and NGO workers – in Sanaa and occasionally remotely. I have also interviewed nine former members of the team of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, including the former UN Special Envoy Jamal Benomar. Finally, I completed 11 interviews in Muscat with Omani experts and researchers. The perspectives and insights of mediators will shed light on the approaches, challenges, and successes of each type of actor in the conflict mediation process. Through this research, I hope to contribute to scholarship on peace processes that moves beyond overly legal-rational interpretations that do not account for the diversity of local and regional actors. The chapter will analyse and triangulate the interpretive discourses of interlocutors via themes derived from my interviews. An anonymised list of interviewees is attached as Appendix A.

This chapter concludes that strategic bias contributes to mediation success by serving as a form of legitimacy. Building upon Smith’s (1985) definition of “unbiased mediators” as a third party that has equal stake in each side of the conflict, which makes them unable to favor one over the other, I coin the term “strategic

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-7

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bias” in which a mediator has equal stake in both sides, but also a vested interest in the conflict ending. This allows them to coordinate between both parties and cultivate trust. I begin this chapter by outlining the empirical realities my interlocutors are responding to and how they narrate them, namely UN absence within Yemen and perceived presence of local and regional actors. Secondly, I outline the biases within UN mediation, namely favoring Saudi Arabia, which prevents effective mediation and hinders trust building measures. Thirdly, I discuss the wide array of local actors and their individual biases. While NGOs and tribes tend to remain impartial, political parties do not, which colours their perspectives on mediator success. I then describe Oman’s impartiality and security interests in Yemen. Yemenis are aware of their intentions – security and humanitarian concerns – which allows them to operate within the country. However, their neutrality in the conflict resulted in material consequences from other Gulf countries. Yet, Oman remained committed to neutrality since strategic bias is linked to their security interests in Yemen and the region at large. Lastly, I unpack the term strategic bias and theorise its place within existing literature, with a particular focus on bringing regional security complex theory into dialogue with mediation literature.

## **UN Bias**

Despite prolonged involvement in Yemen, UN success within the country has been minimal. Following pro-democracy protests against long-term authoritarian president Saleh, the UN has been involved in political mediation within Yemen. The National Dialogue Conference, which outlined a democratic transition roadmap for the country, was UN mediated and offered a path forward for a divided nation (Almosawa, 2023). However, following the Saudi-led intervention within Yemen’s domestic struggle for control, UN mediation has been surpassed by local and regional actors. While the largest UN prisoner swap consisted of 889 prisoners (Berg, 2023), local mediation led by tribal leaders has resulted in the exchange of thousands of prisoners (Al-Dawsari, 2020). Additionally, the first public visits between Saudi and Ansar Allah officials were Omani mediated (El-Yaakoubi, 2023). While there have been key trust-building measures mediated by the UN such as the Stockholm Agreement, all respondents rated UN mediation the lowest when asked to compare between international, regional, and local mediation efforts.

Due to the inherent unequal structure of the Security Council, the UN ends up pushing the interests of five countries instead of focusing on local and regional actors. Interviewee 21 stated that “the UN crushes anything that can be good for the population...because [of] the involvement of big powers – five countries decide when and why [peace occurs].” This demonstrates a key challenge that UN interviewees shared about UN mediation: the interests of the five permanent members of the Security Council (the P5) and the disproportionate power of their allies. To effectively mediate, a mediator must avoid favoring one side over the other, but that is difficult to achieve when five powerful countries are involved. As interviewee 22 stated, “the UN has a better chance of making progress when there is no strong political interest of the Security Council...once the Security Council

is involved heavily, it is hard to mediate.” The pitfalls of strong P5 interests have impacted a wide array of conflicts and has even forced mediators to step down. After the North Korean attack on South Korea in 1950, Secretary-General Trygve Halvdan Lie made it clear that North Korea violated the charter principles, which eroded his trust in the USSR and other socialist governments (Rovine, 1970). In 1952, he resigned as he could not restore trust with socialist governments (Skjelsbaek and Fermann, 1995).

While the case of Yemen highlights inherent structural challenges within the UN, namely P5 power, it is also an unusual case. As interviewee 22 stated: “The UN process is compromised. UNSC [United Nations Security Council] 2216 is a clear reflection of Saudi interests in Yemen...Everything from 2015 to today is compromised.” This is due to the disproportionate power of Saudi Arabia versus Yemen. As interviewee 23 shared: “Nobody in the world cares about Yemen and Yemenis; except for oil [and] the Strait; the security of the [Bab al-Mandab] passageway. The second reason anyone cares about Yemen is global terrorism. ... The ultimate well-being of Yemenis is easily sacrificed.” Given the Saudis’ influence among the P5 and Yemen’s low degree of influence, Yemen was as interviewee 22 described “a political calculation in response to the Iran deal.” Due to Saudi Arabia’s anger over the Iran deal, the West was willing to sacrifice Yemen, which four UN participants noted explicitly. It was a low cost for a big partner. As interviewee 28, who worked in multiple countries shared, Yemen was “an unusual set up.” He describes “sometimes going to Saudi Arabia about perception issues,” going “to Saudi Arabia to brief the Hadi government,” and working with a proxy rather than the de facto government. Furthermore, he describes the UN Special Envoy being based in Jordan and focusing on external actors due to “outside pressures from the Saudi coalition that were distrustful.” Even to travel within the country, UN officials had to get a security clearance from Saudi Arabia. As he put it: “forces did not want too much direct mediation with the Houthis.” This high level of deferral to one party and hostility toward another is not common within the UN, yet it highlights existing power dynamics that allow such clear bias to occur.

While some may argue that UN diplomats play the role of a genuinely impartial third party, UN officials, like everyone, contain their own biases. Fernando Carvajal, who served on the UN Security Council’s panel of experts on Yemen, published a piece in 2023 on the conflict in which he clearly takes a stance. Rather than remaining impartial, he publicly calls for the balance of power to shift to one side of the conflict (Carvajal, 2023). Interviewee 25 went as far as to state that the “envoy is biased against the Houthis...They view the Houthis as the bad guys.” This calls into question the supposed unbiased nature of UN officials.

UN failure in Yemen is in direct contrast to the previous decade in which the UN played a major role in facilitating peace processes across the world. These efforts include contributing to a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq, facilitating the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, and negotiations for a new constitution in Cyprus. The key to many of these successes was impartiality and support from member states. As Skjelsbaek and Fermann note, when the Persian Gulf crisis began, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar did not join the Security Council

in condemning the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait which “undoubtedly made it easier for him to communicate with the Iraqi government” (Skjelsbaek and Fermann, 1995: 105). Unfortunately, in Yemen, the UN Special Envoy having taken a stance against a party to the conflict, Ansar Allah, via Security Council Resolution 2216, has harmed UN relationships with local actors.

### **Local Perceptions of UN Bias**

Local and regional actors perceived UN actors as career-driven and partial to the whims of powerful states, not devoted to peace within the region. Professor Ketchley’s describes the discrepancy between local and foreign mediation, saying: “these people will be our neighbors in the futures vs. I will never see this shiny-toothed Scandinavian again after this” (Ketchley, 2024). Chan describes the aims of UN mediators as follows: fly in, settle conflict, and fly out (Chan, 2011: 271). He continues that the seeming success of the Mozambican peace process carried forward by the Sant’Egidio Catholic community in 1992 and the Oslo peace process between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel in 1993 resulted in “a veritable cottage industry of mediators burgeoned to its present status as a high-earning, high-profile, jet-setting, and seemingly indispensable part of a curious globalization of idealistic and yet professionalized concern for relieving the misery of others” (Chan, 2011: 270). This reputation of a detached industry of elite mediators, coupled with failures in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere, has led to questioning the UN’s role in promoting a peaceful settlement of contemporary armed conflicts. As Helmüller argues, there is increased disunity among the permanent five members (P5) of the UNSC, resulting in reduced support to mediation from within the UN, due to the resurgence of geopolitical competition and a decline of the liberal normative order (Hellmüller and Wählich, 2022).

Local interlocutors tended to agree with Chan and consider UN employees either agents for foreign governments or driven by their own career rather than a desire to bring peace to Yemen. Throughout my own interviews, I noticed a linguistic distancing by UN interviewees from the costs of ineffective mediation: war and famine. Throughout the interviews, UN officials often referred to the conflict in Yemen as a “file.” In contrast, Yemenis used the words war, crisis, and conflict. This key difference in narrating the conflict is well-noted by local actors who deem UN officials uninterested in their country. Furthermore, UN officials who are no longer working for the Special Envoy for Yemen shared that they are no longer following the conflict. As such, many UN participants were unaware of the current situation and could not speak about recent developments. For many, negotiations were a career step, not a matter of personal importance. Yemenis are aware of these personal aims with interviewee 1 describing UN officials as people who “enjoy prestige, traveling, and cash.” Interviewee 7 built upon this Yemeni perception by sharing that the peace process is “not important to them [the UN].” Interviewee 23 described this as “career ambitions” with the UN having conflicting agendas and mandates as “many people in the UN system come from their own governments...It’s not always clear who they are speaking for.” This is an issue within the field where

“an overwhelming majority of mediation specialists express serious misgivings about individuals appointed to senior mediation roles” (Waldman, 2022: 11). These misgivings are shared by locals themselves who notice when officials are either uninterested in long-term peace prospects or unqualified to mediate them.

Both regional and local actors are aware of UN actions and missteps which further harms their already dwindling credibility. UN officials are not perceived to be invested in a peace outcome and are unable to shift unequal power structures within the UN that allow for impunity for malign actors in the conflict. As interviewee 4 shared, “the Security Council [member states] and Gulf [countries]” heavily influence the UN’s direction within Yemen which makes UN mediation a “band-aid on a wound.” Rather than pushing for full accountability from all actors, the agenda is set by powerful countries which makes the UN “unable to find a solution.” The interlocutor noted that “once we have agreed, they will be there,” but the UN is no longer part of the solution. Rather than aiding in resolving conflict, UN mediation at times further exacerbates the conflict by sidelining key actors, such as Ansar Allah, and prioritizing Saudi interests over Yemeni voices. As many Yemeni interlocutors shared, the UN is not only unsuccessful, but they are also damaging the situation. Similarly, Omanis noted that the UN has been ineffective in Yemen with all interviewees sharing the UN has not achieved mediation success in Yemen.

During my own field work in Yemen, I saw multiple anti-UN street art linking the UN to imperialism and the US. Interviewee 28 notes that an Ansar Allah member once told him: “You work for the United Nations of America.” This represents a common sentiment on the ground with most Yemeni interlocutors viewing the UN as biased. This distrust toward the UN and perceived Western intervention is not just a modern phenomenon, but rather a historical and colonial one. As Du Bois writes in *Of the Culture of White Folks*: “These super-men and world-mastering demi-gods listened, however, to no low tongues of ours, even when we pointed silently to their feet of clay” (Du Bois, 1917: 434). The UN stems from the League of Nations which enriched a racial hierarchy via the mandate system. The Mandate Article created a three-tiered system in which mandate territories “were classified according to their degree of advancement” which was based on the assumption “that sovereignty existed in something like a linear continuum, and every society could be placed at some point along this continuum based on its approximation to the ideal of the European nation-state” (Anghie, 2005: 121). The racial justifications of this system are explicit with Middle Eastern states being given paths to quasi-sovereign states whereas the future status of people in Africa and the Pacific was not clarified (Anghie, 2005). To preserve white supremacy, the mandate system placed self-determination within a hierarchical structure with two different forms of self-sovereignty: European and non-European (Anghie, 2005). Now I am not arguing that the average rebel is aware of the evolution of the UN, but rather that these historic injustices still colour how locals consider outsiders and their skepticism toward being told what to do. To quote Guinea’s UN general assembly speech, “We are old enough to know what is good for us... Trust us and let us run our business as you have allowed other areas” (Doumbouya, 2023). This represents genuine frustration with international intervention and UN bias.

### **Local Divergences in Bias**

While the vast majority of Yemenis have a deep desire for peace, not all have equal stake in both sides. Throughout my interviews with Yemenis, all of them stressed the need for peace within the country. Interviewee 4 described it as “what is good for you, is good for your family.” He continued to explain that “family can be blood, tribe, or nation” demonstrating a deep community connection that facilitates reconciliation. When asked why he got involved in mediation interviewee 2 shared that: “We are living in Yemen. We want to be free. The war has hurt all of us, especially elders, women, and children.” Rather than considering this personal impact a barrier to mediation, I conclude that it motivates actors to invest in peace rather than solely their own political careers. Yemenis may be divided, but they also truly want a resolution to this conflict since it impacts their own lives. Most Yemeni interviews ended with a call or even prayer for peace. When asked what he wants to see, interviewee 1 shared: “I would like to see myself back in Yemen. A country that goes to a normal life, politically and economically,” demonstrating the personal desire for a better country that all Yemenis share.

In addition to being invested in peace, members of civil society, which includes tribes, were not biased toward any party in particular. They understood that all parties had made mistakes, but also had legitimate claims. The IRG was the legitimate government in 2015 and Ansar Allah has a long history of historic injustice at the hands of the central government (Riedel, 2017). When talking to members of civil society, none ever noted a preference toward a political party, but rather a general disgust with the war. If they were to critique an actor, it was often the United Nations. In fact, when narrating the conflict, civil society actors tended to focus on the consequences of the conflict not the warring parties or broader geopolitical tensions. As such, they were able to operate on the ground with local trust and contribute to everyday peace. This included prisoner exchanges, youth reconciliation programmes, and finding disappeared Yemenis. Importantly, women were essential to this process with two female participants starting reconciliation groups geared toward women.

However, not everyone agrees on what will result in a “normal life,” with party members remaining divided on key issues resulting in different perceptions of mediation success. This includes calling for one side to resign or blaming it for being unwilling to compromise. Often, this was IRG members disavowing Ansar Allah and claiming they will never compromise. As interviewee 10 shared on the success of Omani mediation: “It’s successful in the short term, but not deep enough. It’s rubbing oil on wounds. They are too appeasing. Are Omanis accepting this because of the gun?” implying that Oman is only in contact with Ansar Allah out of fear of attacks by the group. Given the IRG’s fear of being sidelined if there is a peace deal that would pave the way for Ansar Allah to officially become the government, there is some resentment toward Oman. Both IRG members interviewed were frustrated with Oman. Yet, both still acknowledged Oman’s essential role. When asked to compare which level of mediation was more successful (local, regional, or international), the same interlocutor stated: “So far, Oman has been better based on

outcome.” Despite their own political careers being at stake, IRG members still are aware that Oman has made essential progress within the country. On the other hand, Ansar Allah members did not critique opposing parties, but rather the US and Saudi Arabia. Since they view the opposing parties as proxies, they tended to focus on the states that back them rather than the parties themselves.

Despite these divergences, all Yemeni participants shared gratitude toward Oman for its role in the peace process and hope for peace within their country. As one UN interlocutor shared, locals understand the divisions on the ground in a “better way” as “it’s their country and where they will live.” Even if a Yemeni is biased toward one party or concerned that Omani mediated peace may threaten their political power, the conflict impacts them and their loved ones. Interestingly, while parties sidelined were frustrated due to their own political aspirations, they still voiced gratitude toward Oman. For Yemenis, Omani mediation is not just a political process, but rather a means of creating a future for their country. Across the political spectrum, Yemenis are invested in Omani mediation because not being invested entails giving up on your own country. This level of bias provides motivation, even in cases of tenacious politicians.

### **Regional Bias**

In Yemen, the most active regional mediator has been Oman, with notable successes, including prisoner exchanges and official meetings. Oman’s reputation of neutrality, with some even describing it as the “Switzerland of the Middle East,” places it in a unique position to address conflicts in the region (Morrison, 2020). This is because Oman understands its limitations and its precarious situation in a region rift with conflict. As interviewee 15 states: “We are in a hot spot: UAE, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen.” Given its proximity to nations in conflict with each other, Oman is cautious and attempts to maintain friendly relations with these countries, despite them being in conflict with each other. Oman cannot prefer any side over the other without the risk of material consequences. This neutrality has allowed Oman to maintain diplomatic relations with all countries in the region and host negotiations, with the Iran deal being the most famous example. Even in 1980, Oman maintained neutrality during the Iran-Iraq war and leveraged its neutrality to facilitate negotiations (Cafiero, 2024).

Furthermore, it appears from the perception of interviewees that Oman is interested in maintaining regional stability as a means to ensure continued stability within its own borders, which the war in Yemen threatens. Buzan defines a security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” (Buzan, 1991: 190). Borrowing from his work, I will utilise regional security complex theory as a framework to analyse Oman’s role in Yemen. In the case of Oman, Yemen represents a humanitarian burden, with Oman treating Yemeni war victims and providing aid, and a security challenge on its border. As such, resolving the conflict in Yemen is intrinsically linked to Oman’s own national security and economic interests. As interviewee 20 shared: “If your neighbor has a

sickness, you support them, so the sickness does not reach you.” This is a sentiment regional actors understand well. When civil war broke out in Uganda, Kenya was concerned about the potential destabilizing effect with one Kenyan government minister explicitly stating: “One Chad is enough” (Khadiagala, 2007).

When narrating the Yemen war, all Omani interlocutors described the security threat it posed to Oman. As interviewee 11 stated: “There is fear this war expands. The tribes on the border are mixed – they hold both citizenships.” Similarly, one of the reasons Burundi offered to mediate in the Rwandan Civil war was that Burundi had a similar ethnic mix as Rwanda. As such, Burundian leaders were afraid that the conflict may spill over (Jones, 1999). This fear partly stems from what interviewee 19 describes as “a lot of complex issues at societal levels...If you look into Oman’s identity from the sociological perspective, it is almost impossible to call it a society. We are multiple societies- ethnically and religiously.” Given this diverse religious and ethnic make-up, Oman is always trying to preserve its national unity, which a war on its border consisting of both a religiously and ethnically similar population threatens. This links Omani and Yemeni national securities with a conflict in one country impacting its neighboring countries’ similar population.

Due to this security threat Oman is investing heavily on the border, which Omani interlocutors found concerning. Three Omani interlocutors narrated that this fear partly stems from concerns that fighters might pour into their border, but also that their own population might try to join the fight. As interviewee 18 narrated, when visiting the border, he was often stopped by Omani security forces in disguise asking if he wants to participate in military activity. After saying no multiple times, he finally said yes to see who the people were and was promptly sent to a police station. While this is a security situation for a monarchy attempting to maintain order among its population, it is also expensive for Oman to maintain such high security on a 294-kilometer border. Interviewee 11 stated: “instead of spending millions on the army, we can build roads and hospitals.” Thus, the security situation in Yemen is also a fiscal burden for Oman, a country that is trying to speed up its development to keep up with the rest of the Gulf.

In addition to the perceived threat of internal destabilization, concern over increase of regional troops on its border was narrated by most Omani interlocutors. Interviewee 18 described Oman’s policy in Yemen as “a security policy not diplomatic policy” partly due to terrorism, local trends in Yemen impacting the religious make up of Oman, “but mainly [because] the Saudis are on our border.” Put simply: “Removal of foreign forces is the issue. The idea is: are we next?” Interviewee 19 also shared a similar sentiment that “when Saudis and the UAE started interfering in south Yemen, it became an issue especially after the Qatar blockade. Oman was considered next to Qatar as the second target.” The blockade of Qatar was a shifting point in Gulf politics with the extreme nature of isolation and attacks, including designating 59 Qataris as terrorists and prohibiting screenings of Al Jazeera resulting in increased fear among Gulf States, particularly Oman (Gordon et al., 2017). Interviewee 16 vocalised a similar sentiment stating: “They do not want instability. They do not want the Saudis to interfere too much because they are afraid Saudi Arabia and the UAE will threaten Oman.”

For Oman, the military presence of two wealthy countries with increasing regional aspirations is a worrying trend.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have increasingly militarised their borders with Yemen, which interlocutors perceived as a potential threat to Omani sovereignty. This is partly due to historical tensions over borders, but also religious tensions with Oman being a majority Ibadi nation in a majority Sunni Gulf. As interviewee 16 stated: “If we go to Saudi Arabia, they treat everyone who is not part of their line as kaffir, not part of Islam.” Kaffir is an extreme term for infidel signaling the high level of concern over potential religious persecution and Saudi influence within Oman.

### **Gulf Tensions: Proximity, Intimacy and Hostility**

While Gulf countries are commonly depicted as “brothers,” there is much tension between these countries that are constantly competing with each other. This tension is political, economic, and even personal. As interviewee 20 shared: “If Yemen falls, imagine your neighbor is held by devils.” The devils in question is a veiled reference to both the UAE and Saudi Arabia – two countries that Oman has historical tensions with due to border disputes and that have opposed the Omani government at certain points. As interviewee 20 continued to describe: “Gulf politics is ignorance. We are not united. They [the rest of the Gulf] call us the Indians of the Gulf – the workers.” This demonstrates the personal nature of the tensions with root causes such as elitism and racism over the poorer and more ethnically diverse Oman.

Other Omanis also narrated that Gulf divisions and animosity mainly stem from the regional ambitions of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and the two countries’ lack of strategy in implementing their intervention into Yemen. Many lamented that with “the billions spent on this war, they could have spent a fourth on schools and improve lives” which would have been more effective for the region at large. As interviewee 14 noted in response to what would you like to see: “Yemen united, democratic. Full of prosperity and wealth.” Rather than viewing a strong Yemen as a threat, Oman understands that a stable Yemen benefits the region at large. Therefore, they encourage both peace and integration within the Gulf. Interviewee 11 shared: “Oman wanted Yemen to be the seventh country in the GCC. Why? To lift Yemen’s stability and economic ability.” This is not a selfless act, but rather a practical one with key economic and security implications. Oman understands that Yemen is part of the Gulf and leaving one country behind will have broader ramifications on the GCC at large.

In contrast to Omani perceptions of Saudi and UAE interests within their own borders, Yemenis believe that Omani interests within their country are not malign. As interviewee 9 shared, “others are just trying to rule Yemen... Oman just wants a safe border.” Interviewee 4 agreed: “Oman has helped and the reasons for this are known. They truly want peace which Yemenis notice. Yemenis are okay with their involvement.” Due to their simple desire for stability rather than influence within

Yemen with no preference for one party over the other, “Oman has all Yemeni sides with it.” Even Omanis recognised the legitimacy their intentions offered, with interviewee 13 stating: “We are good at this because our intentions are pure. You can lie one day, not forever.” This demonstrates the power of proximity, intimacy, and repeated engagement with Yemen. As Abler et al. (1971: 75) argue: “the spaces in which people live are much more psychological than absolute.” While proximity ensures that Yemen and Oman are linked, the sustained engagement by Oman and efforts to build good relations with Yemen have created a sense of genuine appreciation among the Yemeni population. Interviewee 3 said other Omanis noted Yemeni perception of their intentions. Unlike the UN, which was disconnected from the local population, the Omanis were well-informed and in communication with local actors to remain transparent in their goals. As interviewee 20 noted: “When you enter a relationship, you must show the real you.” This “real you” is in reference to the aims of the relationships which interviewee 19 describes: “No regional hegemonic ambitions. No interest in interfering in other countries’ internal affairs. We choose to be neutral which gained us trust.” Interviewee 16 also vocalised the benefits of neutrality: “Everyone understands that Oman is not favoring Saudi Arabia or Yemen. There is trust in Oman.” By remaining neutral and maintaining ambitions of peace in Yemen rather than conquest, Oman is able to operate as a mediator with local support.

However, there were material consequences for Oman not joining the rest of the Gulf in the Saudi-led intervention. As interviewee 15 noted: “We are doing a lot of effort to convince Saudi Arabia that we are not with Ansar Allah. We will not engage in any military action. We are here if you need diplomacy. We have had a lot of issues with the Saudis about this. They are not pragmatic; they are emotional.” This is in direct contrast to rational choice theory that conceives individuals as goal-oriented actors that pursue the best available means to achieve an aim (Booth et al., 1993). I am not arguing that Gulf actors are irrational, but rather we cannot assume states always make rational decisions. Emotions and other non-material factors such as identity may influence a state’s decision and they may not always make the most logical routes to achieve their goals.

By not being the only country in the Gulf to not join the coalition, Oman was considered to be biased toward Ansar Allah by the Saudis in the initial phase of the war. Interviewee 19 described these costs: “Lots of accusations. Oman paid a price for this. In terms of investment and joint projects, Oman lost a lot. Some neighboring countries would ask for a project then not let it go anywhere just to kill it. Even at the political level, Oman has paid highly.” These costs are explicitly clear on the ground in Yemen. Oman was the only Gulf country to not close its embassy in Sanaa. Saudi Arabia then bombed the said embassy. Interviewee 16 notes: “It’s clear they targeted the embassy. Two days later, there were negotiations to release Saudi prisoners. [Omanis were] trying to show Saudi Arabia this [Omani diplomacy] is in their interest.” Omani interlocutors narrated the material costs of their neutrality in Yemen, but they also stressed the long-term benefits of remaining neutral.

### **Regional Strategy**

Despite these costs, Oman remained neutral because Omanis understood this was in the Gulf's long term-interest, which Saudi Arabia also eventually realised. When describing Omani-Saudi relations, interviewee 15 notes that "before 2020, not that good. Cold. Currently good though." When asked what changed after 2020, the interviewee continues to state: "They were not able to understand Oman's relationship with Iran and Yemen. They would complain that Oman is with Yemen and Iran and Qatar. The new foreign minister understands." This demonstrates the pressure Oman was under due to its stance of neutrality within a tense region. However, Saudi Arabia eventually realised that it is unable to militarily defeat Ansar Allah and must pursue peace talks. Since Oman maintained relationships with all relevant Yemeni parties, it was the only country that was positioned to host and facilitate these talks.

Rather than pursue short-term benefit to avoid the ire of Saudi Arabia, Oman understood that the war in Yemen requires a diplomatic end and that its status as neutral is more important than economic costs. When describing the military aspects of the war interviewee 15 notes: "The Ottomans weren't able to colonise Yemen. Yemen's geography and people are tough. They are used to fighting – it's their land." For Omani interlocutors, this war was an impractical endeavor given Yemen's terrain and population. After nearly a decade of war, Saudi Arabia also recognised that a military victory is impossible in Yemen. As such, the Saudis have started to engage in negotiations with Ansar Allah in Muscat. Importantly, Oman recognises its neutrality and diplomatic ability as a key source of its power in the region. When discussing Oman's neutrality, interviewee 16 notes: "Oman is always trying to preserve itself. Oman is not trying to deeply go into Arab affairs; trying deeply to protect." This is because Oman understands its limitations.

Given their country's limited resources in comparison to other countries in the Gulf, Omanis perceived their political and economic position as precarious and sought out non-traditional forms of power to maintain stability. Interviewee 14 notes: "We are a small country. We cannot afford to have enemies. Better position if we are peaceful." Rather than considering power as economic and military might, the Omanis understand that power can lie in influence and legitimacy. Interviewee 15 builds upon this by stating: "We have clever leadership. They identified that our strength is not military, not in finances. We have to be realistic. Our people searched for strengths compared to our neighbors." The neighbors in question have actively hostile relations with each other which requires Oman to find a gap that diplomacy serves. As interviewee 20 notes: "Politics in the Gulf is not a success. We are not brothers." Instead, interlocutors noted that relationships between GCC countries are tense and require high levels of sensitivity and tact. As such, Oman is aware of its capabilities, limitations, and the realities of operating in the Gulf with said capabilities and limitations.

Not only is Oman not as strong as the other countries in the Gulf, but it also has a large population and country to develop. Sultan Qaboos was distinctly aware of these challenges and focused on development. When describing Sultan Qaboos,

who set the stones for Oman's diplomacy, interviewee 13 shared the three priorities for the late Sultan: health, education, and poverty. Rather than invest in wars, Oman wants to prioritise its country's economic development, which the rest of the Gulf is starting to agree with. To this day, the priority for Omani policymakers remains health, education, and poverty. While there are broader geopolitical tensions, Oman remains committed to these three aims which conflicts on its border threaten.

Regional security complex theory stresses that "the uniqueness of particular regional contexts must be highlighted and interrogated" (Walsh, 2020). This is essential as regional actors such as Oman are responding to their own contexts rather than great power competition. In reference to Oman's population and size, interviewee 18 describes Oman's role as the Switzerland of the Middle East as "not a decision. It's fate." Accordingly, Oman prefers to remain impartial while also pursuing peace to ensure its own economic stability given its own limitations. When analyzing Chinese policy toward North Korea, Tuva states that "in prioritising a lower level of analysis than more abstract systemic theories, RSCT [regional security complex theory] offers a practical framework for security analysis and a better chance of reflecting the real concerns of policy-makers" (Tuva, 2004). In Oman, these real concerns are the health, education, and economic challenges of its population, not a broader system of international politics. However, the conflict in Yemen threatens these aims due to the high cost of maintaining security forces on the border, potential for internal radicalization, and increased influence of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in a neighboring country. Thus, Yemen and Oman's security interests are linked with a stable Yemen offering a path forward for both countries.

### **Unpacking Strategic Bias**

While there is debate about the effectiveness of bias, I conclude that strategic bias is necessary for successful mediation in Yemen. This not only entails equal stake in each warring party, but also an invested interest in peace. My term builds upon Smith's definition of "unbiased mediators" as a third party that has equal stake in each side of the conflict, which makes them unable to favor one over the other (Smith, 1985). While mediation often requires impartiality, this condition is unlikely to be met within the realm of international politics. Thus, we must accept a certain degree of bias among mediators. When countries intervene in a conflict, they are most likely doing so with a degree of self-interest, which the warring parties themselves recognise. In 1985, during the Nairobi Peace Agreement to end the civil war in Uganda, it was explicitly stated that "instability in any one of the nations is a threat to the peace and stability of the whole East African region." A country intervening as a mediator in a conflict to protect its border or back its proxy is well noted among local and regional actors. Equally important, warring parties and everyday citizens are aware of mediator preference toward certain factions.

Commonly depicted as sectarian entities (Huntington, 1997), Middle Eastern populations are political actors who are cognizant of fundamental structural challenges within international institutions. The average Yemeni is aware of UN

action within their country, not because of anti-Western propaganda, but because of key political decisions that impact their daily life made by the organization. In view of that, when we consider mediators, we must also consider local populations' perceptions of them. This is not to say that Yemenis do not hold their own biases; those within political parties in particular demonstrate this is not the case. However, the war is a fundamental threat to the lives and futures of the majority of Yemenis. In a similar vein, the war in Yemen threatens Oman's economic and security stability, making it invested in conflict mediation. Since Oman provides medical treatment and aid to Yemeni civilians, the conflict is a humanitarian burden for the small country. At the same time, Oman is part of the GCC and must maintain positive relations with its strong neighbor: Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Oman is unable to choose between either side, and the conflict is linked to the country's national security and economic well-being. The same cannot be said of the UN in which Saudi Arabia and its Western allies have disproportionate power and representation. Furthermore, the war is not a fundamental threat to the UN, but rather a slight embarrassment for the institution and a career opportunity for some UN officials.

Strategic bias, the combination of impartiality and a vested interest in peace, can serve as a form of legitimacy for mediators. Suchman defines legitimacy as a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995). Within mediation, a third party should: a) not favor one warring party over the other; and b) remain invested in peace. If a mediator's motivations do not align with local interests, local actors may be less willing to engage with the third party. That is not to say that the selfish interests of mediators are inherently problematic, but that they should not conflict with on-the-ground interests. While some argue that legitimacy depends on output with Scharpf arguing that legitimacy stems from the ability of an institution to enhance the common welfare of a given constituency by effectively solving problems, this view of legitimacy is pre-determined (Scharpf, 1999). Rather than simply consider an actor legitimate if it succeeds, which is an argument often made in reference to international organizations (Gutner and Thompson, 2010), this research aims to understand the factors that *result* in mediation success.

## **Conclusion**

Strategic bias, a condition in which a mediator has equal stake in both sides and a vested interest in peace, is a form of legitimacy that builds mediator trust with locals and warring parties. In international conflict mediation, most mediators will involve themselves due to their own personal biases. Rather than dismiss bias altogether, this research aims to analyse potential benefits and consequences of different types of bias. Commonly, the UN is assumed to be unbiased, yet it has clearly sidelined Ansar Allah and favored Saudi Arabia in Yemen due to the two sides' own structural inequalities. Furthermore, UN officials are not invested in the conflict, which can be seen in how they narrate the war, but rather in their own political careers, which increases Yemeni distrust in UN officials. That said, Yemenis

also hold their own biases. Despite the fact that most Yemenis are invested in peace, Yemenis from political parties hold biases that impact their perceptions of mediators. Yet, Yemeni mediators themselves are able to operate on the ground due to their neutrality toward the parties and community buy-in. In a similar vein, Oman is impartial since it is unable to favor either Ansar Allah or Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Oman wants the conflict to end due to its own security interests, which Yemenis are aware of and, in turn, thus bolstering Oman's legitimacy as a mediator. Despite this lack of bias toward any party in the conflict, Oman faced material and political consequences for not siding with the rest of the Gulf in Yemen. However, this decision to engage in mediation in Yemen was based on Oman's long-term strategy of neutrality as preservation. While the rest of the Gulf initially disagreed, they are now utilizing Oman's relationship with Ansar Allah to negotiate in Muscat. Oman considers this mediation ability in a divided region as a source of power, and Yemen is proving this to be the case. This is anticipated by regional security complex theory as it recognises a certain level of interdependence between regional actors, which may facilitate mediation efforts. While mediation literature often argues that a mediator should remain impartial, my findings suggest that Omani investment in the peace process has provided utility in building on the ground legitimacy. Thus, certain levels of bias may be useful for a mediator.

## Appendix A

### Anonymised List of Interviews

<i>ID</i>	<i>Actor Type</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
1	Yemeni	In-person	Saleh Government
2	Yemeni	In-person	Ansar Allah
3	Yemeni	In-person	IRG
4	Yemeni	In-person	Saleh Government
5	Yemeni	Online	Civil society
6	Yemeni	Online	Civil society
7	Yemeni	In-person	Ansar Allah
8	Yemeni	Online	Civil society
9	Yemeni	In-person	Islah party
10	Yemeni	Online	IRG
11	Omani	In-person	Politics
12	Omani	In-person	Former diplomat
13	Omani	In-person	Media*
14	Omani	In-person	Politics
15	Omani	In-person	Media*
16	Omani	In-person	Politics
17	Omani	Online	Researcher
18	Omani	In-person	Expert
19	Omani	In-person	Expert

(Continued)

<i>ID</i>	<i>Actor Type</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
20	Omani	In-person	Media*
21	Omani	In-person	Researcher
22	UN	Online	Special Envoy
23	UN	Online	Special Envoy
24	UN	Online	Special Envoy
25	UN	In-person	Special Envoy
26	UN	Online	Special Envoy
27	UN	In-person	Special Envoy
28	UN	Online	Humanitarian
29	UN	In-person	UN office
30	UN	Online	Special Envoy

\* While their official job title is media, these interlocutors are elites who frequent inaccessible political spaces and offer unofficial expertise to government officials.

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# 7 Climate Change and the Challenges of Peacebuilding and Reconstruction in Yemen

*Bikem Ekberzade*

## **Introduction**

At this juncture with climate change, disadvantaged populations in underprivileged nations, especially where long-term conflict debilitated the infrastructure, are often left to bear the brunt of climate change triggered risks from potential geohazards. Furthermore, in these regions that have been impacted by long episodes of war and conflict, or that are struggling with poverty and lack of infrastructure, scientific data that is crucial to making evidence-based, relevant and practical recommendations to combat climate change triggered hazards, may not always be present. This may hinder efforts to forewarn populations about potential natural disasters, implement measures to brace for their impact, or build effective early warning systems in data poor regions of the earth. When reliable continuous monitoring data are unavailable due to a lack of ground stations, remote sensing datasets, notwithstanding their shortcomings, become viable alternatives to analyse the short-, medium- and long-term effects of changes in climatic factors on ecosystems and human populations.

Yemen, afflicted by long periods of civil war, and situated at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is home to critically threatened ecosystems. With coasts on the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, the country is open to effects of powerful atmospheric low-level circulations such as the monsoons; rising sea level temperatures; and increasing length of drought episodes followed by extreme precipitation leading to fatal floods and landslides. The mountainous regions in the country are prone to erosion from lack of vegetative cover, and areas where families do subsistence farming are similarly inflicted by drought and flash floods mainly due to episodes of short, intense precipitation. While lives in Yemen are at more risk today from climate related hazards than ever before, the ongoing civil war is only making matters worse.

At the current state of climate change, disadvantaged populations living in underprivileged nations, primarily in places that are being affected by long-term conflict, are often left to bear the brunt of climate-triggered risks from potential geohazards. In these regions, infrastructure may already be lacking or damaged, and coupled with additional adversities from ongoing conflicts, geohazards may turn into complex emergencies, with cascading effects. With scientific data crucial to making evidence-based, relevant, and practical recommendations to combat

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-8

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climate change triggered emergencies not always present, acute health risks and increase in fatalities may become inevitable. For regions where reliable, continuous, and long-term data are missing, projections and forecasts can be made using global datasets that derive information from external sources, including remote sensing outputs. However, these datasets may inherit errors, their spatiotemporal resolution may be coarse, or their coverage may be shorter than required to train models. All of these factors affect the accuracy of projections, which in turn hinder emergency response in the short term, or policy making in the long term.

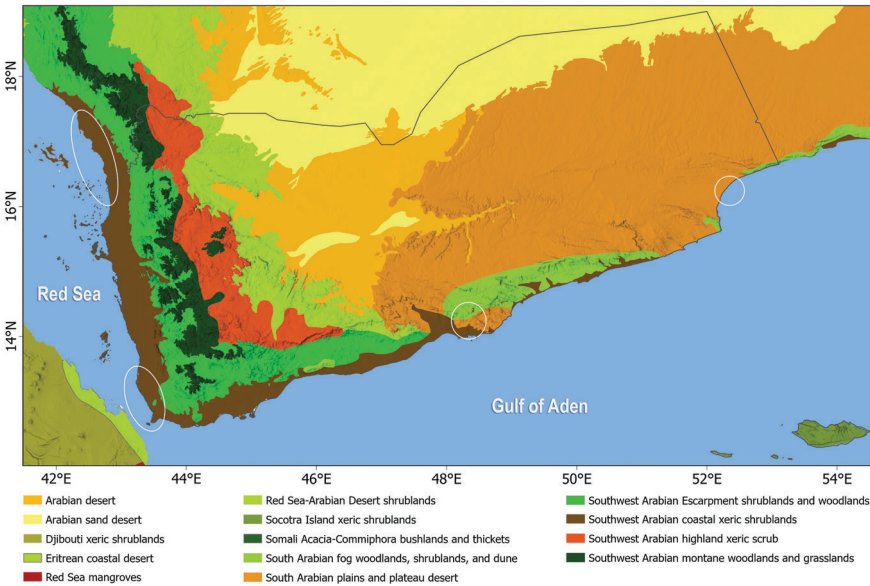
In the case of Yemen, a war-torn region since the 1960s, with an ongoing civil war, most of these limitations on available data exist and make scientific analyses difficult. By location alone, Yemen is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The country currently faces two main challenges: the lack of scientific policy and governance, and economic means to muster change to protect its population from the risks of climate change. With reliable satellite imagery for the Arabian Peninsula prior to 1998 not readily available, where ground observations are limited, patchy, or for certain periods simply do not exist, accurately forecasting climate dynamics and the changes in disturbance cycles for this region becomes a challenge. However, by bringing together information from a number of sources including global reanalysis datasets, and comparing these with historical data reported by scientific, humanitarian and news reports from the region, general assessments can be made.

This chapter highlights the challenges that Yemen faces in the near future induced by climate change. It covers some of the risks and challenges the country faces under a changing climate, while providing a general analysis of the key climatic and anthropogenic drivers that are affecting the region, and how they are expected to change under the current state of rising emissions, and in the age of the Anthropocene<sup>1</sup>. It will also propose a roadmap to mitigate the adverse effects of potential changes in the disturbance cycles, and make suggestions as to what national and international actors such as policy makers, humanitarian and aid agencies, conservationists and scientists with the capacity and mandate to assist the Yemeni people, can do to help.

### **Terrestrial Ecosystems and Geomorphology**

Yemen, due to its complex geography, including mountainous terrain, lowlands, coastal zones and islands, is home to critically threatened marine and terrestrial ecosystems including the coral reefs of the Hanish Islands, the unmatched biodiversity and endemism of the Socotra archipelago, and the mangroves including those at the Shawran crater lake near Bir Ali (Figure 7.1). The latter is one of the few examples of these important ecosystems that exist inland (Nagi et al., 2012; Nagi and Abubakr, 2013), and thus should be considered a conservation priority, primarily from a climate change perspective.

In regions that are afflicted by long periods of conflict, protection of ecosystems may not always be a priority. However, considering the land-atmosphere feedback mechanisms such as potential changes in temperature and precipitation patterns in



*Figure 7.1* Terrestrial ecoregions of Yemen and its immediate surroundings, including the Socotra archipelago (WWF, 2017). The areas for the mangrove habitats have been circled in as relative demarcations mentioned in Nagi and Abubakr (2013).

regions which undergo heavy modification of their landcover, especially under a changing climate and despite political turmoil, it is imperative that the conservation and restoration of existing ecosystems in critical geographical regions such as Yemen should be an utmost priority. Considering the several ecosystem services these habitats may offer to the livelihoods of the people, during and in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, national and international efforts at peacebuilding should also include work to secure the well-being of these habitats.

### ***Mangroves***

While the mangrove habitats, such as those that are scattered along the shoreline in patches both on mainland and on the Socotra island, are important for biodiversity (Nagi et al., 2012; Al-Scwafi et al., 2017), the existing fragments along the Yemeni coastline may also act as effective protective barriers against potential storm surges from cyclones and tropical storms (Figure 7.1; Liu et al., 2013; Menendez et al., 2020; Martin and Schipper, 2024), the intensity of which is predicted to increase with climate change (IPCC, 2021). Furthermore, mangrove ecosystems harbor high capacities for carbon sequestration when undisturbed, and are active agents for land stabilization (Mahmood et al., 2023) and flood mitigation (UNEP-WMCC, 2014).

In Yemen, these critical habitats have historically been under pressure from anthropogenic sources such as urban expansion, pollution (including oil spills), removal by cutting, and animal grazing (Nagi and Abubakr, 2013). Thus, making an urgent re-assessment of the current state of mangroves for the country with a plan to protect the existing patches, restore degraded areas – with a special focus on those that historically inhabited the shores of the Arabian Sea – and help them regain their capacity to act as protective barriers is vital. Allowing these critical ecosystems room to expand would be beneficial for the livelihoods of the Yemeni people, especially those who live in coastal cities which are prone to flooding and open to the destructive effects of cyclones and tropical storms. These ecosystems also often support small-scale fisheries that use traditional methods, who in turn can widely benefit from their restoration, since healthy mangroves have the potential to act as nurseries and feeding ground for fish populations (Onrizal et al., 2020; UNEP, 2023), and the coastal areas in the eastern Arabian Sea act as upwelling zones aided by the monsoon winds between June and September, a factor that contributes to productivity and fish production in the region (Morcos and Abdallah, 2012; Narvekar et al., 2021; Derrick et al., 2023).

Last but not least, these ecosystems can be considered a nature-based solution toward the protection of fragile coastal marine ecosystems in Yemen, such as the threatened coral reefs, an important marine habitat not only from a biodiversity perspective but also due to their carbon sequestration potential. Because of the current political impasse their present-day condition is unknown, yet an urgent assessment needs to be made, since these vulnerable ecosystems are under pressure globally due to disturbances from anthropogenic sources, pollution, and climate change which affect changes in sea surface temperature and salinity (Andrello et al., 2021).

### *The Socotra Archipelago*

The island of Socotra in the Socotra Archipelago is renowned for its potential as a biodiversity hotspot. Portraying qualities of an island ecosystem, it harbors around 900 plant taxa, 307 of which are endemic (UNEP-WCMC, 2017; Saraf, 2021). High rates of diversity are also present within the Archipelago's marine ecosystem (Zajonz et al., 2019). However, habitats both terrestrial and marine are under threat from increasing anthropogenic pressures, including but not limited to pollution from oil spills and waste water; habitat fragmentation from mainly road construction on the main island (Miller et al., 2007); overgrazing; and tourism. Anthropogenic climate change is not helping matters either. The increase in marine heat waves is affecting vulnerable marine ecosystems that are open to their effects. Sessile organisms such as corals and sea-grass populations are among the most vulnerable (Goreau, 2024).

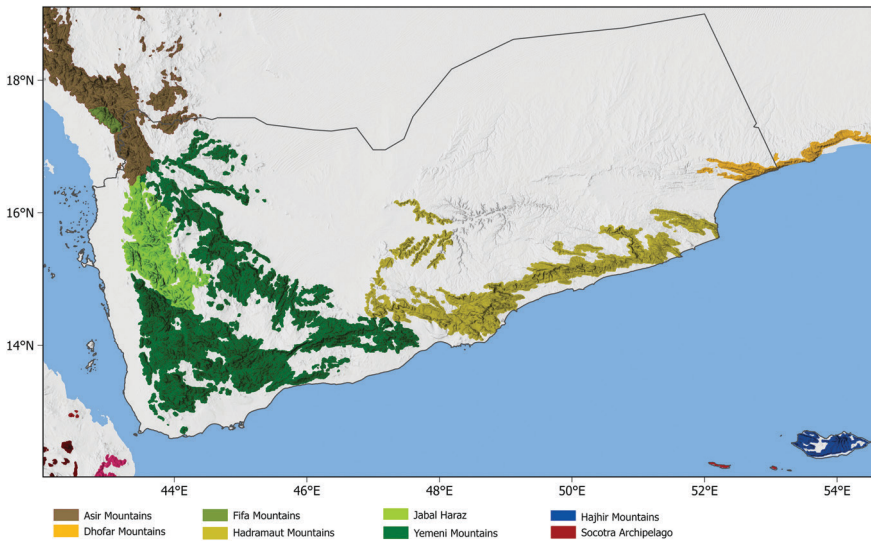
The reefs within the archipelago are also under pressure from ongoing and unsustainable practices, such as trawl and dynamite fishing (UNEP-WCMC, 2017). Expanding the existing marine reserve areas, such as those in Roosh and Dihamri Nature Reserves in the Socotra Archipelago, with the engagement of local

communities, and taking precautions against illegal fishing can help alleviate the pressures on these fragile ecosystems while offering a sustainable development alternative. Strengthening the local small-sized fisheries, preserving and encouraging traditional fishing techniques through capacity building and subsidies would also enhance the livelihoods of the communities by continuing to provide them with a vital income.

### *Topography and the Mountain Ecosystems*

With 2,500 kms of coastline, and in spite of the mountainous terrain in the west, Yemen is open to the effects of powerful atmospheric low-level circulations such as the monsoons, where rising sea level temperatures are further strengthening storms making landfall, and the increasing length of drought episodes followed by extreme precipitation leading to fatal floods and landslides.

Figure 7.2 shows the main mountain ranges in the country. Due to the lack of thick vegetative cover, the western highlands are especially prone to erosion that strips off nutrient rich topsoil, especially along the wadi banks, and potential floods and landslides following increasing episodes of short, intense precipitation. Rainwater from these short-term downpours is sufficient only to replenish the shallow ground water (Van Den Berg et al., 2021), and the sediment carried by flash floods along the wadis and down steep slopes in the affected mountainous regions may also further endanger the delicate marine habitats in the coastal zones of the country, where anthropogenic pollution is already present (Vineetha, 2020).



*Figure 7.2* Major mountains of Yemen, including the Socotra archipelago.

Source: Dinerstein et al., 2017.

Yemen is a country afflicted by long periods of armed conflict, and the surface run off from short term heavy precipitation poses the additional threat of randomly moving unexploded ordnance or UXOs (Project Masam, 2021) into areas where communities do subsistence farming (GICHHD, 2006). Another important result of the civil war in Yemen has been deforestation, especially in the mountain ranges. With many regions including the port areas rendered inaccessible during the height of the conflict, and blockades leading to critical shortages of fuel, firewood was turned to as a viable alternative for heating and cooking. This is not the first time that deforestation has been a direct result of conflict in a war-torn region (Daiyoub et al., 2023). In Yemen, according to news reports, every year, close to 900,000 trees were felled to keep the food sector operating in Sanaa alone (Abdullah, 2021).

Forests are important climate regulators, acting as potential mitigators against the adverse effects of climate change through an efficient land-atmosphere feedback mechanism (Bonan, 2008). In an arid, semi-arid region with sparse foliage cover, deforestation may have a wide range of consequences: increased evaporation, soil nutrient loss and subsequent erosion, an increase in surface temperatures, and even change in precipitation patterns. Yemen was once referred to as *Arabia Felix* due to its lush vegetation cover and fertile soils (Retsö, 2000). Yet as of 2021, the country harbors only 1% forest cover (World Bank Open Data, 2023), a fact that not only potentially exacerbates the effects of climate change, but also the impacts of climate-change triggered disturbances such as droughts and flash floods.

### ***Soil***

Alongside high levels of landslide risk in populated areas, in Yemen, farming communities are negatively affected by alternating episodes of drought and flash floods – mainly as a result of hydrophobia from lengthy exposure of soil to extreme temperatures during dry episodes, leading to a loss in its capacity to soak in the much-needed rain water. Figure 7.3a shows different climate regions for the country based on the Köppen-Geiger climate classification (Rubel and Kottek, 2010) highlighting the dominance of arid climate patterns, with small warm-temperate regions limited to the mountainous areas, surrounded by cold arid zones. Figure 7.3b shows the distribution of the main soil types in the region (FAO & IIASA, 2023). Main soil types found in the country are calcisols and gypsisols, typical of arid, semi-arid areas. Regosols are also found, typical of eroding lands where landcover has been changed or removed. In the absence of vegetation cover, these soil types are prone to high levels of wind and water erosion, especially in the wadi banks. In Yemen, the fertile luvisols suitable for agriculture in the temperate regions are restricted to only small patches inland. In a country where around 75% of the local population relies on agriculture (ICRC, 2022), sustainable use and preservation of soil resources, with consideration for terrestrial ecosystems such as natural vegetation and the existing few forest patches, is of utmost importance.

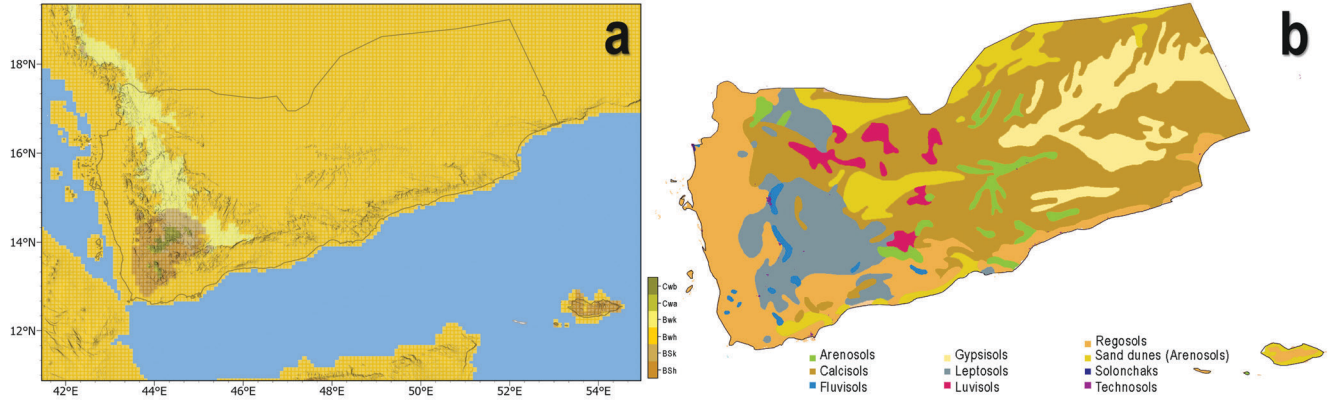


Figure 7.3 Different climate types in Yemen based on Köppen-Geiger classification (a), and the major soil types including the Socotra archipelago (b).

## **Population, Land Use Change and Geohazards**

The land use change (LUC) data for Yemen between 2000 and 2020 show a clear expansion of croplands in the western part of the country, between the Tihamah and the Yemeni and Jabal Haraz Mountain ranges (Figure 7.4). Also, both cropland and urban areas take over natural vegetation, including the woodlands and forested areas on both sides of the western mountain ranges, and in Wadi Hadramawt. When we take a closer look at the wadi, the expansion of stable cropland and urban expansion in this region becomes clear.

Figure 7.5a shows the population distribution by governorate according to the 2024 country-wide census, and Figure 7.5b shows the population density (UN adjusted) in 2020, as the number of individuals per hectare in 2020 (WorldPop, 2020). To continue on the Wadi Hadramawt example, where Figure 7.4 highlights the expanding built-up areas in the area, the maps in Figure 7.5 highlight the higher population densities along the wadi, as opposed to the rest of the governorate: Figure 7.5a marks the governorate as a highly populated region, and Figure 7.5b shows where the population aggregates. Population “islands” such as these in the wadi, where dense populations gather in small areas with limited carrying capacity, put a strain on the already limited resources. The adverse effects of conflict, climate change, and overcrowding may increase the risk and the potential number of fatalities from geohazards, such as floods and landslides.

The median of areas affected annually by precipitation-triggered landslides between the years 1980–2018 are shown in Figure 7.6a. Only landslides that cover an area greater than 100 m<sup>2</sup> are considered, and the legend numbers indicate the annual frequency per km<sup>2</sup>. Figure 7.6b shows the total hazard ranks as estimates. The areas are marked according to their estimated risk level. The data for both of the maps have been derived from a global dataset (Ove Arup & Partners International Ltd, 2020). When the maps in Figures 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6 are analysed together, they indicate that for the years 1980–2018, landslide occurrence and estimated high-risk areas overlap with dense population clusters in mountainous terrain in the west and in Wadi Hadramawt, where the anthropogenic interference on landcover is ongoing.

## **The Direct Effect of Climate on Geohazards**

### *Post-Monsoon Cyclogenesis in the Arabian Sea*

Due to the cyclogenesis<sup>2</sup> potential of the Arabian Sea, and as an arid, semi-arid country largely devoid of vegetation for soil cover, Yemen is prone to fatal flooding, particularly following the monsoon season. Post-monsoon tropical cyclones have hit the country (including those that affected mainly its coastal areas in passing, making landfall in neighboring Oman or Somaliland) almost on an annual basis, at times back-to-back within the same month with only days apart. The post-monsoon cyclones in the Arabian Sea are a natural phenomenon. However, with anthropogenic climate change, the increase in their frequency and severity (Evan

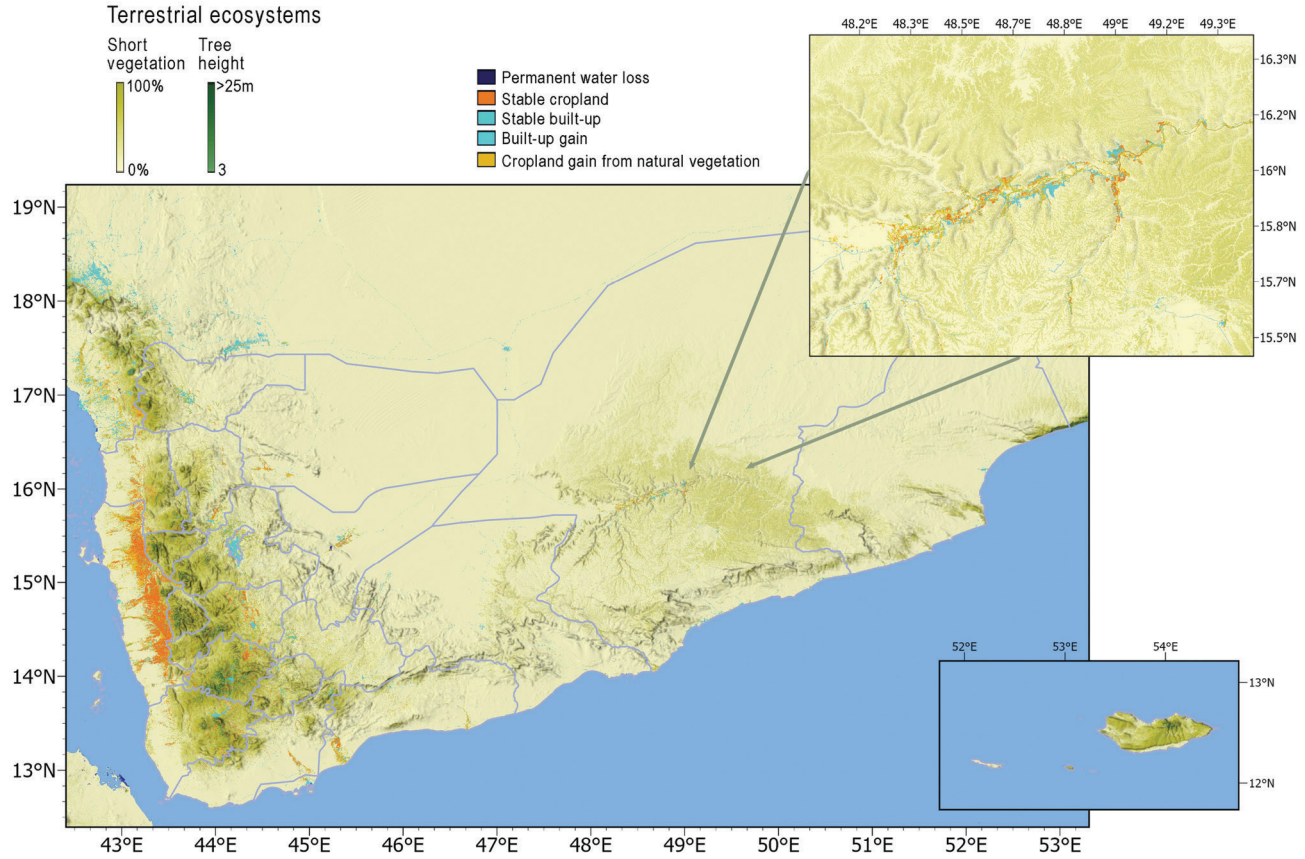


Figure 7.4 Land use land cover change data between 2000 and 2020.

Source: Potapov et al. 2022.

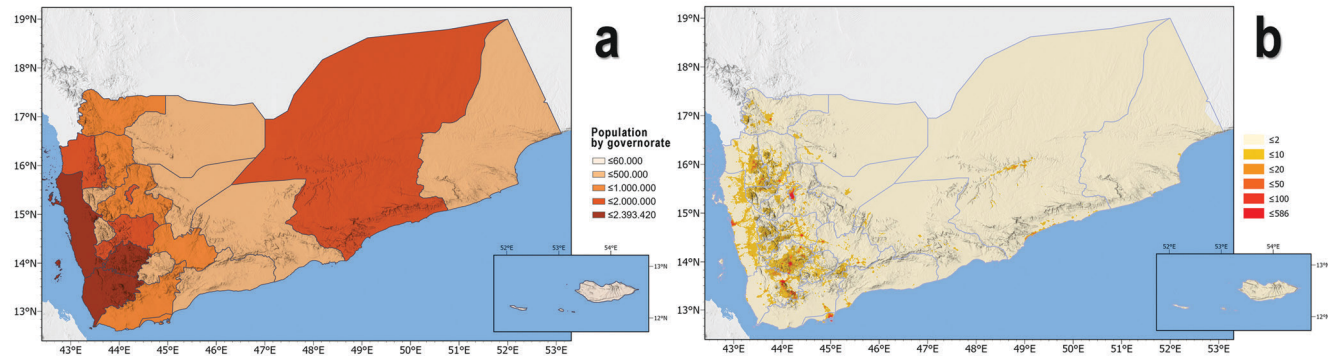


Figure 7.5 2014 census data (a) and 2020 population density estimation (b, UN adjusted). Population density estimate data is derived from the 2020 dataset and refers to the estimated number of individuals per hectare of land.

Source: WorldPop, 2020.

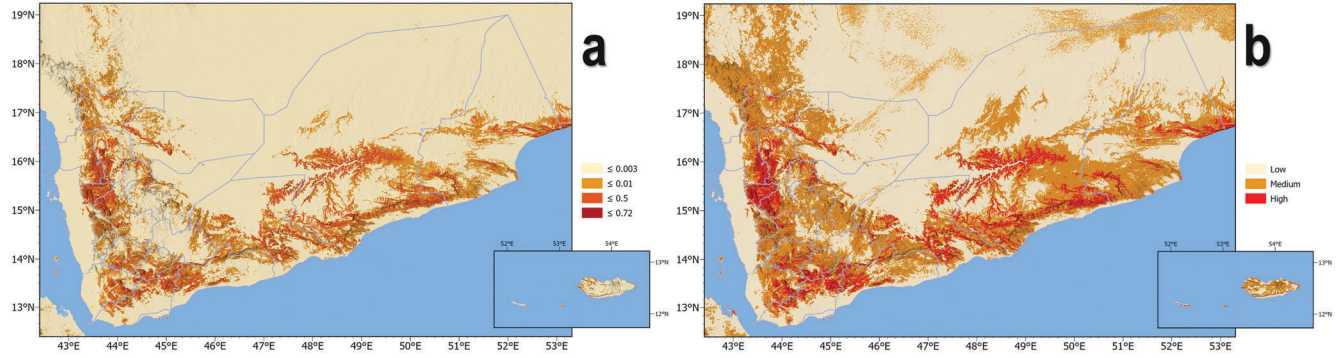


Figure 7.6 Number of precipitation-triggered landslides with impact greater than 100m<sup>2</sup> (a), estimated total hazard ranks (b).

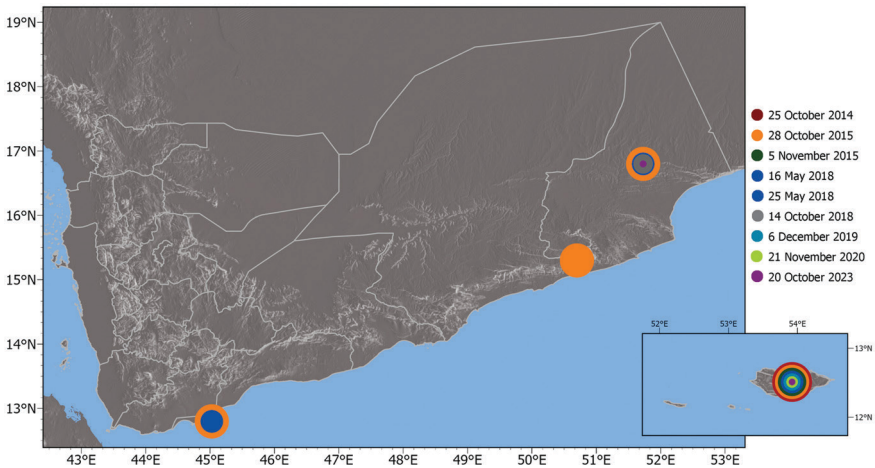
and Camargo, 2011), as a result of the increase in atmospheric moisture content mainly due to an increase in sea-surface temperatures (SST, see Vidya et al., 2023), is a risk that directly puts the lives and livelihoods of the Yemeni people in danger.

When some of these cyclones with greater impact for the last decade are analysed, the positive contribution of climate change to the cyclogenesis activity in the Arabian Sea – observed through an increase in the frequency of tropical storms and cyclones – and what it means for the region becomes clearer. Cyclone Chapala hit Yemen in October 2015 with heavy rains (close to 180 mm/day), and caused major flooding along the coastline and in the deposition zone of Wadi al-Masilah, one of the main river basins in Yemen (NASA, 2015a). Chapala was followed by Cyclone Megh only days after leaving 27 dead and the island of Socotra destroyed (FAO, 2015; NASA, 2015b). Cyclone Sagar formed in the Gulf of Aden in May 2018, making landfall in Somaliland and affecting the southern coast of Yemen and the Socotra archipelago (ReliefWeb, 2018). Only days after, Cyclone Mekunu made landfall in the same areas (OCHA, 2018). Few months later, Tropical Cyclone Luban hit the Yemeni coastline on October 2018 (Davies, 2018; NASA, 2018). A little more than a year later, Pawan made landfall on Socotra Island before heading over to Somaliland in December 2019 (ReliefWeb, 2019). A similar path was followed by Cyclone Gati in November 2020, affecting Socotra Island, and killing Yemeni fishermen in open water (ACAPS, 2020; *Arab News*, 2020).

In October 2023, Cyclone Tej gained strength in the Arabian Sea, approaching Socotra Island on 21 October and making landfall in mainland Yemen, in Al-Mahrah and Hadramawt governorates on 24 October. Although the cyclone recorded its peak wind speeds, 195 km/h, as it passed Socotra, the devastation was extensive in mainland with fatalities and extensive infrastructure damage reported by humanitarian agencies working in the region (OCHA Yemen, 2023). Cyclone Tej hit Yemen at a time when the country's health system was already facing difficulties from almost a decade of conflict, and heavy torrential rains further put a strain on these facilities posing a major challenge to post-disaster response (WHO, 2023). Figure 7.7 shows the locations and the dates where the cyclones between 2014–2018 made landfall. The southern coastal zones on mainland and the Socotra Island stand out as being the most vulnerable.

### ***Flash Floods***

During the flooding that was triggered by Cyclone Tej, the United Nations agency OCHA reported on the importance of early warning that saved lives (2023). In almost all of the flash flood episodes, precipitation levels that would be considered high for this region were recorded in relatively short time periods: 77mm in Aden in June 2019 and 48.3 mm in several governorates in July 2021 made landfall in 24 hours. On 21 April 2020, during another episode of heavy rainfall followed by flash floods in Aden, total precipitation was reported as 125 mm/day by the Yemen Meteorological Services (*FloodList News*, 2020). During Cyclone Tej in 2023, between 22 and 24 October, in the Omani towns of Rakhuyut and Dhalkut along the



*Figure 7.7* Cyclones that originated in the Arabian Sea and made landfall in Yemen between 2014 and 2018.

Yemeni border, 232 mm and 203 mm of total precipitation were recorded respectively, for the 3-day period (ClimaMeter, 2023).

In addition to the cyclones generated in the Arabian Sea, and as a direct result of increased intensities in precipitation on poor land cover, fatal flash floods mainly in the western and northwestern governorates in the country were recorded over the last decade. Table 7.1 lists the regions where and when major floods took place, and the number of fatalities from each event. The incidents listed in Table 7.1 include only the fatal floods and the figures have been aggregated from news and humanitarian agency reports as well as official announcements, between years 2013 and 2023.

The map in Figure 7.8 shows the cumulative fatalities per region from the floods listed in Table 7.1. Al-Mahwit, Taiz and Ibb governorates, all on mountainous terrain, stand out with higher fatalities. In addition to the loss of life, in all regions that experienced heavy flooding, extensive property damage, destroyed crops, water wells, and debilitated IDP camps were also reported, the latter having been left largely uninhabitable in the wake of these disasters. Post-flash flood risks, such as the potential relocation of UXOs penetrating into agricultural zones, continue to threaten livelihoods, and waterborne diseases are a primary threat in places where infrastructure is either destroyed by conflict, inadequate, or simply does not exist. Cholera, often caused by sewage mixing into the water supply, is a major concern, causing outbreaks that spread fast and pose a major challenge to the already strained health system of the country. The disease is a continuous health threat, and was responsible for 4,000 deaths between 2016 and 2021 (WHO, 2021). The most recent cholera outbreak was reported during the months of October–December

Table 7.1 Fatal floods, the regions affected and the number of reported casualties from each event

Date	Region(s) affected	Number of fatalities
August 2013	Taiz, Dhamar, Al-Mahwit, Ibb, Hajjah, Al-Hudaydah, Shabwah, Abyan	40 (UNOCHA, 2013)
May 2014	Sanaa	3
November 2015	Hadramawt, Shabwa	3
May 2016	Taiz	20
August 2016	Sanaa and surrounding areas	> 8
May 2018	Ibb, Marib, Socotra	> 6
October 2018	Al-Mahrah	> 3
June 2019	Aden	> 3
August 2019	Al-Mahwit, Hudaydah	> 12
March 2020	Aden	> 2
April 2020	Sanaa, Marib	> 9
May – August 2020	Marib, Hajjah, Raymah, Al-Mahwit, Al-Hudaydah	131, UXOs moved into non-contaminated areas (FloodList, 2020)
July 2021	Al-Mahrah, Hadramawt, Shabwa, Al-Jawf	14
April 2022	Hajjah, Marib, Dhamar, Saada	> 2
July, August 2022	Hajjah, Al-Hudaydah, Al-Mahwit, Raymah	> 63
October 2023	Al-Mahrah	6 (FloodList. n.d.)

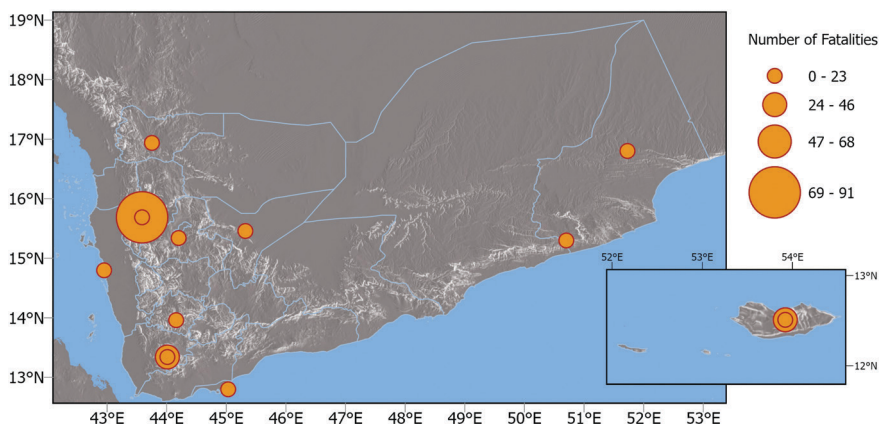


Figure 7.8 Fatalities from flooding, numbers and regions, between 2013 and 2023.

2023 in the aftermath of Cyclone Tej, where at least 20 people lost their lives and thousands of others were affected (ReliefWeb, 2023).

## **Climatic Drivers**

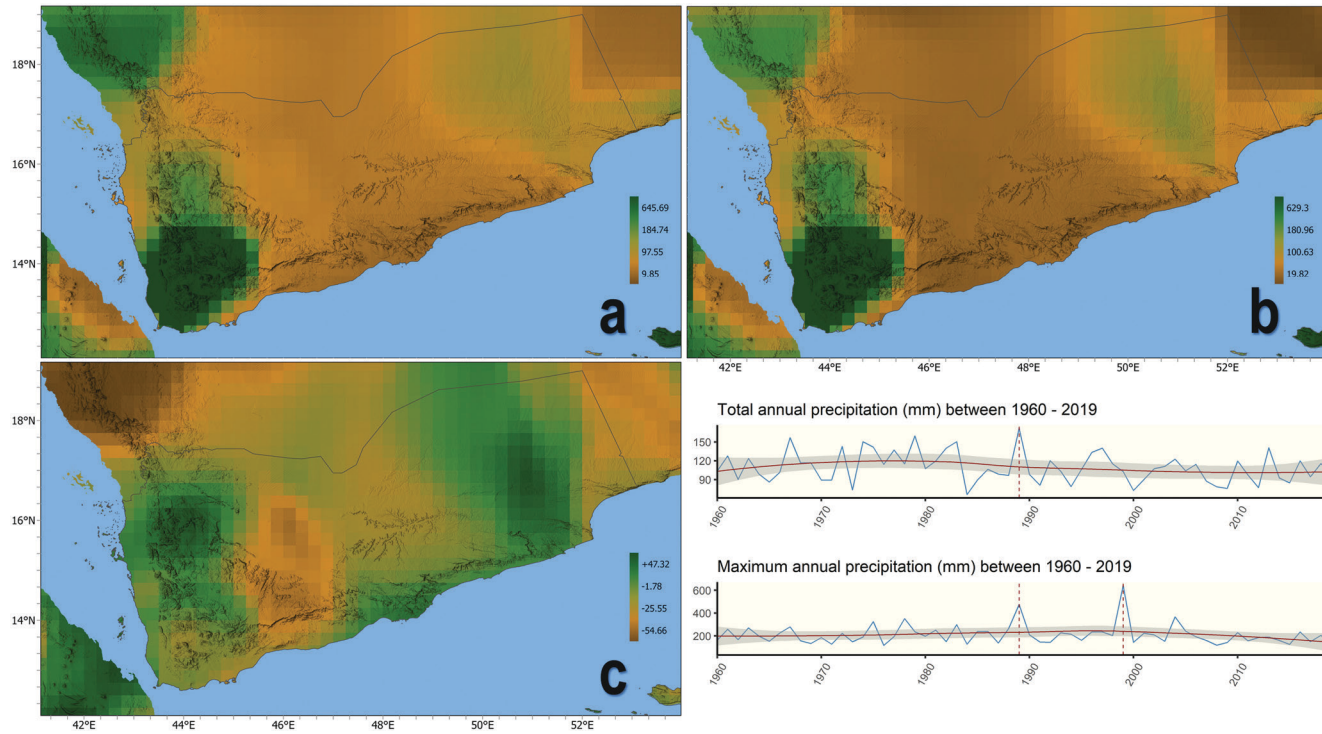
### *Precipitation*

Changes in precipitation patterns play an important role in the livelihoods of the people in Yemen, either in the form of persistent drought episodes, or extreme precipitation. Figures 7.9a and b show the 30-year mean of total annual precipitation for the region between 1961 and 1990, and 1997 and 2019 respectively, calculated from the Global Precipitation Climatology Center (GPCC) datasets (Schneider et al., 2020). Figure 7.9c shows the change between the two time periods. As can be seen in the 30 year means, the southwestern region received the highest levels of annual precipitation, although the maximum levels came down by around 20 mm annually. In contrast, the drier regions received around 10 mm more rainfall between the two time periods. The timeseries show total annual precipitation and the annual maxima respectively, with the vertical dashed lines marking La Niña years where extreme precipitation was recorded in this region: 476.1 mm for April 1989 and 642.78 mm for April 1999.

According to the International Disaster Database (EM-DAT, 2023), two major floods were reported for Yemen in 1989, both categorised as riverine in March and April of 1989. The flood in March affected mainly the eastern and central governorates. In April 1999, Socotra Island was listed as having been affected due to flooding (EM-DAT, 2023). The positive contribution of La Niña to the monsoons and El Niño to droughts in this region have previously been reported on both in the media and by humanitarian agencies working in the region (Rojas et al., 2014; Vidal, 2022).

Figures 7.10 and 7.11 show the monthly precipitation time series for maximum precipitation derived from NASA's Integrated Multi-satellite Retrievals (IMERG) remote sensing dataset. IMERG aggregates high quality accumulated daily precipitation from different satellite missions (Huffman et al., 2019). The extreme precipitation events, which were triggered by the cyclones and the fatal flood episodes listed in Table 7.1, can also be observed in this dataset. Figure 7.10 shows regional monthly maxima derived as monthly sums from the daily dataset for the period 2001–2023, and Figure 7.11 shows the same for years 2013–2023. The vertical dashed lines in Figure 7.11 correspond to three cyclone episodes, Sagar, Mekunu and Luban in 2018, and the heavy rains which led to fatal floods during the monsoon season in 2020.

Of these episodes, the estimated precipitation levels from the IMERG dataset for 24 May 2018 were 267.32 mm when Cyclone Mekunu made landfall on the coastal zone in Al-Mahrah; and 208.4 mm the next day, as it continued to move inland. Luban made landfall in Hadramawt on 14 October 2018. Maximum precipitation from 14–15 October are 105.5 mm/day and 199.6 mm/day, respectively. Two years later, on 31 May, 2020, torrential rains which started 3 days earlier



*Figure 7.9* Maps: total annual precipitation calculated as 30 year means from 1961–1990 (a), and 1991–2019 (b), and the change between the two time periods. Plots: total and maximum annual precipitation (mm) for the region between 1960–2019. All data is derived from the GPCC global dataset.

Source: Schneider et al. 2020.

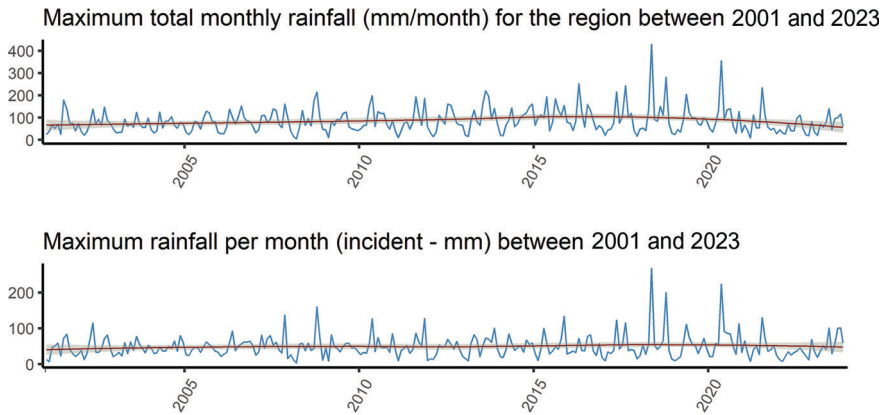


Figure 7.10 Time series derived from NASA’s IMERG dataset: regional maxima of total monthly precipitation (top) and monthly maximum precipitation (bottom) for 2001–2023.

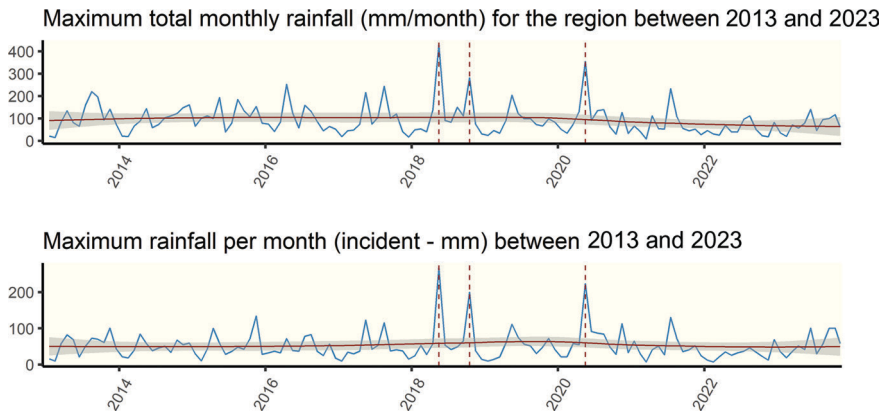


Figure 7.11 Time series derived from NASA’s IMERG dataset: regional maxima of total monthly precipitation (top) and monthly maximum precipitation (bottom) for 2013–2023. Dashed lines indicate cyclone episodes.

recorded a maximum of 223.1 mm/day, and continued sporadically until August, resulting in the fatalities shown in Table 7.1.

Figures 7.12a and b show the areal distribution of rainfall from IMERG daily accumulation precipitation dataset for 24 May and 15 October, 2018, respectively. The time series plot in Figure 7.13 shows the daily total precipitation levels from the torrential rains between May and September 2020. The adjacent map highlights

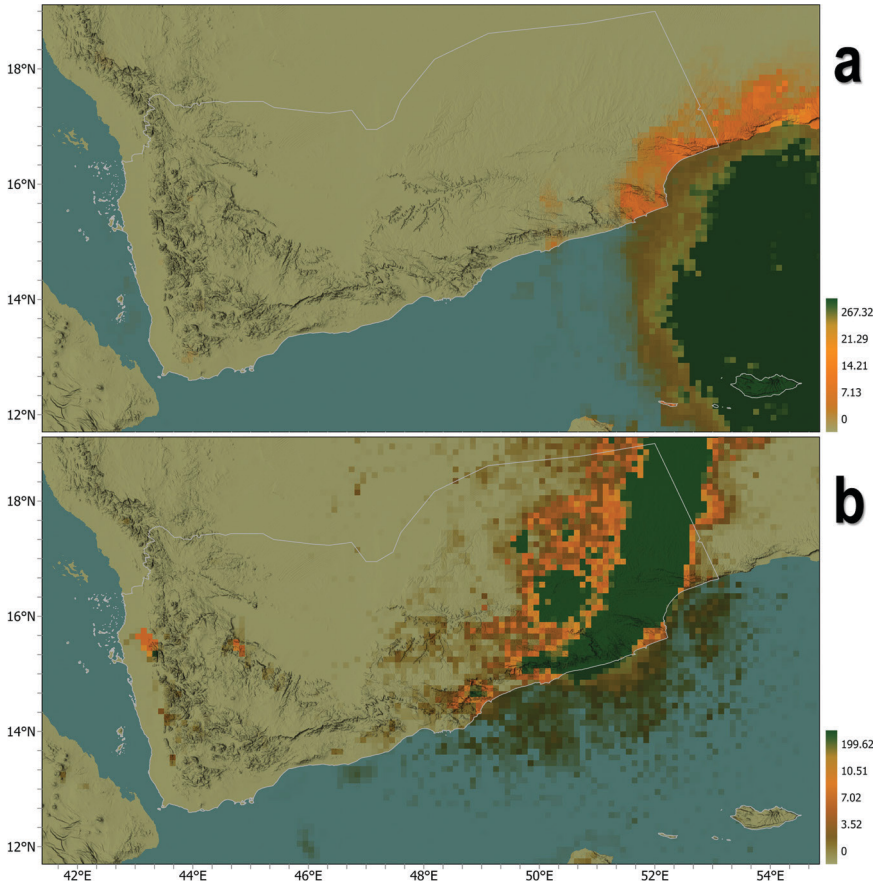
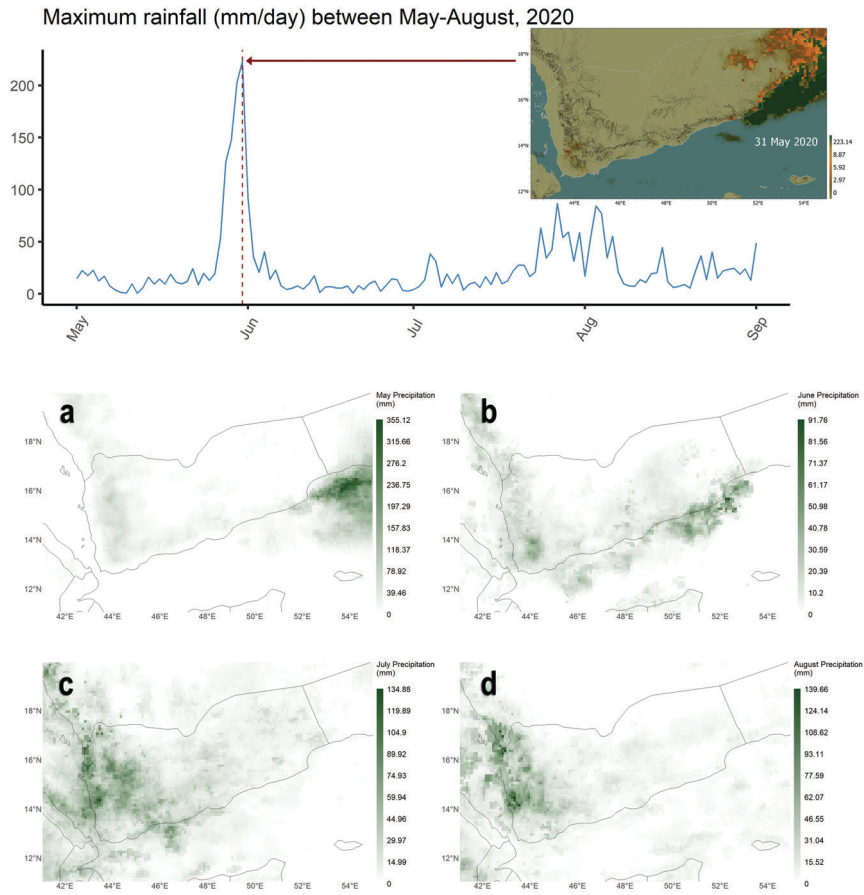


Figure 7.12 Satellite data for total daily total precipitation for 24 May (a) as Cyclone Mekunu makes landfall over the Socotra Archipelago; and October 15, 2018 (b) as Luban makes landfall in Hadramawt. Values are in mm.

the regional distribution of precipitation and their levels for the date when the maximum levels were recorded on 28 May 2020. Figures 7.13a–d show the areal distribution of total monthly precipitation for the 5 months in question.

During intense monsoon episodes such as in this period, in regions where there is sparse vegetation cover and where soil may show signs of hydrophobia, heavy precipitation that is preceded and followed by dry episodes, besides fatal flood events, constitute a potential risk also for mass movements such as landslides, or mud flows which leave serious destruction in their wake.

Figure 7.14 shows the time series for forecasted annual precipitation maxima for this century for Yemen, from 5 global climate models (GCM) running under Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSP) 3-7.0: the regional rivalry scenario. All 5



*Figure 7.13* Time series for maximum rainfall (mm/day) between the months May-August, 2020 with dashed vertical line and map marking the peak rainfall on 31 May; total precipitation for May (a) June (b) July (c) and August 2020 (d).

GCMs shown in the time series are contributions to the sixth phase of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP6). Under SSP3-7.0, radiative forcing<sup>3</sup> continues to increase with a potential peak at 7.0 W/m<sup>2</sup> by the end of the century, as countries become more competitive, invest in national security, domestic or regional issues are prioritised, investment in technology and education is shifted to nationalistic concerns over food and energy security, and where inequalities continue to increase (SSP, 2024). Under this scenario, albeit a slight increase, the selected GCMs forecast little to no change in their median, for maximum precipitation, for the region, by 2100.

Alternately, Figure 7.15 shows the time series for forecasted annual precipitation maxima (as derived from forecasted total daily precipitation amounts) for

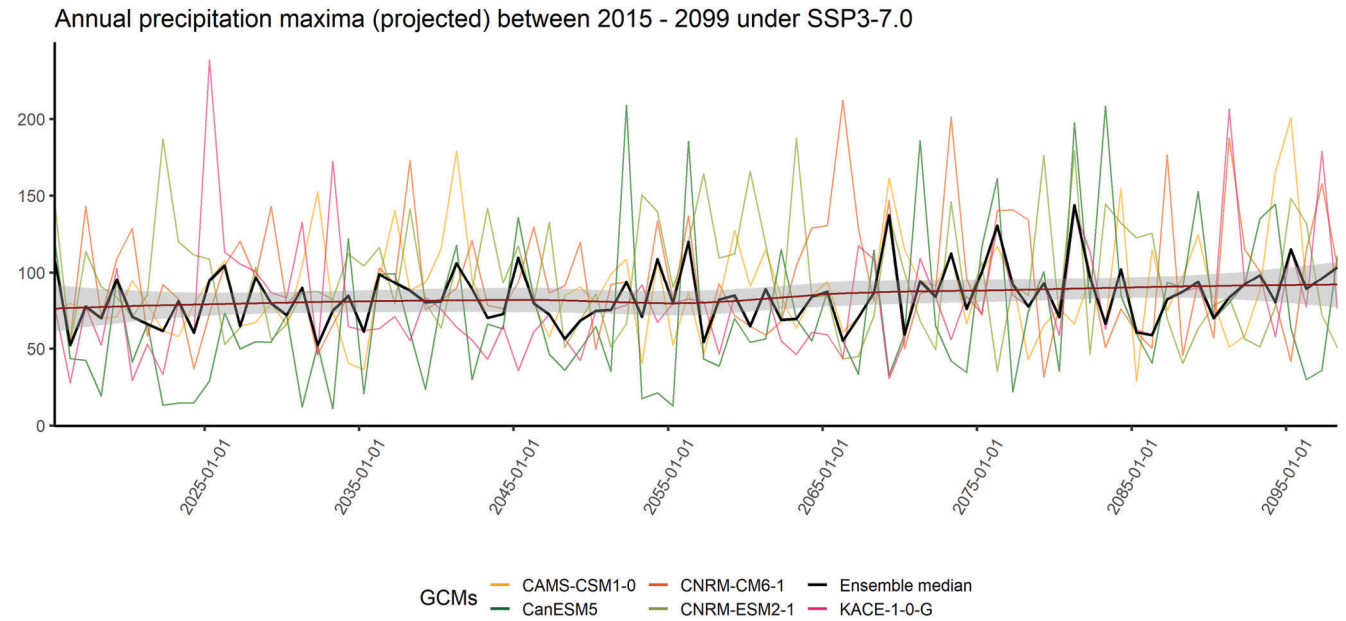


Figure 7.14 Time series for projected annual maximum precipitation levels (in mm) between 2015 and 2100 under SSP3-7.0. The black line represents the ensemble median.

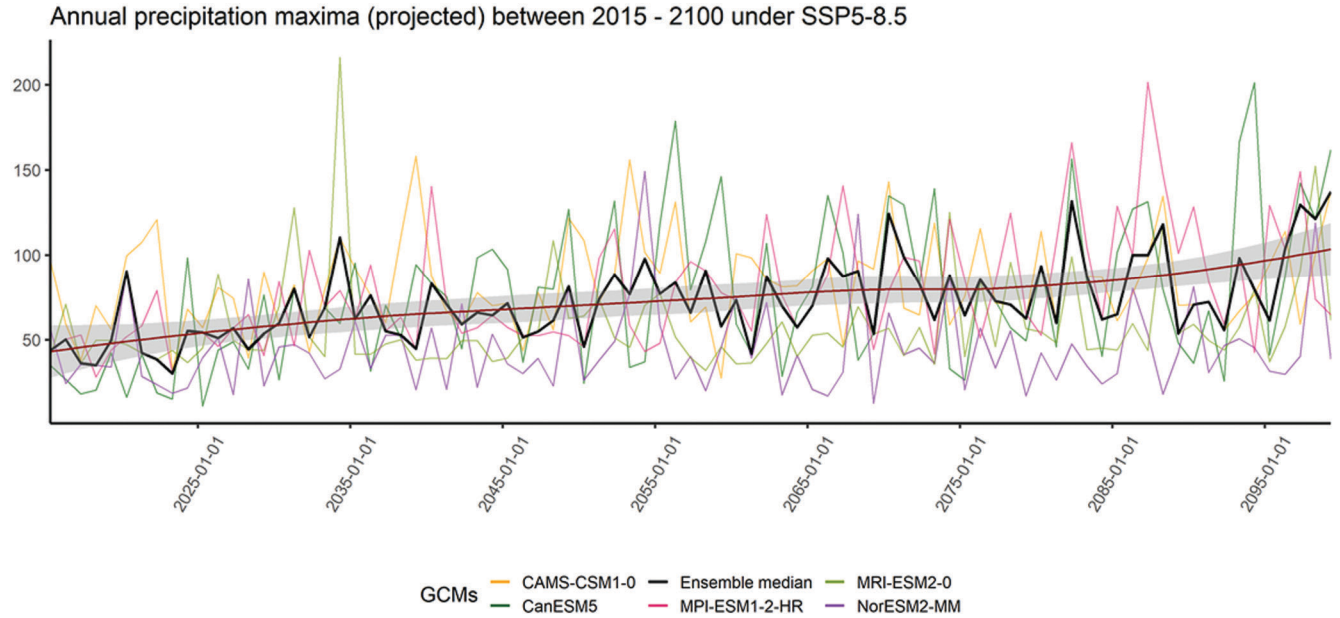


Figure 7.15 Time series for projected annual maximum precipitation levels (in mm) between 2015-2100 under SSP5-8.5. The black line represents the ensemble median.

this century for Yemen, from 5 GCMs running under the high emissions scenario: Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSP) 5-8.5. SSP5-8.5 is often referred to as the business-as-usual scenario, where global industry continues to be based on fossil fuel extraction and usage, and emissions continue to stay high with an expected increase in radiative forcing of  $8.5 \text{ W/m}^2$  by the end of the century (SSP, 2024). Under SSP5-8.5, atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  estimates by 2100 near 1120 ppm. Although considered the worst-case scenario, it acts as a critical benchmark for policy measures to be targeted, to achieve some measure of climate resilience. All 5 GCMs shown in the time series are contributions to CMIP6, and the black line in the plots shows their ensemble median, which shows a steadily increasing trend under SSP5-8.5 between 2015 and 2100.

### *Sea Surface Temperature*

The effect of the changes in SST on cyclogenesis in the Arabian Sea (AS) has been well-established in previous research (Schade, 2000; Evan and Camargo, 2011). Figure 7.16 shows the time series from the ERA5 reanalysis dataset for the SST levels, broken down by month between 1940–2023 for the AS. While there is an overall increase between March and December, the increasing trend is more noticeable after 1980s. The maps in Figure 7.17 show the difference between the 30-year means for the beginning (1940–1969) and the end (1994–2023) of the time series for SST, for each month, for the region. When considered together, in Figures 7.16 and 7.17, the increase in SST for the months of September and October from the beginning to the end of the time period by almost  $1^\circ$  stands out. This result is also in agreement with prior research conducted using different datasets (Albert, et al. 2023).

Changes, especially an increase in SST, are important drivers behind the increasing intensities of tropical storms (Schade, 2000; Li et al., 2023), in this case in the AS, mainly from April–December for the 83-year time period. The increase in SST in the AS and its contribution to atmospheric moisture loading, and the genesis and intensity of the post-monsoon cyclones have been explored by Vidya et al. (2023). Their results, while in agreement with the increasing trend in the time series shown here, also highlight the rapid intensification rate of cyclones being around 1.7 times higher than that in the northwest Pacific Ocean (38% and 22% respectively, Vidya et al. 2023). Considering the fact that tropical cyclones develop, or gain in strength when SST is higher, the time series and the anomaly maps (Figures 7.16 and 7.17) offer a plausible explanation to the destructive intensities of the post-monsoon cyclones in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2023.

Figure 7.18 shows the centennial forecast simulations for SST for the region from 9 GCMs running under the high emissions scenario, SSP 5-8.5. All 9 GCMs are contributions to CMIP6, and the black line in the plots show their ensemble median. For Yemen, the steady upwards trend in SST under SSP5-8.5, with potential increases above  $4^\circ\text{C}$  for the Arabian Sea (AS), calls for immediate action, and robust measures to be taken for the coastal zones, to protect coastal populations

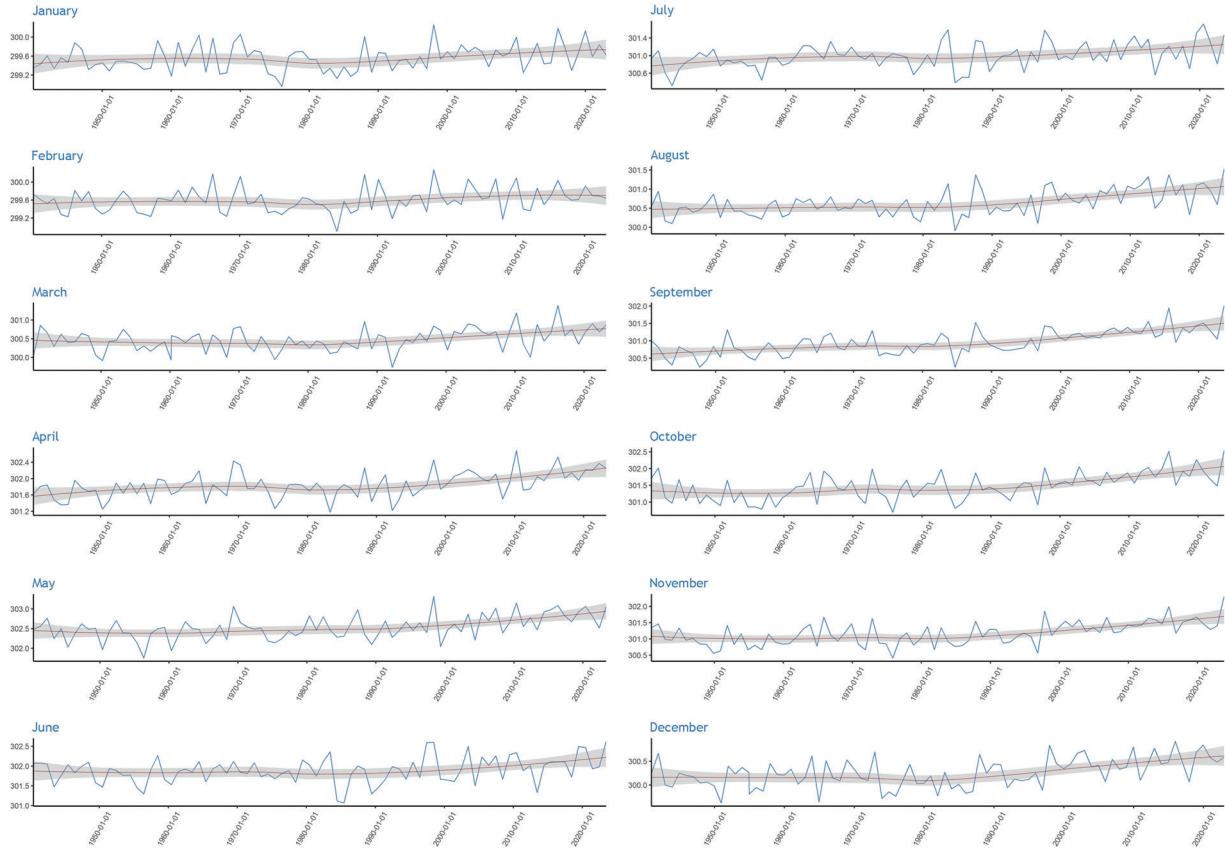


Figure 7.16 Time series for monthly SST (in Kelvin) between 1940–2023.

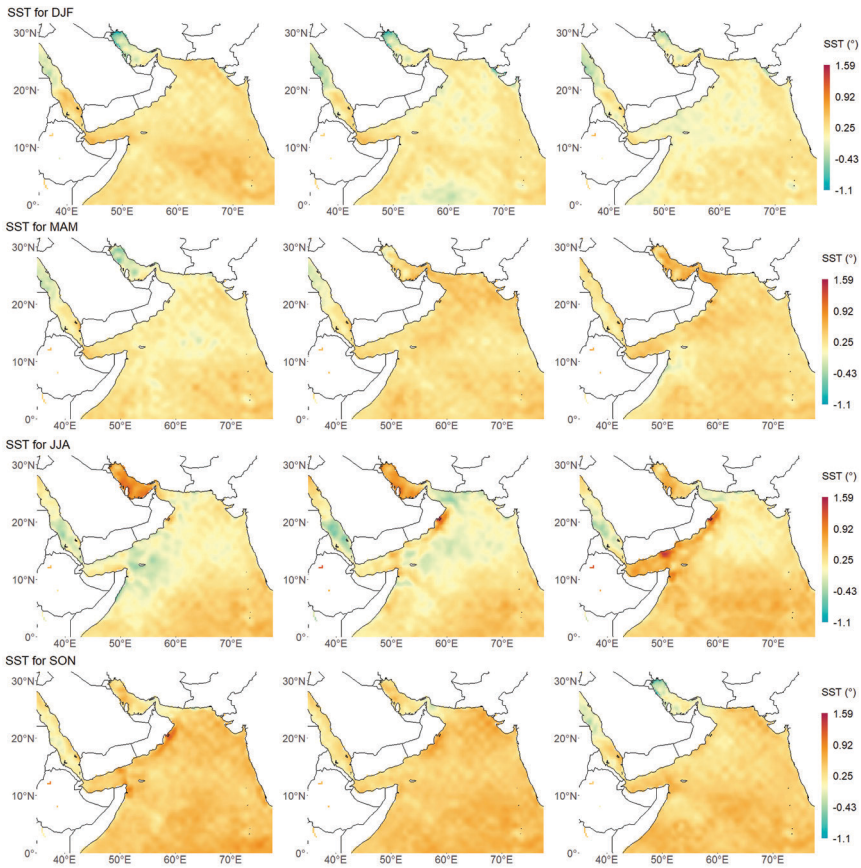


Figure 7.17 Monthly SST anomalies between 1940–1969 and 1994–2023 means.

from potential storm surges and flooding around wadi discharges as tropical storm intensities are likely to increase under climate change.

Alternatively, when we consider the CMIP6 simulation results from 7 GCMs under the regional rivalry scenario, SSP 3-7.0, where radiative forcing continues to increase with countries becoming more competitive, with a potential increase in regional conflicts and inequality, coupled with environmental degradation, we see a steady potential increase in SST reaching well over 3°C in the Arabian Sea by the end of the century (Figure 7.19). The effects of changes in SST are not limited to the changing intensities and frequencies of tropical storms and cyclones. Warming of such magnitudes will also have a direct effect on the marine ecosystems in the region, with potential consequences for pelagic fish stock (Makwana and Patnaik, 2021; Kessler et al., 2022), and global circulation patterns (Chen et al., 2015).

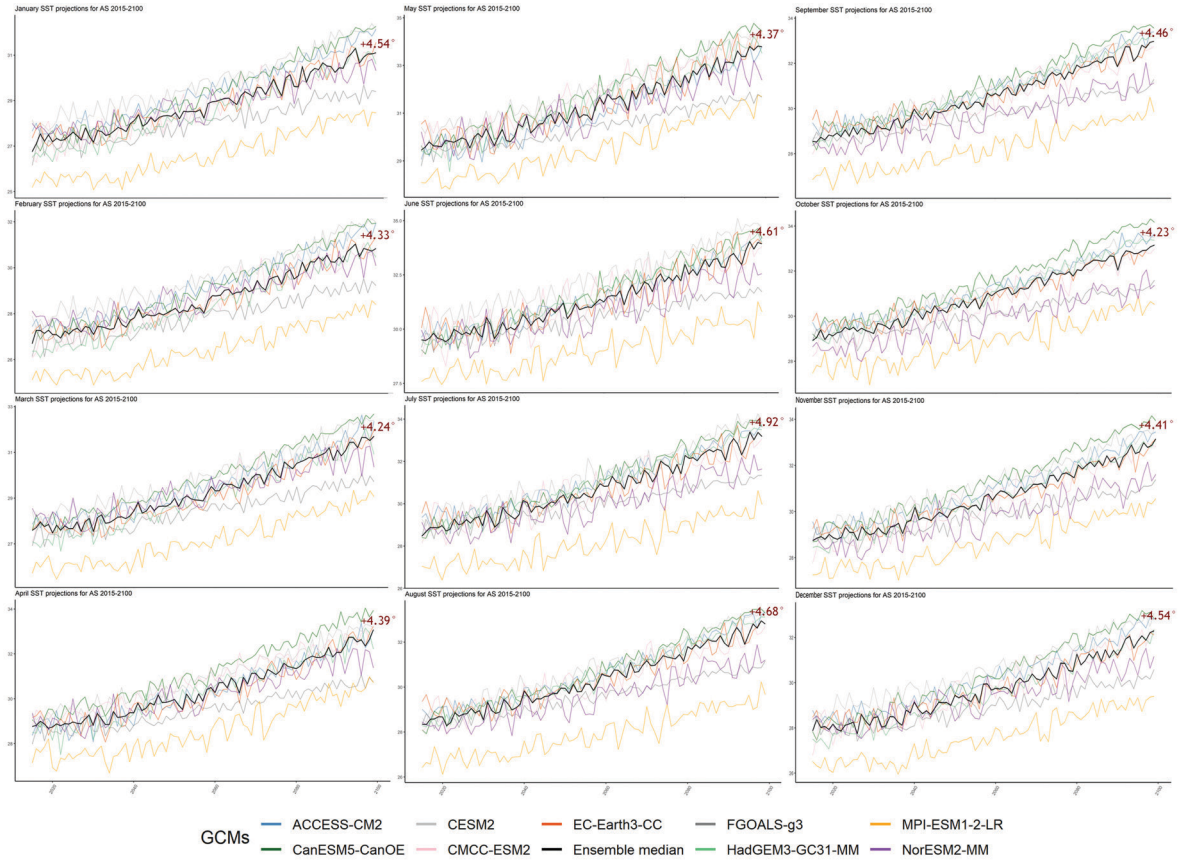


Figure 7.18 Simulations results from 9 GCM contributions to CMIP6 for SST for AS under scenario SSP 5-8.5.

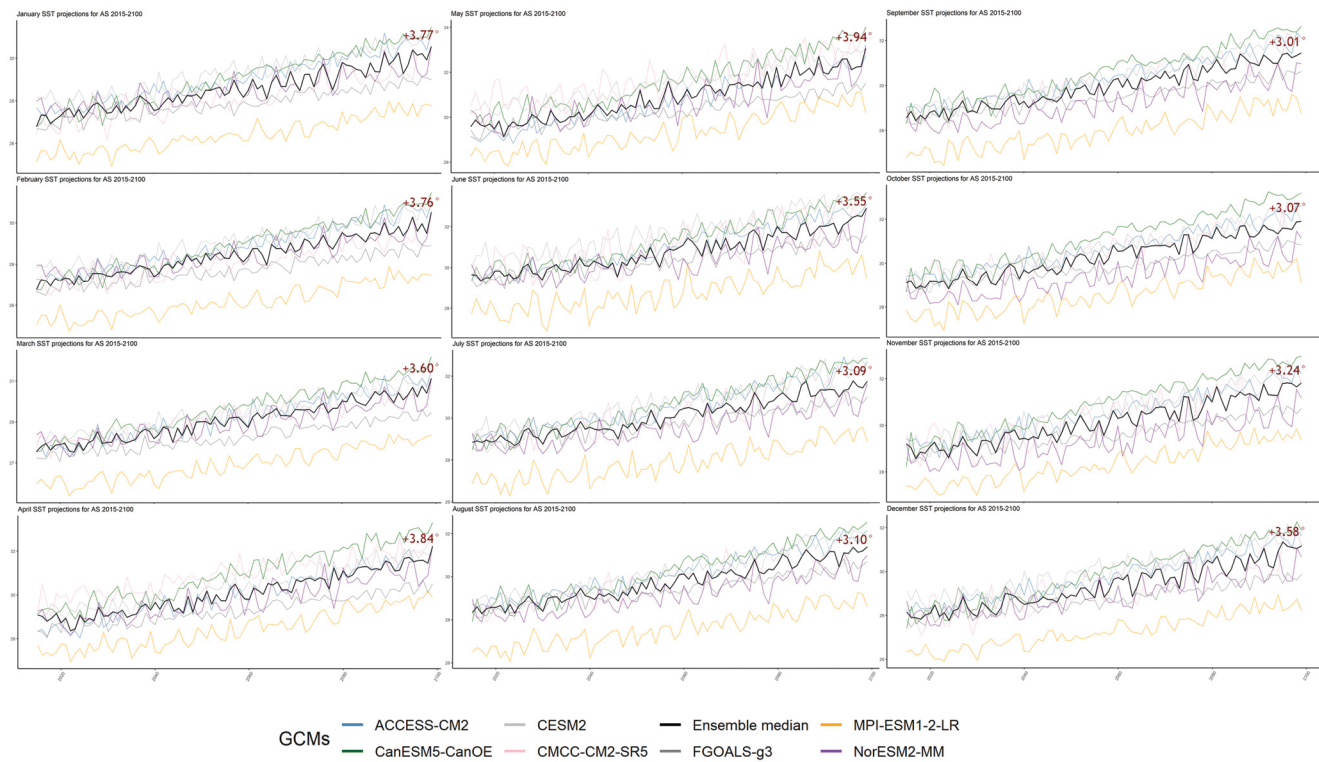


Figure 7.19 Simulations results from 7 GCM contributions to CMIP6 for SST for AS under scenario SSP 3-7.0.

**Temperature**

The maps in Figure 7.20 show the 2m temperature for 30-year means of 1961–1990, and 1994–2023 for the region calculated from ERA5 Land reanalysis dataset, and their difference. Between the two time periods, more than 1°C of warming can be observed inland, on the continental plains behind the mountainous regions in the west and the south, where mainly a desert ecosystem is found. The time series shows the mean annual 2m temperature for the region between 1960–2023, where a similar, and steady warming pattern can be observed.

The time series in Figures 7.21 and 7.22 show the projected mean annual temperature and the annual maximum temperature (both in °C) for this region under the two different scenarios, SSP5-8.5 and SSP3-7.0, respectively. The high emissions scenario as projected by 7 different GCMs datasets, part of CMIP6 simulations, forecast a warming of 4.89°C for the region by the end of the century. In the annual maxima, a difference of over 5°C is also projected between the beginning and end of the time series (Figure 7.21).

Under SSP3-7.0, the annual mean temperature also projects a steady increase between 2015–2100, and a 3.86°C increase is forecasted for the end of the century. The annual maximum temperatures under this scenario are also expected to increase by 3.87°C between the beginning and the end of the timeseries as forecasted by the median of the 5 different GCM datasets, contributions to CMIP6 (Figure 7.22).

As can be seen, under both scenarios a strong increase in 2m temperature for Yemen and its immediate surroundings is expected. With increasing temperatures, especially in the annual maxima under both scenarios, the effects of drought episodes will potentially be stronger. Coupled with an increase in maximum rainfall projected for the end of the century under SSP5-8.5 (Figure 7.15), it can be interpreted as further fatal flooding events to be expected, primarily in the absence of vegetation cover.

With these in mind, considering the potential cooling effect of terrestrial high vegetation cover, and to secure livelihoods and create a climate resilient society, the Yemeni government will need to take immediate action to restore the degraded coastal zones and forested highlands, and control urban expansion in critical regions such as around dry wadi banks.

**Challenges to Peacebuilding and Climate Resilience**

Yemen is a low-income country with a fragile economy that continues to be affected by long periods of civil war. Situated at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, the country is open to the effects of seasonal monsoons, as shown above. The intensity and the frequency of tropical storms and cyclones are expected to intensify in the Arabian Sea due to the positive effect of global warming to the changes in SST, threatening livelihoods in Yemen, while potentially increasing security risks – i.e., territorial armed conflict over resources which may spill across the border into neighboring countries and an inevitable increase in forced

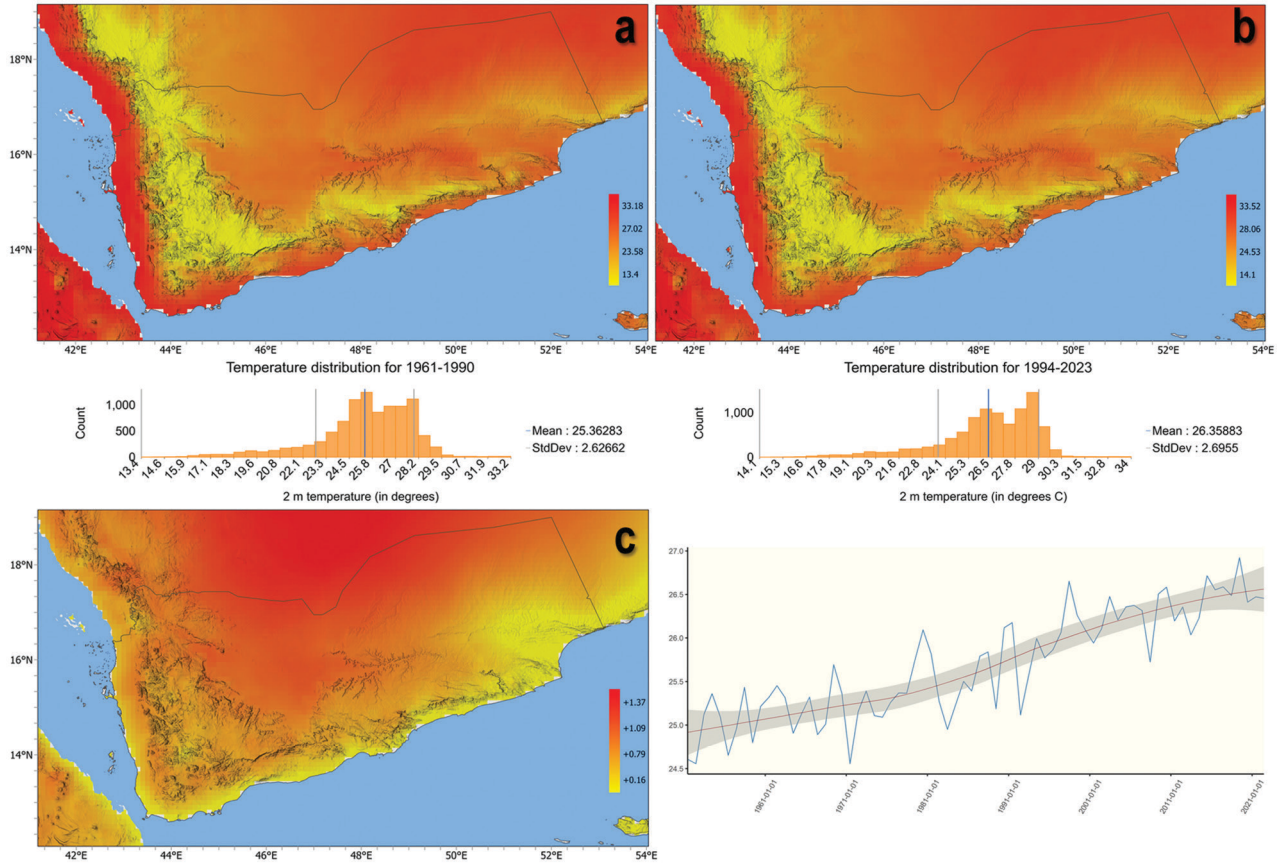


Figure 7.20 2m temperature from 30 year means for (a) 1961–1990, (b) 1994–2023, and (c) their difference. Line-plot shows the timeseries for monthly temperature for the region between 1961–2023.

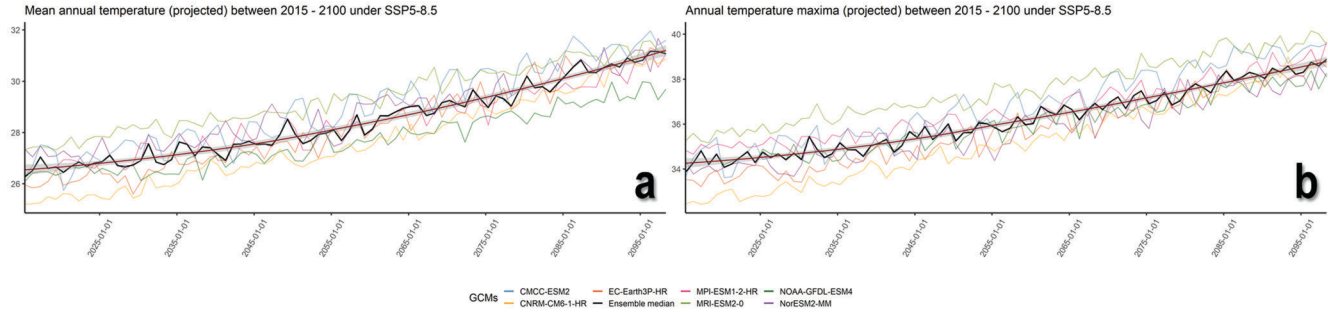


Figure 7.21 2m mean (a) and maximum (b) annual temperature projections from 7 CMIP6 GCM datasets and their ensemble median for 2015–2100 under SSP5-8.5.

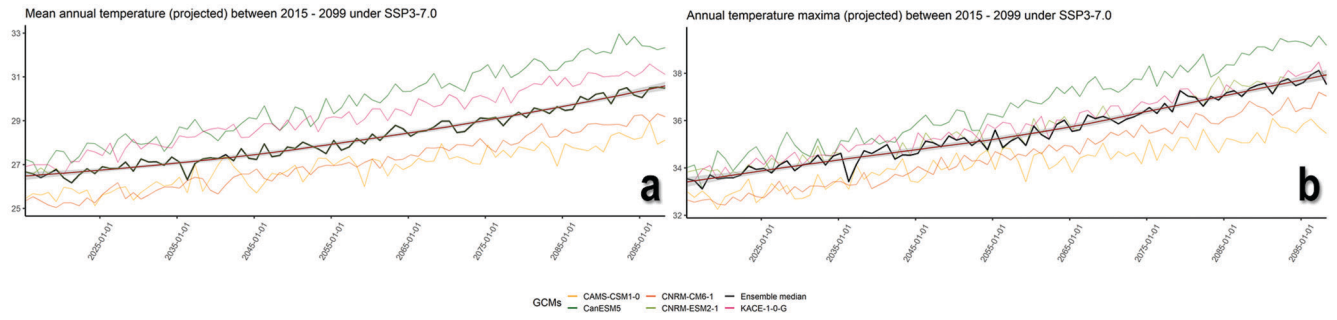


Figure 7.22 2m mean (a) and maximum (b) annual temperature projections from 5 CMIP6 GCM datasets and their ensemble median for 2015-2100 under SSP3-7.0.

migration which may in turn exacerbate human trafficking. Increase in precipitation intensity coupled with lack of vegetation cover especially on mountainous regions and dry wadi banks may lead to excessive run off creating high risk of fatal landslides and other mass movements; carrying pollutants and sediments to the sea; as well as relocating UXOs, further endangering the lives of those that live in the regions. Compound and complex emergencies such as these, that are triggered or augmented by climate change, may put additional pressure on the already strained resources, the health system, and humanitarian aid, leading to dire consequences such as infectious diseases, famine, displacement, and further conflict over habitable land and resources. As international embargoes continue, and international aid falls short of expectations, with climate change, the livelihoods of the Yemeni people will be in direct threat, leading to their further impoverishment, and a potential rise in health-related risks especially from preventable epidemics. As shown in previous sections, lives in Yemen are at more risk today from climate related hazards than ever before, and the ongoing civil war is only making matters worse.

In a state of conflict and political instability, highlighting preventative measures and relevant direct action to reduce vulnerabilities is key to climate resilience, as acting upon them may increase adaptive capacities of populations, while supporting future peacebuilding efforts. Despite the challenges and threats from climate change and continuous anthropogenic interference leading to the near-depletion of renewable resources (which can be a precursor to further instability) as explained in the sections above, Yemen still harbors high levels of biodiversity in its remaining fragile, yet fertile ecosystems. Mangrove habitats, despite being under pressure from pollution and environmental degradation, continue to offer limited yet crucial protection in the coastal zones from potential storm surges, and along with the coral reefs, are important for the fish stock upon which small fisheries rely for sustenance, and the local population for affordable high-quality protein. The leftover forest patches in the highlands still offer limited carbon sequestration, essential vegetation cover, while acting as potential seed banks to aid in future restoration efforts. The healthy endurance of these terrestrial and marine ecosystems to the livelihoods of the Yemeni people are vital, especially when the multiple ecosystem services that they provide are considered. Despite ongoing conflict, should policies, that are based on sound scientific evidence, be implemented and enforced by the Yemeni government and civil society, and where possible in cooperation with the regional governments and the international humanitarian and environmental agencies – i.e., curbing illegal fishing and pollution in the Arabian Sea – this would support both local livelihoods and regional security.

As highlighted throughout this chapter, Yemen is already suffering the effects of anthropogenic climate change and has very little time to put in place effective policy measures to protect the fragile ecosystems within its borders, and restore the degraded ones. Without immediate effective policy that is based on sound science, the Yemeni people will be left further exposed to the dangers that climate change now poses. Due to the scarcity of long-term observation data, and despite the errors and uncertainty which may be inherent in global datasets, it is often a challenge to make predictions about geohazards for data-poor regions of the earth.

Therefore, in regions where reliable and undisrupted monitoring data is unavailable due to a lack of operational stations, remote sensing data becomes a valuable tool to analyse the changes in climatic factors and their short-, medium- and long-term effects on ecosystems and human populations. However, to further finetune regional projections, and make accurate assessments on the threats and risks, on-the-ground data gathering initiatives should urgently be implemented in Yemen, and the existing ones strengthened, starting in areas that are least affected by political turmoil. Furthermore, in-situ data collecting and monitoring services should be left in the safeguard of national academic institutions which will train the manpower to further develop and maintain these initiatives. Since field observations are an integral part of relevant and meaningful forecasts, with reliable data curated in critical parts of the world such as Yemen, global forecasts could also improve. Also, under different global warming scenarios more accurate assessments can be made for the region, and these, in turn, can effectively guide policy.

In regions such as Yemen where long-term conflict has debilitated the infrastructure, disadvantaged populations are left exposed to the negative impacts of climate change and have to bear the brunt of climate-triggered risks from potential geohazards. The indirect link between conflict and climate change may often be challenging to attest, however, the state of conflict and uncertainty delaying or obstructing long-term policy measures toward sustainability and resilience from being identified and implemented, is often a reality. In regions of need, the flow of international humanitarian aid often plays a vital role to overcome such barriers, and to implement and maintain sustainability measures for climate resilience, it is imperative for external aid to be uninterrupted until national institutions become capable. Therefore, while it is of utmost urgency for the international agencies that are operating in the region, and the Yemeni government, not only to ramp up efforts to build, and strengthen the early warning systems; start or support initiatives which are geared to educate the local population on potential natural disasters and their related health risks; and implement protective measures to brace for impact when confronted with them, it is imperative that the international donors also do their share in providing continuous support to regions in need targeted specifically for building climate resilience, despite the nature of the conflict.

Even in many affluent societies where resource distribution is equal and just, and violent conflict is often not an immediate concern, climate change is only recently being brought into national and regional policy design. To ease tensions and work toward effective peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict regions such as Yemen where climate change is also adding to the pressures, first and foremost, people's livelihoods from climate-related threats must be guaranteed. Where lives are in danger from climate change related phenomena, i.e., fields that families do subsistence farming in are afflicted by drought and flash floods, and where continuous political instability and conflict forebodes further loss of life, peacebuilding may seem like a distant promise. To realise that promise, an integrated approach is necessary where policy and science can work together to strengthen institutions, which in turn will develop and implement relevant policy, where preventive measure, including conservation and restoration, are prioritised to preserve the health of ecosystems

so that they may continue to deliver their services. Landforms, ecosystems and climate do not abide by the political borders that man has over the centuries drawn. Therefore, to adapt to climate change related threats, and to install the building blocks toward robust peacebuilding and peacekeeping, multinational cooperation and multidisciplinary approaches are vitally important.

## Notes

- 1 Although not yet official, the Anthropocene Epoch refers to the current period in Earth's history during which the impacts of anthropogenic (human) interference in climate and ecosystems can be unmistakably observed, and thus may indicate a distinct geological age.
- 2 The development and intensification of cyclones.
- 3 The change in the incoming (mainly solar) and outgoing (mainly terrestrial, infrared) energy. When outgoing energy in the form of heat is trapped by the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, this enhances “the greenhouse effect.”

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# 8 Post-Conflict Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration in Yemen

## Lessons Learned from Other Conflicts

*Julia Palik*

### Introduction

Since the 1980s, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have become commonplace activities in international interventions aimed at building peace in post-accord countries (Muggah, 2005; Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, 2010; Bourne and Greene, 2013). According to the United Nations (UN), “inclusive and effective demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes are critical to preventing countries from lapsing or relapsing into conflict” (A/RES/70/262, 2016, p. 5). Each component of a DDR program seeks to prevent conflict recurrence through a different mechanism. *Disarmament* is envisioned to reduce opportunity costs of war through reducing the number of available weapons, *demobilisation* seeks to disrupt war-time bonds between combatants and their leaders to lower the chances of remobilisation, and *reintegration* is aimed at developing alternative income sources for combatants with the long-term goal of facilitating their transition from combatant to civilian identity (Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, 2010).

The UN’s Integrated DDR Standards lists a number of preconditions for the implementation of a DDR program, such as the signing of a peace agreement, trust in the peace process, willingness of the parties to engage in DDR, and a minimal level of security (UN IDDRS, 2019). As of 2023, neither of these conditions are present in Yemen. Since 2014, the country has been devastated by what the international community calls the “worst humanitarian crisis”<sup>1</sup> in which arms and armed groups have proliferated, and the civilian population has been suffering from violence and economic hardship. Yemen is deeply divided. Around 70% of the population lives in areas controlled by the Ansar Allah Movement, commonly known as the Houthis, including the capital, Sanaa. The internationally recognised government, since 2022 led by the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), operates from Aden and retains only a limited degree of authority and legitimacy. At the same time, several other tribal, ideological, religious and separatist armed groups fight for influence across Yemen. Each of these groups has its own ambitions and vested economic interests concerning Yemen’s future. Yemen’s conflicts, while rooted in local grievances, were considerably escalated by the “proxy war” between the pro-government Saudi Arabia and UAE intervention (supported by the US, UK,

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-9

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and France amongst others), and the pro-Houthi Iranian involvement. External actors have supplied weapons and funding to local armed groups that often have competing interests. Mumford's (2021) argument is characteristic of Yemen: "the weapons channeled to today's proxy wars are the spoilers hindering the DDR processes of tomorrow." What type of DDR program should be implemented in such a complex security situation?

The prospects of DDR in Yemen have been discussed by others (Jachnik, 2020; Naji and Jalal, 2021; Johnsen et al., 2022) and this chapter is part of that ongoing scholarly and practitioner discussion. It is based on newly collected global data on peace agreements' DDR provisions between 1975 and 2021, review of primary and secondary sources related to weapons, historical, sociopolitical, and economic information on Yemen. While this chapter primarily focuses on what other DDR cases can tell us about the likely opportunities and challenges of a DDR program in Yemen, the case of Yemen itself will offer important learning points for future DDR programs.

Before I discuss the opportunities and challenges of a future DDR program in Yemen, four clarifications are in order. First, while the academic study of DDR has considerably expanded in recent years, this field remains largely practitioner driven and undertheorised (Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, 2010). While the basic assumption is that DDR helps to prevent conflict recurrence which is a macro-level outcome, DDR at its core targets combatants, i.e., it operates at the individual level, and the mechanisms connecting these two levels remain underspecified. Second, given the lack of a peace agreement in Yemen, this chapter engages in a scenario building exercise and assumes that DDR will be part of a negotiated peace agreement (or multiple local agreements) which means that participation in DDR is voluntary. Third, the chapter assumes that Yemen will remain a unified country with a federal system in which local governance structures will assume a critical role. Lastly, the chapter assumes that external assistance will be provided to the future government of Yemen to undertake a DDR program, both in terms of funding and in deploying an international force that will monitor the process to ensure that combatants who disarm are protected.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section briefly discusses trends in DDR. The second section provides an overview of context specific characteristics of Yemen that directly impact any DDR program. Building on these insights, the third section identifies lessons learned from other cases for Yemen, followed by the concluding section.

### **The Evolution of DDR Programs**

In this chapter, I adopt the UN Integrated DDR Standards' (2019) definition of DDR. *Disarmament* is the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. It also includes the development of responsible arms management programs. *Demobilisation* refers to the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups,

and *reintegration* is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. It is a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level (IDDRS, 2019). The three components of DDR together are aimed at preventing conflict recurrence, yet in many cases not all DDR components are agreed upon or implemented by the parties. Our research found that amongst 289 peace agreements concluded between 1975 and 2021, 126 agreements provided for at least one component of a DDR program, and only 78 agreements provided for the full DDR package (Palik et al., 2025). These results highlight that there are vast differences both across, and as we will see, within DDR programs around the world.

DDR activities have become more complex over time. The 1980s and 1990s were characterised by the so-called “first generation” DDR programs which were implemented in a post-conflict environment characterised by the presence of a peace agreement and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission. During the 1990s-2000s, as conflicts and UN peacekeeping missions grew more complex, the “second generation” of DDR programs evolved which focused more on development (as opposed to an exclusive focus on state security) and communities affected by violence (Muggah, 2005; Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, 2010). From the mid-2000s onwards, a “third generation” of DDR programs has evolved which encompass a number of innovations that seek to tackle the multiplicity of armed actors, the lack of peace agreements, and the transnational nature of conflicts. Recently, the UN developed “DDR related tools,” such as community violence reduction (CVR) and transitional weapons and ammunition management (TWAM) that can be implemented even in ongoing conflicts (UN General Assembly, 2022, p. 5).<sup>3</sup>

While a large number of DDR focused policy documents and lessons learned analysis are available, it is still difficult to take stock of the costs and benefits of DDR, because research is largely driven by case studies, making it difficult to generalise from findings. Furthermore, the impact of DDR programs on conflict dynamics is difficult to measure in the absence of clear definition regarding what constitutes “success” and “failure” (Banholzer, 2014). Arguing that the lack of conflict recurrence shows the effectiveness of DDR is problematic due to the fact that DDR programs never exist in isolation from other interventions and that considering a counterfactual (what would have happened in the absence of a DDR process) is methodologically difficult (Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, 2010: 6). Strong state capacity, political will, the presence of a peace agreement, sustained funding and external commitment to the process are crucial factors in *any kind of* intervention in a post-conflict country, yet these factors are rather obvious and do not help us to understand what and how a particular component of DDR program seeks to achieve.

### **The Yemeni Context**

Given that DDR is context specific, this section focuses on three key features of the Yemeni conflict which have implications for the design and implementation of any DDR program: First, state capacity in terms of economic indicators, ensuring

the monopoly of violence, and institutionally, is weak. Second, Yemen experiences a high level of external involvement in its multiple conflicts. Third, weapons, especially in the northern tribal areas, have historically been crucial economic, political, and societal tools. Importantly, these characteristics do not exist in isolation, but reinforce each other.

### *State Capacity*

Weak state capacity<sup>4</sup> makes it less likely that a government is able to implement a peace agreement (DeRouen et al., 2010) in general and hence a DDR program. Even before the war, Yemen's economy was amongst the worst performing ones in the region and a 2019 UNDP study concluded that the conflict reversed human development by 21 years (Moyer et al., 2019: 6). As of 2023, Yemen is divided into two economies, each with its own currency and financial institutions which led to the significant depreciation in the value of the Yemeni rial areas controlled by the internationally recognised government. The World Bank estimates that real GDP contracted by approximately 50 % between 2011 and 2021. The conflict has damaged or destroyed more than one-third of the country's homes, schools, hospitals, and water and sanitation facilities (World Bank, 2023a: xvi.). In 2022, unemployment rate stood at 13.6 % and youth unemployment (ages 15-24) was 25.6% (World Bank, 2023b). Moreover, a specific war-economy has developed which means that there are several actors who have a vested interest in the continuation of the conflict. While since 2015 Yemen has received billions of dollars in aid, corruption and aid diversion have been widely reported (McVeigh, 2019).

The Yemeni state has never held complete monopoly on violence and had a limited power projection capacity beyond the capital. Yemen's pre-war politics were characterised by former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's cooptation and patronage of tribes, a process in which weapons played a critical role (Phillips, 2008; Clark, 2010). Tribes are of paramount importance to Yemen, especially in the north, and tribesmen have traditionally been relatively autonomous, well-armed, and hence a significant power for any government in Yemen to reckon with (Miller, 2003: 37). The conflict led to the blurring of the line between state and non-state institutions (World Bank, 2023a). Ansar Allah, the Southern Transitional Council<sup>5</sup> (STC)'s Security Belt Forces and Shabwani Elite Forces, Tareq Saleh's Joint Forces (consisting of the Giants Brigades, National Resistance Forces and the Tihama Resistance), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State (IS) are amongst the myriad of armed actors operating in Yemen. Several of these groups are acting outside of formal command structures and have opposing aims which makes it extremely challenging to design a DDR program (Cardenas et al., 2018).<sup>6</sup> As of 2023, Yemen is de facto divided into two states. In the north and in the capital the Houthis took over existing state institutions and developed their current system of governance which rests on a network of "supervisors" (*mushrifin*) who have displaced former ruling party (General People's Congress – GPC) members. The south is controlled by the loose and often conflictual anti-Houthi coalition, in which some actors are aimed

at secession. The southern coalition is supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE (who have had conflicting interests in Yemen).

### ***External Intervention***

The proxy nature of the Yemeni conflict impacts all components of the DDR process. The internationally recognised government of Yemen relies on the Saudi-led coalition's air and ground support for its military campaign against the Houthis. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the cornerstones of the anti-Houthi coalition, the two countries have pursued different strategies and have different aims which sometimes led to violent clashes between their supported forces. Conventional weapons have been supplied to the coalition parties by a number of countries, most notably the US, UK, France, and Germany (Hokayem and Roberts, 2016). The UAE has armed, trained, and financed, more than 90,000 individuals under organised structures in the eastern and southern parts of the country (Naji and Jalal, 2021). The UAE had a substantial troop presence in Yemen until 2019. Sudan also had as much as 15,000 troops on the ground which was reduced to 5,000 in 2019 (*Sudan Tribune*, 2022), and reports indicated that the UAE sent Colombian mercenaries to fight in Yemen (Bender, 2015). Importantly, weapons are not only being used by Saudi Arabia (and other coalition members) but passed on to allied militias, violating trade agreements by facilitating the diversion of arms. Amnesty International, for instance, expressed grave concern over weapons "being passed on to completely unaccountable Coalition-allied militias" (Amnesty International, 2019). These include US, French, Finnish, and South African-made tanks and armored vehicles transferred to the UAE and then diverted to the Joint Forces and the Security Belt and other Elite forces, military units that operate outside the internationally recognised government's command-and-control structures.

The Houthis acquired their weapons mostly from local sources through looting and corrupt government officials, and most importantly through their alliance with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his military establishment (Perlo-Freeman, 2019).<sup>7</sup> The Houthis have access to long-range missiles capable of reaching Saudi Arabia and drones that weren't part of the Yemeni army's assets (Nevola, 2023). The UN reported arms shipments to the Houthis from Iran. In 2017, the UN Panel of Experts reported that the Houthis had an estimated 10 short-range ballistic missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles (UN Panel of Experts, 2017). The report states that the Houthis, rather than importing complete weapons smuggled into the country (the group is subject to a UN arms embargo), they are assembling the weapons using imported components, in particular engines, guidance systems, and other key electronic components, a trend which continued in 2023 (UN Panel of Experts, 2023).

### ***Societal Embeddedness of Weapons***

While heavy weapons are likely to be the key focus of an initial disarmament in Yemen, the question of small arms and light weapons (SALW) poses significant risks to any transition from war to peace. Even before the war, Yemen has often

been characterised as a place with the second highest level of gun ownership (after the US), “awash with weapons,” where “weapons culture is strong and ingrained” (Abdullah, 2010; Root, 2013).<sup>8</sup> While no official data has even been collected and verified, popular claims estimated that there were 50 million weapons in circulation, but later, more systematic research estimated that the actual number was somewhere between 6 and 9 million SALW for a population of 18 million in 2001 (Miller, 2003). The conflict has led to the influx of not only more weapons, but better-quality ones. Weapons have traditionally been openly carried in public spaces, and their possession and usage have been subject to strict social rules. Pre-conflict weapons display and use had an important communicative role of potential violence, were an integral element of tribal mediation practices, and conveyed manhood and status, particularly in the northern areas. These social conditions have important implications for the likelihood and the form of any disarmament. Violence had been subject to strict social control, hence pre-conflict criminality levels were relatively low compared to high levels of accessible weapons (Miller, 2003, p. 40). Small arms ownership and carrying in Yemen is a highly gendered phenomenon being strongly associated with the masculine tribal identity. Furthermore, gun possession and usage is not homogenous across urban and rural areas and between the north and the south (Heinze, 2014, p. 74). State control over weapons possession and usage has been extremely limited. The pre-conflict societal mechanisms controlling weapons possession and usage are important to emphasise because war disrupted several such mechanisms, and such a change has important consequences for the development of acceptable and locally owned disarmament and CVR programmes.

### **Lesson Learned from Other Cases**

By building on the context specific challenges, this section addresses seven key aspects of any future DDR programme in Yemen through analysing other DDR cases. The lack of state capacity has implications for the design (including the sequencing), implementation, and monitoring of DDR, Security Sector Reform (SSR), the gender aspects of DDR, and the reintegration of minors. The proxy war nature of the conflict impacts the disarmament and demobilisation component, while the embeddedness of arms impacts disarmament and the language and symbols surrounding the process.

### ***Sequencing of DDR Components***

The sequencing dilemma of DDR is whether security or development should come first. As highlighted by others, traditionally sequenced DDR programs (disarmament first, reintegration last) are unlikely to work in Yemen (Johnsen et al., 2022; Jachnik, 2020). In several peace agreements, not all DDR components were agreed upon by the conflict parties and other measures such as rehabilitation and reinsertion were also included. For example, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement between the UK government and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) only provided

for disarmament (termed as decommissioning), and the Kabul Peace Agreement of 2016 between the Afghan government and the Hizb-I Islami-yi Gulbuddin (HIG), led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, provided only for the demobilisation and reintegration. The 1997 peace agreement in Tajikistan prioritised reintegration over demobilisation and disarmament of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). Integration into the government, military and law enforcement units was quick and helped to develop trust, but this has happened at the expense of transitional justice (Torjesen and MacFarlane, 2007). A reintegration first, and disarmament and demobilization later approach is more viable for the Yemeni context given that no armed actor will be willing to lay down their weapons first because it will become vulnerable not just to attacks from the government but from other armed actors. Even more importantly, DDR related tools, such as TWAM and CVR programmes can be implemented in certain governorates in Yemen even in the absence of a peace agreement. For example, in 2018 in Mukalla, the capital of Hadhramaut province, leaders introduced gun control measures and the city has become a gun-free area (*The Economist*, 2018). The bottom line is that, in Yemen, DDR programs should be developed by “sound reintegration programmes well on the way to being in place before the disarmament even begins” (Swarbrick, 2007, p. 13).

### ***Monitoring of DDR Implementation***

One key element of the UN’s approach to DDR is that these processes should be owned by national authorities. Yemen presents a challenge to this aim given lack of institutional capacity to design and carry out DDR and the threat that a nationally owned DDR process will be dominated by elites without any meaningful inclusivity. Hence, it is expected that external actors will have an important role in any DDR program in Yemen, especially when it comes to the provision of sustained funding. Walter argues that unless the disarmament process is accompanied by meaningful external security guarantees, groups that are disarming may perceive themselves to be vulnerable, and conflict may recur if they are attacked or pre-emptively attack others (Walter, 1997).<sup>9</sup> Our research found that external parties participated in 55% of the 126 peace agreements that provided for at least components of DDR, and 63% of agreements that provided for the full DDR package contained provisions for the involvement of third-parties (Palik et al., 2025.). DDR can facilitate trust-building processes through the establishment of joint monitoring missions that can perform different tasks. For example, in Colombia and in Nepal, the conflict parties together with a team of international actors (the so-called ‘three in a jeep’ model) were responsible for monitoring the implementation of certain elements of the DDR process. Such committees can aid the information flow between former enemies and establish channels through which conflicts are resolved in a non-violent manner. In the Philippines, the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) agreed to establish the Joint Peace and Security Teams (JPSTs) which are units composed of the armed forces of the Philippines, the police, and MILF’s BIAF members who are tasked with monitoring the implementation of the agreement, supporting dispute resolution on the ground, and documenting private armies

and work on the reduction and control of weapons (Annex on Normalization Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, 2014: 2–4).

*Gender:* Yemen's gender relations are characterised by patriarchal structures and strict gender norms, some of which – such as women's role in labor market – have changed during the conflict. Pre-conflict gender dynamics, and their potential transformation during conflict, has to be taken into account by DDR planners. DDR processes often fail to cater to the specific needs of female ex-combatants (Farr, 2003; Hauge, 2020; Vastapuu, 2021) which is not only morally problematic but strategically too. Research showed that female combatants make wars longer, and that when women voluntarily take part in combat, rebel victory is more likely (Giri and Haer, 2024). Given that neither conflict parties nor external actors view women as a security threat after conflict, their needs are rarely taken into account. The lack of focus on female combatants in DDR programmes is striking. Research shows that amongst 126 peace agreements that had at least one DDR component, only two referenced women, nine minors, and 11 both groups (Palik et al., 2025.). DDR negotiations tend to be a predominantly male domain. There are usually technical, political, and normative barriers for women to enter these negotiations. Generally, extra efforts are needed to make women as agents of violence, visible and design appropriate reintegrated strategies.

While women across Yemen have shown resilience and contributed to political change and peace efforts for decades, DDR negotiations and programmes often collate all women and portray them as victims. It is important to acknowledge the agency of women perpetrators of violence and to explicitly mention them in the peace agreement's DDR provision. Female combatants' experiences and interests should be incorporated in DDR programmes to avoid their economic and psychosocial marginalization in the post-conflict period (Bouta et al., 2005). Achieving this is not easy, even in traditionally matrilinear societies such as in Bougainville where conflict parties actively campaigned against the inclusion of women in talks about the fate of weapons because they perceived women to be in favor of destruction of weapons (Douglas et al., 2004).

In acknowledging the agency of women perpetrators of violence, we should not lose sight of the intricate nuances of the Yemeni setting. Ansar Allah has a women's-only wing, the Zainabia. Members of the group have been trained to use weapons, to contribute to recruitment, education, suppress protest, and to police the population. Reports indicate that women are also playing important roles, such as guarding checkpoints for the anti-Houthi Popular Resistance fighters (*Middle East Eye*, 2022), and that there are female fighters in Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula too (Schmitt, 2017). The extent and role of women as armed actors in Yemen remain relatively understudied and future research should devote particular attention to these women to ensure that they will not be left out of a future DDR process.

Importantly, a gender-sensitive DDR does not mean an exclusive focus on women but also has to consider the needs of men from across the social and political spectrum. While men make up majority of the fighting forces, young boys have reportedly been subject to sexual violence (Al-Ammar et al., 2019, p. 65). Viewing

violent masculinities as the only type of masculinity and disregarding the fact that some men and boys are also victims, can mean that DDR programmes securitise men and de-securitise women as it was the case in Liberia's DDR program (MacKenzie, 2009).

*Minors:* Children have been recruited by all sides of the conflict. According to the 2023 Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ansar Allah, the Security Belt Forces, the Shabwani Elite Forces, the Yemeni Armed Forces, the Giants Brigades, and unidentified perpetrators all recruited children (UN General Assembly, 2023). Furthermore, several reports showed that the Saudi-led coalition has also recruited children (*Aljazeera*, 2019). While different numbers have been reported<sup>10</sup>, according to a local Yemeni human rights group between 2014 and 2021, the Houthis have recruited more than 10.000 children (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor and SAM, 2021). Children living under Houthi-controlled areas have been subject to years of indoctrination and violence promotion in school (Lashuel, 2022). The international community has clear legal standards and procedures for children in the DDR process, according to which children have to be separated from the armed groups as soon as possible and that children are not required to hand in weapons to be eligible for DDR support. Research carried out with minors who underwent DDR in Colombia and Nepal revealed that minors who had to return to their communities faced stigmatization, lack of security and education, problems that were aggravated for female minors (Hauge, 2021). Another study conducted with former child soldiers from the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) shows that child soldiers who developed close ties to their groups had more difficulties with the reintegration process (Banholzer and Haer, 2014). Given the sheer number of children affected by the conflict and recruited by the parties, a separate, robust, and prioritised programme has to accompany any DDR with a particularly strong psychosocial component.

### ***Security Sector Reform (SSR)***

While the central topic of this chapter is non-state actors' DDR, the Yemeni context necessitates a wide-ranging security sector reform (SSR).<sup>11</sup> SSR is critical in ensuring that citizens are able to access and benefit from security and justice. The first important observation in case of Yemen is that the state (at least since 1990) has never held the monopoly of violence (like in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC, or Mali). Furthermore, it is reasonable to ask if the state in Yemen will ever be able to implement a truly nationwide SSR not only because of the lack of institutional capacity, but because of the deliberate utilization of a fragmented security landscape characteristic of former President Saleh's rule (Clark, 2010).<sup>12</sup>

In several conflicts, ex-combatants could choose to integrate into the national army which is a form of military power-sharing that is envisioned to build trust between former enemies which contributes to self-sustaining peace (Hartzell et al., 2001). Although military integration featured in many post-conflict contexts such as in Nepal, research found scant evidence regarding the effectiveness of military

integration as peacebuilding strategy (Glassmyer and Sambanis, 2008). By simply merging former rebels into the army without retraining them, as it was the case in the DRC, army integration can backfire and increase insecurity. External actors' intervention in SSR (as in all other aspects of the peace agreement) should take a participatory form. In Liberia, the US government was charged with rebuilding the army and commissioned the RAND Corporation to undertake a comprehensive security review with a very low level of government involvement, eventually creating more government deficit and disempowered the population (Ebo, 2008). It is expected that some form of SSR and army integration will take place in Yemen, but such a process won't cover all ex-combatants. In fact, most rank-and-file soldiers will need economic, political, and social reintegration support if sustainable peace is the aim.

### ***Disarmament***

Disarmament is the costliest concession any armed group can make and requires considerable buy-ins (such as political and military power-sharing or amnesties). Full disarmament of armed groups in Yemen is highly unlikely due to the difficulties in establishing case load numbers, sheer number of weapons, the relative ease for rearmament (from external and internal sources), the lack of government control over borders, and the role of weapons in the daily lives of Yemenis. As mentioned earlier, no group will be willing to disarm while the others can retain their weapons. Given the widespread availability of weapons, disarmament planners might need to consider moving away from measuring the number of weapons collected and focus on other outcome criteria that disarmament seeks to achieve, such as improved perceptions of security and decreasing crime rates. Importantly, the assumption that disarmament is a necessary condition for peace is eroded by examples (such as Mozambique, Tajikistan and Aceh in Indonesia) where a rebel group failed to give up a significant proportion of its weapons, yet the conflict did not recur for many years (Marsh, 2007; Giustozzi, 2016). It appears that a political commitment to cease fighting was sufficient. Disarmament in Yemen, if ever happens, will likely be localised, small scale, and incomplete. Priority will be given to the handing over of heavy weaponry. High quality arms are likely to be collected, documented, and transferred to the military. Making disarmament as a pre-condition to access reintegration benefits or to receive cash in exchange of weapons can easily backfire in Yemen. In Liberia, non-combatants also registered<sup>13</sup> as combatants to get the reintegration benefits (Jennings, 2007). The relaxed eligibility criteria in this case contributed to the "commercialization" of the DDR process and young people from neighbouring countries were recruited by rebel commanders to be processed by UNMIL with the case reward being split between the commander and the family of the combatant. This was possible because of the lack of clear information on who served with the armed groups (Paes, 2005). Cash incentives and benefits offered in exchange of weapons can backfire and actually contribute to more guns being brought into the country or leading to inflated combatant numbers and allowing the abuse of funding through corruption. Having a phased disarmament process, as it

was the case in Northern Ireland and in the Philippines, might yield better results. This means that non-state armed actors are making “progressive concessions on the weapons issues only alongside parallel ‘tangible progress’ of other peace accord provisions” (Berghof Foundation and UN DPO DDR section, 2022, p. 10). This runs contrary to conventional DDR in which disarmament and demobilization is a pre-condition for political participation.

### ***Demobilization***

Severing ties between combatants, and between combatants and their leaders is difficult to imagine, especially in the case of well-organised groups such as the Houthis and STC, both of whom had been governing areas of Yemen for years. Although most demobilization programmes are focused on dismantling command and control structures and scattering combatants around the country, this approach fails to investigate if an armed group had any positive impact on the communities living under its control (such as improved security or provision of services). Former combatant networks in Mozambique after the 1992 DDR programme remained important for ex-combatants’ social life both in terms of providing security, economic safety, and sense of belonging (Wiegink, 2015). Similarly, examining the role of mid-level commanders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP) in Colombia, Sharif (2022) concludes that maintaining the war-time bond between combatants and commanders can contribute to peacebuilding by helping to repurpose rebel organizational structures for the purpose of reintegration. The Colombian example is useful to consider in case of rebel groups with strong command and control structures but might be less meaningful in case of loosely organised groups, both of which are present in the country. Yemen is unlikely to be suited for conducting demobilization in cantonment sites which, if not safe, well resourced, and ensure quick processing can create dissatisfaction amongst combatants and make it more likely that they restart the conflict or might put nearby communities at risk as it was the case in Liberia and the Central African Republic. In Nepal the Maoists cantonment was envisioned to last for 6 months, but it ended up lasting for six years causing widespread dissatisfaction amongst combatants that threatened the fragile gains of the peace process.

### ***Reintegration***

There is considerable research on various aspects of reintegration programmes and their effectiveness that can inform the potential programme design for Yemen (for an overview see for example Sharif, 2018). However, the central question in the case of Yemen is “reintegration into what?” given the extremely weak absorption capacity of the local labour market. If combatants can choose where to settle, they might want to go to cities to get better employment opportunities. This can add an additional burden on already malfunctioning local economies, as was the case with former combatants in Liberia where many ex-combatants decided to move to the capital Monrovia (Paes, 2005; Jennings, 2007). Conceptually, the term

“transformation” might be more suitable in Yemen than “reintegration” which implies that combatants have a pre-war context in which they can or want to return to<sup>14</sup> which is not always the case (Berghof Foundation and UN DPO DDR section, 2022). Reducing social stigma and encouraging community acceptance are key elements of reintegration, and community sensitization programmes can start even before the commencement of DDR programmes.

### ***Language and Symbolism of DDR***

While this chapter has referred to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration these terms are not merely neutral, technical concepts. In several conflicts, non-state actors insisted on using different terms because disarmament has been associated with defeat and surrender<sup>15</sup> and in many cases reintegration is not the adequate term for certain armed groups who live and fight in the same area (Torjesen, 2013; Marsh and Palik, 2021). For example, in Colombia, FARC insisted on using the term “laying down of weapons,” while the Maoists in Nepal called disarmament as “management of arms and armies,” and in Northern Ireland and in the Philippines, disarmament was called as “decommissioning.” One might expect that if any of the armed groups in Yemen agree to lay down some of their weapons, they would likely want to avoid appearing as defeated, hence the terminology of DDR is likely to be different. The international community will need to place a special emphasis on adopting language that is acceptable, locally owned, and implementable. Previous agreements in Yemen were characterised by vague language that enables parties to interpret the text according to their preferences (Palik, 2021). Such an outcome can inherently put at risk the implementation of any DDR plan. Clear timetables, reporting obligations, and dispute resolution mechanisms need to be incorporated into any DDR provision. Scholars have also suggested other ways that disarmament can contribute to peace: Public ceremonies in which weapons are destroyed illustrate how disarmament can delegitimise the use of weapons or provide a powerful symbol that the fighting is over (Knight and Özerdem, 2004). The 2016 peace agreement between the government of Colombia and FARC, for example, requires the parties to transform weapons into three monuments. Such initiatives in Yemen should be utilised to provide an opportunity both for combatants and civilians to make transition from war to peace visible.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter examined how weak state capacity, external intervention, and social embeddedness of weapons can impact the design and implementation of a DDR programme in Yemen. It argued that different governorates will need different constellations of DDR components, but reintegration has to assume priority despite challenging conditions. External actors will play a crucial role in the funding and management of the DDR programme, but monitoring should be designed in an inclusive and participatory way so that former enemies can engage in confidence-building measures. Gender-sensitive DDR requires that heterogeneity

is recognised and accounted for (for example, by focusing on non-violent men and violent women) and female ex-combatants' interests need to be mapped and included in DDR talks. Children who have been socialised in military settings will need long-term psychosocial support. While a comprehensive SSR is needed, it will be challenging to create a unified army. Disarmament (at least initially) is likely to be focused on heavy weapons, and rather than "counting the number of weapons," DDR planners should define alternative outcome measures of disarmament such as perceptions of insecurity. Practitioners will need to accept that combatants will retain some weapons as a security and economic guarantee, and due to the social embeddedness of weapons. Demobilisation must be actor specific, while some groups that have strong command and control might be able to work together toward building peace. Reintegration is extremely challenging given the extremely dire situation of the economy and the lack of marketable skills of many combatants, factors that put them at risk of re-recruitment.

There are four key take-aways from this chapter. First, in the absence of credible, independent, and sustained baseline data regarding the locations, number, armament, command and control structure, and leadership of armed groups, it is challenging to design a DDR programme. DDR planners should work together with and solicit the experiences of different members of armed and conflict-affected groups, preferably taking into account age, gender, method of recruitment, and rank (leader, mid-level commander, rank-and-file). Such a consultation can either happen in a National Dialogue Conference style plenary session or be undertaken by specialists in the form of needs assessment, as was the case in the Philippines before the implementation of the decommissioning process.

Second, any DDR programme should start by clearly formulating narrow and specific goals that it seeks to achieve. Is disarmament aimed at establishing state monopoly of violence or at reducing community insecurity in a specific location? Is reintegration aimed at "keeping ex-combatants busy" or improving overall macro-economic performance of the state? Defining goals facilitates the effective monitoring and evaluation of DDR programmes and helps to avoid creating the impression that DDR should ensure peace (which it cannot achieve by itself). These questions illustrate that DDR cannot be separated from other elements of the peace process and the overall reconstruction of the country.

Third, and relatedly, as it stands now, it is unlikely that there will be one peace agreement in Yemen that would involve all armed actors. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that after governing for a decade, the Houthis would relinquish their power and agree to disarm. A more realistic outcome can be some form of coalition government in which the Houthis and the STC (at the minimum) will be involved. Yet, even in such a scenario it is difficult to foresee how these disparate armed fractions can be united. What is more likely is a number of different, location specific peace agreements, and hence, potential "pockets" of different DDR programmes or DDR related tools.

Lastly, given the proxy nature of the conflict in Yemen, external arms suppliers will need to be brought into the DDR process. Even if a particular group is willing to disarm and to enroll in a reintegration programme, external actors can easily

outbid the financial benefits of such programmes and remobilise combatants. In short, collecting some of the weapons that are inside the country will have a limited impact given the ease with which the local proxy actors can re-arm. This is a considerable policy challenge which has been present in the DRC and other countries, but no previous DDR programme has tackled such an issue comprehensively.

## Notes

- 1 ACLED estimates that since 2015, more than 150,000 people have died as a direct result of the violence until mid-2022 (ACLED, 2023) and more than 11,000 children have been killed or injured and an estimated 2.2 million children are acutely malnourished (UNICEF, 2022). By early 2022, 4.3 million people are internally displaced (UNHCR, 2023) and the UN's humanitarian office estimated that 21.6 million people – two-thirds of the population – are in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2023).
- 2 The question of third-party involvement is, however, a sensitive one. A robust US or Saudi presence in disarmament efforts will be generally contested (given these and other states' role in arming and funding conflict actors), if not outright rejected, by the Houthis. While a potential UN peacekeeping mission might sound like the best option, it remains a challenging question given the resources the UN would need to mobilize to tackle such a complex security environment and some actors might be skeptical of a UN peacekeeping mission.
- 3 The UN implements DDR and DDR related tools not only in peacekeeping contexts, but in special political mission contexts such as the one in Yemen.
- 4 The measurement of state capacity is more complex than presented in this chapter and entails other dimensions than the economic and military. Due to space constraints, I focus only on these two. For a recent overview of various measures of state capacity see O'Reilly, C., & Murphy, R. H. (2022). *An Index Measuring State Capacity, 1789–2018*. *Economica*, 89(355), 713–745.
- 5 The 2019 Saudi Arabia-brokered Riyadh Agreement between the internationally recognized government and the STC agreed, among other things, to form a shared government and to reorganize the military and security forces.
- 6 In 2022, the PLC established a Joint Military Committee to restructure and unify the Anti-Houthi coalition (Ardemagni, 2022). The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen noted in 2023 that the some PLC members are “backed with financial and other support from their benefactors, have their own armed forces and exercise de facto control over their territories” (UN Panel of Experts, 2023: 3)
- 7 UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) demands that the Houthis “immediately and unconditionally: (...) relinquish all additional arms seized from military and security institutions, including missile systems” (UN SC, 2015: 3). Furthermore, the resolution subjected Yemen to restrictions on arms flows and imposed special measures aimed at preventing the Houthis and Saleh from acquiring weapons.
- 8 According to Miller, “Tribes in the north are especially unlikely to disarm or consider changing weapons possession and use practices unless their cohesion, identity, and traditional forms of law can remain vital, or unless the tribe itself can be undermined as a viable social institution” (Miller, 2003, p. 47).
- 9 Externally funded programmes may also prove to be counterproductive. Disarmament in South Sudan was used to help consolidate Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) power over rivals during the South Sudan civil war.

- 10 UNICEF estimates that some 3,900 boys were recruited between 2015 and 2022 (AP, 2022).
- 11 According to the UN, Security Sector Reform (SSR) “aims at improving safety through enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of security institutions controlled by civilians and operating according to human rights and the rule of law.” <https://tinyurl.com/yjs9yptn>
- 12 The economic downturn that impacts the feasibility of DDR influences any attempts at SSR too. The limited payment of salaries to civil servants, including army personnel, is a key challenge. While in 1990, southern and northern Yemen were unified on paper, the two armies never merged under a unified command (Seitz, 2014, p. 56). Furthermore, the military has been the largest employer in the country (Seitz, 2014, p. 59). In 2012, then-President Hadi tried to restructure the armed forces, but the decades-long patronage network that characterizes military matters prevented any meaningful change.
- 13 The influx of non-combatants into the programme was in part encouraged by changes UNMIL made to its eligibility criteria from one firearm per person to 150 rounds of ammunition in exchange for 300USD, a comparatively high cash reward.
- 14 Combatants might have not even left their homes as it was the case for many Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters in the Philippines.
- 15 In 2015, the Hadi government required the Houthis to disarm and withdraw from seized territory prior to reaching a political agreement (Hadi, 2015), while the Houthis wanted to retain their arms until said agreement is in place, arguing that Hadi’s demand would be tantamount to surrender (Middle East Eye, 2016).

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# 9 Governance and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Yemen

## Challenges and Recommendations

*Gaghman Abdulghani*

### Case Study Context

Yemen is a low-income country that faces troublesome long-running difficulties to balancing out and developing its economy. The current conflict since 2015 has just exacerbated those issues (CSO, 2020). The economic impact of the continuing war in Yemen has been severe: falling currency, rapid inflation, seriously constrained food and fuel imports, and crumbling infrastructure. It is considered the worst humanitarian crisis in the world (HDR, 2018; Jenkins, 2020). At least 85% of the population needs humanitarian assistance.

Prior to the start of the conflict in 2014, Yemen was highly dependent on oil resources for revenue. Oil and gas earnings accounted for roughly 25% of GDP and 65% of government revenue (CSO, 2020). Projections suggest that Yemen would not have achieved any of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, even in the absence of conflict (Moyer, et al. 2019).

The war had a colossal negative impact on the economy. The Yemeni economy contracted by 16.7% in 2015, and the economic situation worsened later. The International Monetary Fund expects that GDP growth will improve by 1% in 2023. A more optimistic prognosis is that it may improve even beyond that. Table 9.2 shows the most important economic indicators for Yemen in recent years.

The war has also led to a humanitarian crisis reflected in the increase of the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance from 51% in 2014 to 87% in 2019, while the number of people suffering from food insecurity rose from 41% in 2014 to 68% in 2019 (Jenkins, 2020). The World Bank expected an increase in the poverty rate, that is the number of individuals identified using the World Bank's international poverty line for daily per capita consumption of \$ 1.90, to approximately 71% of the population in 2022 (World Bank, 2022).

Several attempts and efforts by the previous government bodies aimed to boost or improve the country's economy ended up in failure. This failure has been attributed to more than one reason linked to Yemen's inability to achieve sustainable economic development. But one main factor is the absence of good governance. On top of that, a decade of still ongoing conflict has devastated the Yemenis' jobs and shaken the political, financial and social institutions of the state. Recovery and reconstruction efforts in Yemen cannot wait until the end of the war.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-10

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Table 9.1 Yemen Economic indicators

<i>Main Indicators</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>
<b>GDP (billions USD)</b>	24.56	27.59	29.86	23.03	24.37
<b>GDP (Constant Prices, Annual % Change)</b>	-	0.8	2.1	-3.0	6.1
<b>GDP per Capita (USD)</b>	819e	895	943	709	732
<b>General Government Gross Debt (in % of GDP)</b>	84.3	64.8	56.3	56.8	43.5
<b>Inflation Rate (%)</b>	30.4	27.6	10.0	26.7	25.0
<b>Current Account (billions USD)</b>	-0.04	-0.50	-1.20	-0.91	-0.50
<b>Current Account (in % of GDP)</b>	-0.2	-1.4	-7.4	-2.8	-0.01

Source: IMF, 2020.

International organizations, donors, and researchers prescribe good governance as a solution for persistent development problems (Abuzaid, 2007). Therefore, strategic planning for the reconstruction phase must take into consideration the needs and requirements to ensure that the reconstruction process would be effective in the Yemeni context. For these reasons, and to overcome the previous complications afflicting Yemen, the government of Yemen needs, when it embarks on successfully promoting good governance in Yemen as a post-conflict country, to enhance public confidence in the government and to create a sense of ownership on the part of citizens which lead to the reduction of conflict factors and triggers (Moyer et al., 2019).

Lately, governance also has become one of the most important concepts in both developed and developing countries. The Commission on Global Governance report published in 1995 “refers to ‘government-like’ activities” in the international system usually performed by a panoply of constantly changing institutions, including international law, international and regional organizations, and NGOs (Kemp et al., 2005). As governance is the core focus of international and local development, similarly, reforming governments toward good governance is necessary. It entails a host of activities and measures aimed at fighting corruption, endorsing rule of law, and continuing commitment to improve government efficiency. Consequently, many countries, especially in the developing world, try to pursue good governance and adopt policies in accordance with the established concept of governance to achieve the desired sustainable economic growth and development.

The discussion of development and good governance in the world in general, and Arab countries, after the outcomes of the UNDP reports (HDI, 2019; UNDP, 2016; UNESCWA, 2017), was intended to focus on the dimensions of sustainable development and achieving human development with its comprehensive scope. The most widely used indicators are those of the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP), which envisages interdependence of political, social, economic, cultural and environmental spheres. Accordingly, long-term planning in the fields of education, culture, welfare, healthcare, environment and others should

be based on a degree of justice, accountability, equality, legitimacy and participation. All the above, or the so-called principles of good governance, underscore the strong relationship between development, combating poverty, improving living standards and achieving other sustainable development goals, because good governance is the guarantor of transforming economic growth into sustainable development.

To reach more accurate conclusions and achieve a better diagnosis of reality, limits have been set for the problem posed in this research, namely when setting the framework in which the subject is studied based on questions and hypotheses. To achieve this, the research was done based on the following limits and dimensions:

- The context of the analysis in this research is limited to the economy of Yemen and its performance.
- The problem is to identify the appropriate governance framework for post-conflict planning for sustainable peace and development in the existing circumstances; culturally, economically, socially, and politically.
- This study deals with the relationship between governance in its various aspects and sustainable economic development in Yemen. This requires an analysis of development and good governance principles/indicators during the period 2009–2019 and the various strategies and reforms adopted to achieve the sustainable development goals.

### **Relevance of the Study**

Governance contributes to the formulation and application of policies which aim to determine a sound and attractive business climate for investment and production, reconstruct the infrastructure, guarantee property rights and freedoms, and ensure human rights and participation by all, including the poor and the low-income strata in society (Nasser and Osberg, 2018).

### ***Problem Statement***

Development in Yemen, like in other countries, must be achieved through the adoption of good governance to establish safety and security, nurture an open market, and promote integration with the global economy (HDR, 2018). To achieve comprehensive development, a series of effective measures must be taken to fulfil the demands of democracy and transparency, sustainable development, and its goals.

Based on the above, the main problem of this research can be formulated as follows:

To what extent has good governance been achieved in Yemen? What is the relationship between the adoption of the concept of good governance and post-conflict reconstruction planning?

To simplify the research question, the problem it deals with can be divided into the following questions:

1. What is the status of governance in Yemen?
2. What is the role of governance in post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen?
3. What are the major obstacles and challenges confronting good governance in Yemen?
4. What recommendations can be made to improve the adoption of the principles of good governance as a tool to achieve post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen?

### ***Research Objectives***

This study will contribute to scholarly research on good governance. It will add to the body of knowledge among scholars and practitioners in the field by shedding light on the effects of good governance on various economic, social, and political levels in Yemen. The study's objectives are as follows:

- To analyse governance in Yemen and the key elements that have a major influence on it.
- To support the implementation of good governance as part of post-conflict reconstruction planning in Yemen.
- To develop a post-conflict framework for promoting and adopting good governance in Yemen.

### ***Research Methodology***

Based on the pre-defined objectives of this study, the single case study methodology has been used to answer the above questions with the aim to explain the complexity of establishing good governance in Yemen. However, some scholars have criticised the case study method, arguing that it is not the best method for scholarly inquiry due to the uniqueness of different cases (Stake, 2008). Johansson (2007) considers the case study methodology as a meta-method as it enables the accumulation of knowledge through the study of a multitude of cases. Accordingly, Yemen as a “case study” in this research can be described as a distinctive case with lots of complexities, in the current situation and in the past, which can be compared to other cases in the MENA region and similar countries elsewhere.

In conducting this study, the following predefined procedure was adopted based on Tellis (1997):

- Conduct the case study:
  - Data collection and preparation from international databases for the period (2009–2019).
  - Collect the data for MENA countries.

- Analyse case study evidence:
  - Apply analytic strategy.
  - Trends and correlations (multiple sources of data).
  - Time series analysis.
- Findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence.

Governance in Yemen has been purposely selected as a case study by virtue of being somehow a unique and extreme case: Yemen ranks the lowest among the least developed countries in the Arab world (World Bank Yemen, 2018). The study, therefore, has an intrinsic value as it enables us to understand the reasons behind Yemen's critical economic situation and poor governance, and what should be considered once we move toward post-conflict reconstruction planning.

To achieve the objectives, a range of tools and techniques will be utilised, including literature review and constructing a descriptive narrative. However, the research will not be limited to the abstract level. Primary data obtained from trusted international statistical sources, as well as official national data issued by Yemeni government institutions, will also be presented and analysed to explore relevant economic facts.

### *The Importance of the Study*

The subject of this research is of crucial importance for Yemen's economic policy. It represents a future vision for the implementation of the principles of good governance aiming to achieve post-conflict development in the medium- and long-terms, considering the results achieved so far by some countries and lessons learned. This vision aims to achieve and create a balance between different sectors of the national economy in a way that improves safety and security, boosts government effectiveness, reduces corruption, and consolidates democracy in hopes of meeting the current challenges and the requirements of successful post-conflict reconstruction. Moreover, the following considerations need to be borne in mind.

- The war in Yemen, which escalated in March 2015, compounding the post-Arab Spring chaos that started in 2011, has turned a poor country into a failed state and a humanitarian catastrophe.
- The need to discuss the role of good governance in rebuilding Yemen in the post-conflict period.
- The necessity of understanding which governance principles/elements have the most impact and influence on the quality of socio-economic development.
- The importance of good governance contributions to ensuring social and economic stability and achieving well-known sustainable development goals (UN, 2016 SDGs).

### *Research Layout*

The research will begin with an introduction followed by a theoretical background section on governance and post-conflict construction based on the literature review.

This will be followed by a detailed analysis of governance in Yemen with its associated indicators.

### **Literature Review: Good Governance**

This section provides an overview of the literature on good governance and post-conflict reconstruction planning. It will help deepen our understanding of the concept of good governance. It examines the circumstances and factors that led to the emergence of this concept and the problems it poses on both the theoretical and practical levels and its impact on the policies and programmes of sustainable and comprehensive development.

The term governance is applied to development measures for both the public and private sectors within the framework of the legitimate state. It incorporates the working and capacity of the public sector, as well as the policies, regulations, and principles that establish the framework for the public and private sectors, including the assurance of better economic and financial performance. In broad terms, “*governance is about the institutional environment in which citizens interact among themselves and with government agencies/officials*” (Holzer and Kim, 2002).

The World Bank introduced the term “crisis in governance.” It has since been broadly utilised in political studies, particularly for portraying the political standing of developing countries. Keping (2018) summed up the various scholarly theoretical perspectives on governance in five main categories as follows:

1. Governance indicates that the government is not the focus of the state’s power in the traditional sense since governance is applied by institutions and actors inside and outside the government. This participatory element is a source of strength for state decisions.
2. Governance takes cognisance of the blurry limits and obligations when handling social and economic issues that the state, in modern society, increasingly shares its traditional responsibilities with society. Subsequently, the dividing lines between the state and society, and public and private sectors, are getting progressively blurred, as well as the nature of their responsibilities.
3. Governance recognises the dependent relationship between institutional parties to collective action. In general, groups involved in collective action depend on other groups. To carry out their activities and accomplish their purposes, they need to exchange resources and identify shared objectives. The outcome of these interactions and exchanges depends on the resources of every actor within the bounds of the environment in which they operate.
4. Governance highlights the importance of self-governing and self-sustaining systems for many actors. The self-governing system can give orders in a specific circle, work with the government in this circle, and share the burdens of the government’s duties in relation to public administration.
5. Governance aims to create the ability to act and attain goals without relying on governmental authority. This is facilitated by the government’s application of modern administrative techniques and methods that the government in its

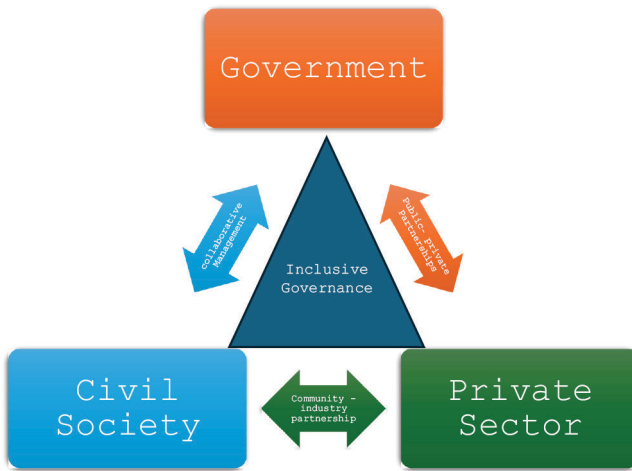


Figure 9.1 Key Components of Governance and Their Inter-Relationships.

Source: Bennett et al. 2019.

Table 9.2 Good Governance Principles (Summarised by Author)

<i>(UNDP, 1997)</i>	<i>(Keping, 2018)</i>	<i>(WGI, 2019)</i>
- Participation	- Transparency	- Voice and Accountability
- Rule of law	- Rule of law	- Political Stability and
- Transparency	- Responsiveness	Absence of Violence
- Responsiveness	- Effectiveness	- Government
- Consensus Oriented	- Accountability	Effectiveness
- Equitability and Inclusiveness	- Legitimacy	- Regulatory Quality
- Effectiveness and Efficiency		- Rule of Law
- Accountability		- Control of Corruption

management of public affairs (Stoker,1998), as shown in Figure 9.1, the key Components of Governance and Their Inter-Relationships (Bennett et al. 2019).

To gain economic competitiveness and ensure social growth, countries search for new forms of governance inspired by the principles of good governance that enable governments to best achieve their desired objectives. Here, the governance attribute, both locally or nationally, can be summarised based on the literature regardless of the governance context (UNDP, 2012). A summary of the principles of good governance is shown in Table 9.2.

In short, good governance refers to governing principles of public administration that aim to safeguard the public interest. This might be achieved through a

set of practices that fall under different categories. For example: community participation, strengthening the relationship between civil society and the state, and enhancing community confidence in government. Gaghman (2020) summarises the good governance perspectives and their impact on sustainable development into the following six principles:

1. *Legitimacy* which indicates that the state or political system is voluntarily recognised. The system and social power have no direct relationship with the laws and regulations of the state. Legitimacy stems from the people. The citizens' confidence in the state is what gives it legitimacy, and the higher the degree of legitimacy, the higher the level of good governance. Achieving and improving legitimacy relies on a number of things, including unifying political identity among citizens, maximising consensus, mitigating the conflicts of interests between citizens and the state, and enhancing citizens' approval of public administration activities and contributing to them.
2. *Transparency* which refers to the level of political information publicity. All citizens are entitled to the information and have the right to see the state's policy documents because they are an important part of the state and, in general, these policies relate to their own interests. The scope of transparency should include all legislative activities, policies, law enforcement, financial budgets, and public spending. In general, transparency should be made as a common practice in all government institutions. So, the level of good governance will rise by improving the degree of transparency.
3. *Accountability* methods would ensure that each individual is responsible for their own conduct. In policy management, accountability refers specifically to the obligations identified with a specific position or institution and its respective commitments. Accountability means that state officials and executives in all state institutions must fulfil the duties and obligations of the positions they occupy. The greater the accountability of the public sector, and especially the state's executives, the greater the degree of good governance.
4. *Rule of law* means that the law is the basic and constant reference base that does not change in the general political organization. The law must be applied by the administrative authorities and felt by the public, who must all be equal under the law. Rule of law requires a sound legal framework and respect for the law, which must be applied to all. The primary goal of rule of law is to control the behaviour of the individual, manage social affairs, preserve social life, and protect the basic political rights of citizens, primarily freedom and equality. Therefore, rule of law is a necessity for good governance.
5. *Responsiveness* is closely related to the above-mentioned principle of accountability. So, more accountability is to be reflected in the level of government officials and agencies responding to the residents' requests in a timely and responsible manner. Laws must be enacted that prevent delaying the response and responding without reason or leaving any unconfirmed case without reaction. Responsiveness also requires those concerned to seek advice proactively from the population, to uncover the state's strategies and plans that concern

the population, and to always answer their inquiries. Therefore, the greater the degree of responsiveness, the greater the degree of good governance.

6. *Effectiveness* principally refers to management efficiency. It has two basic foundations: rational administrative structure applying experimentally planned regulatory methodology and engaging in adaptable authoritative activities; and limited managerial expenses. Ineffective or profligate administrative activities interfere with good governance. The higher the degree of good governance, the more effective the management.

### **Governance in Post-Conflict Countries**

The effective progress of good governance in countries emerging from conflict depends on various factors, in particular the way the conflict was concluded, the activities adopted by the international community to address the post-conflict situation, and the extent of the state's weakness or destruction during the time of conflict. The chances of combining peace with improved governance increase significantly when the conflict parties themselves arrange a settlement and are supported by the international community (Debiel and Terlinden, 2005).

#### ***Post-Conflict Reconstruction***

Lately, the idea of "post-conflict reconstruction" has received a lot of attention from researchers and specialists, as well as from international organizations, including the United Nations. All things considered, because of the complexities inherent in post-conflict circumstances, coming up with an exact definition for the term "post-conflict reconstruction" has been elusive (Kauzy, 2003).

Despite taking up the cudgels for post-conflict reconstruction, no international organization has given an exact meaning of the term (Duffield, 1999). The World Bank associated the term "post-conflict," for the most part, with "transitional" nations experiencing their first phases after a rough conflict (Kauzy, 2003).

The United Nations Development Program, in a Crisis Prevention and Recovery Report (UNDP, 2008) titled "Post-Conflict Economic Recovery," describes present conflict nations based on their advancement along a range of "peace-building achievements" (UNDP, 2008). The report states: "*A post-conflict nation ought to be viewed as lying some place along a continuum on every one of these achievements, perceiving that it could here and there move in reverse.*" It is up to a nation to ensure that it will not slip back on any of these achievements and continuously proceed toward recovery. Recovery needs to be adopted and understood by the state as a real goal. Otherwise, the country will never recover. The following are the key indicators of the peacebuilding phase according to the UNDP, 2008:

- Ceasing hostilities and violence.
- Signing of peace agreements.
- Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration.
- Return of prisoners and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

- Establishing the foundations for a functioning state.
- Initiating reconciliation and societal integration.
- Commencing economic recovery.

Hence, the reconstruction task in any post-conflict country is challenging. However, as the history of Yemen's reconstruction effort has shown, there is no permanent crisis management system in Yemen. So far, every response to a crisis or conflict has started from scratch (Al-Akhali et al., 2019). The horrific social and financial disturbance brought about by the conflict in Yemen represents a colossal test for post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. There are critical divisions among the public on issues identified with local self-sufficiency and social resistance. These divisions, which are compounded by grievances resulting from the conflict, could keep on influencing the possibility of longstanding peace and could compromise the nation's ability to achieve manageable peace (Yemen Economic Outlook, 2019).

### ***Post-Conflict Reconstruction Framework***

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) distributed an exhaustive framework of basic activities for effective post-conflict reconstruction (Hamre and Sullivan, 2004). The CSIS Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework depicts three phases of post-conflict reconstruction:

1. **Phase I: Initial response:** This stage immediately follows the end of violence. It is frequently characterised by the establishment of humanitarian crisis administrations and military interventions to ensure fundamental security.
2. **Phase II: Transformation/Transition:** During this time, national local capacities have to be built and developed and must be combined in the process. Particular attention is paid to economic development and overhauling public service, government reform, and the construction of essential social welfare infrastructure.
3. **Phase III: Fostering sustainability:** It is a long-term process that consolidates recovery efforts to prevent the resurgence of conflict. Ideally, during this phase the society begins a process of normalization, moving the country from post-conflict recovery to peacetime economic development, with good governance rules and principles so that government and civil society institutions would become fully functioning.

Furthermore, CSIS Post-Conflict Task Framework is organised around four pillars (Table 9.3):

Another point of view maintains that leadership is essential in conflict circumstances to set up appropriate frameworks and institutions, to improve the individual's capacity, to wisely utilise scarce resources, and to advance the use of information. Leaders must have a vision to implement institutional changes. They should, likewise, have the option to prepare the individuals around them to move forward with changes and accomplish shared objectives (Kauzy, 2003).

Table 9.3 Key Pillars for CSIS Post Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework

<i>Key pillar</i>	<i>Main Elements</i>
<p><b>1. Security</b> This pillar addresses the establishment of a safe environment and development of stable security institutions. Individual and collective security is a precondition for achieving positive outcomes in the other pillars.</p>	<p>a. In the initial response phase, post-conflict reconstruction activities establish basic security.</p> <p>b. In the transformation phase, they develop legitimate security institutions.</p> <p>c. In the final sustainability fostering phase, they consolidate local security capacity, reducing the reliance on international actors.</p>
<p><b>2. Justice and reconciliation</b> This pillar creates an accountable legal system to deal with past abuses and emerging challenges. Key elements of this pillar may include effective law enforcement, an open judicial system, fair laws, humane corrections systems, and formal and informal mechanisms for resolving conflicts.</p>	<p>a. In the initial response phase, post-conflict reconstruction activities develop mechanisms for addressing past and ongoing grievances.</p> <p>b. In the transformation phases, they build legal systems and create a process for reconciliation.</p> <p>c. In the final sustainability fostering phase, they sustain a functioning legal system based on international norms.</p>
<p><b>3. Social and economic well-being</b> This pillar deals with basic social and economic needs, especially provisions for emergency relief, the restoration of essential services, the creation of a foundation for a viable economy, and the initiation of a sustainable development programme.</p>	<p>a. In the initial response phase, post-conflict reconstruction activities mostly focus on providing emergency humanitarian aid.</p> <p>b. In the transformation phase, they establish the foundation for an independent economy.</p> <p>c. In the sustainability fostering phase, they institutionalise long-term development.</p>
<p><b>4. Governance and participation</b> This pillar focuses on creating effective political and administrative institutions, particularly through establishing a representative constitutional structure, strengthening public sector management and administration, and ensuring active civil society involvement in governance.</p>	<p>a. In the initial response phase, actors determine the best governance structure and establish foundations for citizen participation.</p> <p>b. In the transformation phase, post-conflict reconstruction activities promote legitimate political institutions.</p> <p>c. In the final sustainability fostering phase, they consolidate political institutions and participatory processes.</p>

Source: Hamre and Sullivan, 2004.

Yemen's present conflict is in many ways similar to many other long-drawn-out conflicts. Examples include conflicts in Iraq (2003–present), Democratic Republic of Congo (1992–present), Sierra Leone (1991–2002) and Liberia (2000–2003) (Duffield, 1999). However: “Yemen is the World’s Worst Humanitarian Crisis, with extraordinary degrees of need made by struggle and seriously restricted access to humanitarian aid” (Jenkins, 2020).

Countries which have had great leaders advancing good governance have created and sustained the momentum for post-conflict reconstruction despite exogenous

Table 9.4 Good Governance Actions Taken by Leaders in Several Post-Conflict Situations

Country	Good Governance Actions
JAPAN After World War II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political and economic institutions that were formed in the 1950s helped Japan achieve high growth in the 1960s and 1970s</li> <li>• Dual economy institutions: large firms must co-exist with small firms and farmers and not compete with them.</li> <li>• Strong trade unions and productivity movements</li> <li>• Emphasis on corporate governance</li> <li>• Democratic governance at political level as the empire was replaced with a democracy: “deliberative councils,” which consisted of representatives of interest groups in every ministry, to “quickly incorporate rich local information scattered around the industries into the government policy.”</li> <li>• Institutions became adaptive: socio-economic development forced institutions which seemed to exemplify “Japanese style” or “Japanese culture” to change drastically in the 2000s and the 2010s</li> </ul>
GERMANY After World War II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk less about leaders: Hitler was gone – but institutions remained and were reformed.</li> <li>• Sharp changes in socioeconomic institutions following World War II in directions conducive to fostering growth.</li> <li>• Sweeping but regulated pro-market reforms in West Germany abolished cartels, and put the West German economy on a path toward European and world market integration.</li> <li>• Collective bargaining and workplace co-determination, the principal mechanisms through which distributional coalitions had asserted themselves remained and informed big-investor growth.</li> <li>• Technological adaptations and inventions allowed in private and public sectors</li> </ul>
Latin American Countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolving institutions like in Ecuador.</li> <li>• Institutional strengthening.</li> <li>• Institutional improvement especially in the natural resources sector.</li> <li>• Institutionalised technology transfers and adaptations taking place in Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador.</li> <li>• Strengthening of democracy – e.g., Ecuador’s transformational leader.</li> </ul>

Source: Gaghman, 2020: 241–242.

shocks and emergencies. Governance is the vehicle of reasonable advancement, the support around which nascent institutional development spins. Let’s now take a quick look at a number of examples of post-war reconstruction (Table 9.4):

- Post-World War II Japan.
- Post-World War II Germany.
- The evolving Latin American economies.

Since post-conflict circumstances are heterogeneous, there is no “one size fits all” institutional answer for governance challenges. Therefore, the difficulties confronting emergency and post-conflict countries are varied and complex.

Governments and global associations can occasionally depend on a multitude of ways to deal with re-establishing governance principles. Involvement in post-conflict reconstruction and development does not necessarily require that national and international aid organizations be only devoted to detailed, suitable, adaptable, sound, and powerful post-conflict reconstruction methodologies. They must also incorporate four essential variables into their plans and projects (Rondinelli, 2007):

1. Comprehensive view of key conditions and needs inside post-conflict countries, including the difficulties that administrations face, their qualities, and shortcomings in meeting those difficulties, the most basic undertakings and capacities that legislatures must complete in a five- to ten-year time period, and the insufficiencies in government constraints on offering certain types of assistance and actualizing reconstruction plans.
2. Acknowledgment of potential impediments to change, including the potential for surviving or forestalling the most incessant bottlenecks or obstacles to rebuilding government.
3. An appraisal of the potential ways to deal with international aid, including the capacity to actualise an aid programme that meets all or the greater part of the donors' standards for assistance.
4. Proper recognition and understanding of the capabilities, strengths, and shortcomings of other assistance approaches, and of the conditions under which they are probably going to be plausible.

Governance includes establishing rules and procedures that enable political decision-making to ensure the provision of public services in an effective and transparent manner. Governance and participation are considered among the main pillars in the post-conflict framework as they address the need for political and administrative institutions that uphold rule of law, operate effectively, and act with full transparency, in line with participatory processes within peaceful legislative and political frameworks, and in a manner that enhances the participation of civil society in the formulation of the government's agenda and its policies (Hamre and Sullivan, 2004).

In Africa, there are several post-conflict reconstruction attempts but with limited achievement. Englebert and Tull (2008) have discussed and link the causes of this limited success to several inconsistent assumptions on which reconstruction efforts are predicated. These assumptions include the following:

- Aid capacity limits and African government resistance have adversely impacted aid effectiveness.
- Less focus on informal political institutions, and most of the aid did not reach the right recipients.
- Different points of view about state failure between donors and African elites, where these elites use state failure as an opportunity to increase their political status regardless of the social benefits.

- Reconstruction efforts are frequently replacing the existing government system, salaries with short-lived wage earnings, and homes with shelters. In the end, these reconstruction efforts contribute to the incidence of chaos.
- Reconstruction aid to Africa is usually short-term, especially when compared to reconstruction plans which aim to bring lasting peace and security.
- Donors lack priorities to allocate the donations to main projects and do not have enough to cover the capital for reconstruction. Overlapping donor plans, as well as the incompatibility between reconstruction objectives and national interests, can undermine the local legitimacy of state-building endeavors.

The flawed assumptions of international reconstruction activities highlight the constraints on what aid providers can reasonably accomplish in failed states in Africa. Locally-based (indigenous) reconstruction activities in Uganda and Somaliland have fared superior to their externally supported partners. Broad and intrusive external interventions to deal with state-building may be as much part of the problem as of the solution (Englebort and Tull, 2008).

International donors may, therefore, acknowledge the potential for indigenous recovery in Africa by supporting local initiatives and promoting state development through collaborative and interactive structures between government and society. Rather than offering constant quick fixes in failed states, donors should strengthen the bargaining power of the private and local sectors by supporting their relationships with the government. Additionally, donors can target specific groups, such as national media, conflict resolution bodies, and human rights watchdogs, to advance state responsibility and accountability. By taking these steps, international donors can help facilitate sustainable recovery in Africa.

In every state, institutional changes ought to be customised to current needs while considering the heritage of previous organisations, including past qualities and frameworks (Kauzy, 2003).

### **The Impact of Conflict**

On 21 March 2015, after taking over Sanaa and the Yemeni government, the Houthi-led Supreme Revolutionary Committee declared a general mobilization to overthrow President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and expand their control by driving into southern provinces (Popp, 2015). Hadi rescinded his resignation and returned to Aden in September 2015, and fighting has continued since then. As of December 2017, Hadi had reportedly been residing in exile in Saudi Arabia (Salisbury, 2015). In 2022, Hadi stepped down and nominated an 8-member presidential council to rule the country.

Concurrently, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched military operations, characterised by the extensive use of air strikes, to restore the former Yemeni government. The United States provided intelligence and logistical support for the campaign (Salisbury, 2015). According to national statistics, over 482,000 people lost their lives of which 166,000 are combat deaths and 316,000 indirect deaths due to lack of food, health services and infrastructure (Moyer et al., 2019) (Table 9.5).

Table 9.5 The Impact of War in Yemen

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*2022 Impact – If the conflict had ended in 2022, it would have accounted for:*

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482,000 Deaths	(1.5 percent of the 2022 population) with 166,000 combat deaths and 316,000 indirect deaths due to lack of food, health services and infrastructure
1 Child Death	every 7 minutes in 2022
331,000 Deaths	children under the age of five
50%	of the population living with malnutrition
43%	children without access to schools
US \$181B	loss in economic output
US \$2,600	reduction in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP))

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Source: Moyer et al., 2019:7.

Jenkins (2020) blames the Saudi-led coalition for the deteriorating situation in Yemen. He characterises the military operation as “brutal aggression” against the Yemeni people. According to Jenkins, this aggression, which given its gravity borders on genocide, is backed by a group of EU Member States that have made lucrative deals selling hundreds of millions of euros worth of arms to the Saudi-led coalition (Jenkins, 2020). The conflict has resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, and its impact continues to worsen daily up to the current date of this research.

While there were many factors, both internal and external, that explain the cause of the conflict, there is big agreement that it was years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable (Smith, 2000). Since the conflict started, the nation had been deprived of its dignity. Government accountability was non-existent, official institutions almost collapsed, political expression and dissent had been crushed, democracy and the rule of law were dead (Salisbury, 2015).

To achieve better and sustainable reconstruction, it is crucial to proactively study the needs and requirements for reconstruction before the end of the conflict. This approach facilitates the formulation of guidelines and recommendations based on previous experiences, which can effectively address the current and future situation of the country, rather than just responding to crises as they occur (Gaghman, 2020).

### ***Yemen Post-Conflict Reconstruction Vision***

Yemen has suffered since 2011 from a deteriorating economy and repeated shocks to an already weak economy. On the other hand, the population continues to increase, from 18 million in 2000 to more than 33 million in 2022. This puts great pressure on the government and other concerned parties in the country, as they are required to provide all basic services, create job opportunities, implement community and rural development, build infrastructure, and provide other basic needs for decent living (Al-Akhali et al., 2019). These basic requirements should be among

the priorities at the dialogue table and peace building processes to avoid returning to the square of conflict again and to encourage people to move away from conflict and play a role in sustainable development.

Reconstruction under any post-conflict scenario is a very difficult task. As the Yemeni government begins to build an institutional framework for post-conflict reconstruction, it can learn from successful local institutional models that enjoy the benefits of a deep understanding of society (Rogers, 2018), national access and professional manpower (Al-Sarhan and Brehony, 2015). Therefore, economic stability is the most important step, and it is considered a guarantee to gain the confidence of Yemenis in peacebuilding processes, tackling the root causes of the war, getting out of the cycle of conflict (Al-Akhali et al., 2019), rebuilding the fragile state, and moving toward sustainable economic development and social prosperity.

## **Findings**

### ***Governance Indicators***

Two strategies have been considered to analyse the governance domains, pillars, and elements in relation to SDGs by using Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) and Legatum Prosperity Index (LPI), while the governance attribute was measured using Worldwide Governance Index (WGI).

To know which elements Yemeni leaders and governments should put at the top of their priorities and take urgent action to address, the Legatum Prosperity Index (LPI) has been used. LPI is considered one of the most comprehensive resources to assist countries and relevant authorities in determining what must be done to enhance the paths of transition from poverty to prosperity. There are 12 pillars, or essential foundations, of prosperity that are grouped into the following three domains: Inclusive Societies, Open Economy and Empowered People.

The field of inclusive societies embodies the structural relationships in society. These relationships may be between individuals themselves and between individuals and institutions on a large scale. Studying these relationships enables researchers to identify and understand the factors that enhance or affect community cohesion and collective development. This domain consists of the pillars of Safety and Security, Personal Freedom, Governance and Social Capital. It comprises 95 indicators captured within 21 elements (Legatum Institute 2019).

### ***Data and Information***

In the following section, LPI will be analysed in a downscaling approach from pillars to elements and indicators. In the LPI score for the MENA countries for the period (2009–2019) Yemen ranked the lowest, 165<sup>th</sup>, scoring 31.1 in 2019, and 32.7 in 2022, down (14%) compared to (36.1) in 2009. This corresponds to the situation in other conflict-ridden and politically unstable countries in the region (namely, Syria, Libya, and Yemen) (Legatum Institute, 2020). Figure 9.2 shows the Legatum Institute (LPI) Score Progress Variation Between 2009 and 2019.

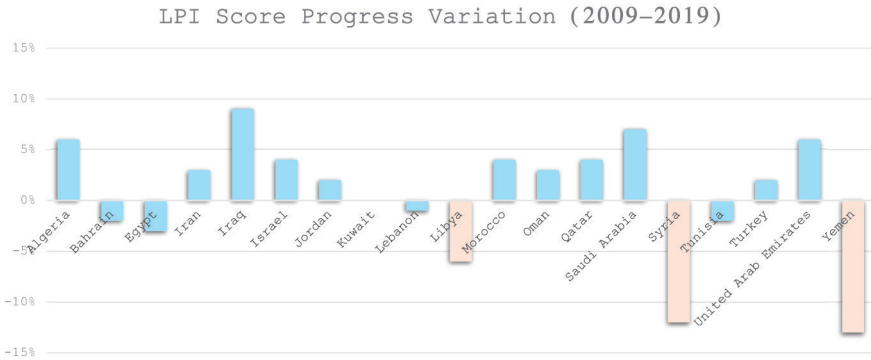


Figure 9.2 LPI Score Progress Variation Between 2009 and 2019.

Table 9.6 Summary of the most sensitive variables for the period (2009–2019) in Yemen

Pillar Name	Element	Diff. %
Safety and Security	Politically Related Terror and Violence	-99%
	Property Crime	-10%
	Terrorism	-94%
	Violent Crime	-14%
	War and Civil Conflict	-38%

A strong relationship between safety and security, on the one hand, and governance, on the other, can be observed from the data for MENA countries such as Libya and Syria, the most conflict-ridden countries in the region besides Yemen. To demonstrate this in Yemen, there is a high degree of variance between Yemen’s LPI indexes for the period (2009 and 2019) (Table 9.6):

The key elements of safety and security that exhibited marked variations between 2009 and 2019, and, in turn, contributed to the low/negative score for Yemen, are:

- Safety and Security elements → Politically Related Terror and Violence (-99%) and Terrorism (-94%). (Figure 9.3).
- Governance elements → Government Effectiveness (-83%).
- Social Capital elements → Civic and Social Participation (-93%) and Institutional Trust (-41%).

Improvement in safety and security elements will be reflected in governance, leading eventually to progress toward more prosperity.

A nation’s prosperity depends on the availability of a number of conditions, including safety and security, effective institutions, an open economy, and an empowered population who are healthy, educated and can participate in the nation’s

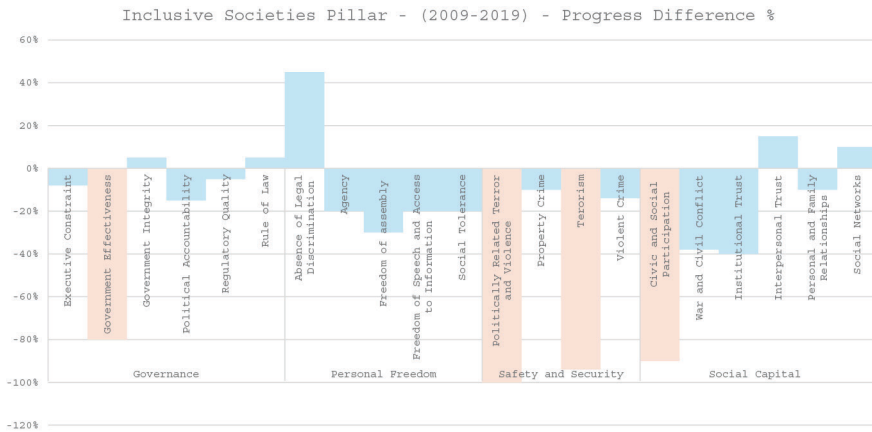


Figure 9.3 Yemen Inclusive Society Pillar/Elements Score Difference (2009–2019).

Table 9.7 Quality of Governance Elements during (2009–2019) in Yemen

Governance element	Indicator	Diff. %
Government Effectiveness	Efficient use of assets	-100%
	Implementation	-100%
	Policy coordination	-100%
	Policy learning	-100%
	Prioritisation	-100%
Government Integrity	Budget transparency	-100%
Political Accountability	Consensus on democracy and a market economy as a goal	-75%
	Political participation and rights	-100%

decisions (Legatum Institute, 2019). The quality of governance (particularly government effectiveness, government integrity and political accountability) in Yemen has deteriorated the most, which had a negative impact on the country’s institutional strength and overall LPI score.

Improvement in government effectiveness elements will contribute to an improvement in overall governance and a transformational path toward better institutional and economic strength (Table 9.7).

Research shows evidence of the importance of governance as key input for the quality of the economy. When looking at the progression of the most successfully-developed countries, a correlation between the quality of the economy and the quality of governance can be observed. The relationship between governance and economic development is shown in, and can be predicted from, the regional trend in Figure 9.4, which depicts the relationship between the Governance Index and the Economic Index (BTI, 2020).

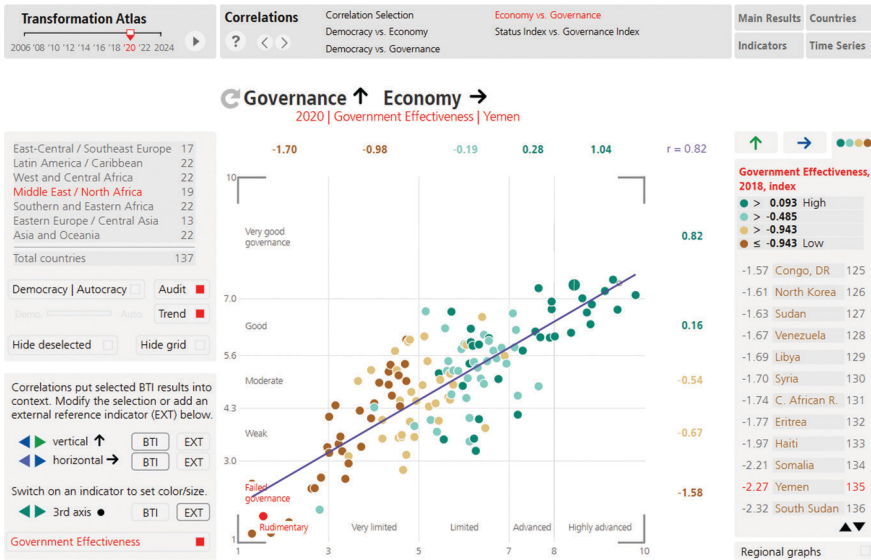


Figure 9.4 Economic Index vs Governance index (Colour index in the upper right corner for Government effectiveness) for the MENA Countries.

Source: BTI, 2020.

In conclusion, as previously mentioned, governance measures the extent of government effectiveness which is a combination of the quality of public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy and the competence of officials.

Several governance indexes have been used in this research. They show that Yemen suffers from poor governance and state failure, which are linked to the political stability and war conditions plaguing the country. Besides, ineffective government institutions and low social capital negatively impact the overall quality of Yemen's economy.

The nature of Yemen's governance has an impact on its economic growth. Political stability, government effectiveness and strong institutions contribute significantly to governance quality, as do competent governments that enact policy efficiently and design regulations that deliver policy objectives without being overly burdensome.

Based on the research findings, the government of Yemen should take serious steps toward ending the conflict and engaging in peace dialogue as the first step to improve the safety and security of the Yemeni people, strengthen justice and reconciliation organizations, and stabilise and grow the economy. Work toward economic recovery and improvement would go a long way toward ensuring sustainable peace. Moreover, the government should work with national bodies to assess what economic and social strategies should be adopted to ensure future inclusive society,

improve people's living conditions, an open economy, and empowered people to attain greater levels of prosperity.

## **Recommendations**

In Yemen, like in many post-conflict countries, the breakdown of order is hard to reverse and undermines the whole state. The risks it poses are exacerbated by broader regional rivalries in the MENA region. Failed states have little expectation to re-establish a strong institutional model of power or meeting obligations, such as security, education, or well-being. The qualities and shortcomings of the state in Yemen as exemplified by the components of governance were depicted in Table 9.2. Establishing safety and security is understood to be the key factor in deciding the country's future.

Restoring governance and strengthening government in Yemen requires difficult and complex changes that may require long-term efforts to actualise. Initial activities to that end should concentrate on building capacities required for completing the most critical reforms. The fundamental reforms that the government of Yemen needs to take should be aimed at effecting changes in a number of areas, primarily: establishing safety and security, strengthening government institutions, restoring infrastructures and service provision, involving the private sector, stabilizing and developing the economy, promoting equity and equality, and supporting civil society associations.

The Yemeni government has weak managerial capacities and needs financial assets. It regularly experiences institutional deficiencies that will require significant stretches of time to address. Serious measures are needed to improve government effectiveness. Planned adequately, approaches that energise public-private and public NGO partnerships can help improve the public administration's ability to carry out its responsibilities and to oversee private associations and reinforce the regulatory framework that enables the private sector to complement the work of public sector institutions (Babily, 2018).

Embracing increasingly responsible, transparent, and participatory methodologies in the formulation and implementation of policies boosts public trust in general in the governance and creates a feeling of ownership among the population. Nonetheless, some essential suggestions are required for accomplishing the post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen, covering strategies, policies, planning and governance. As depicted in Figure 9.5, where it shows the key Pillars and Elements for Post-Conflict Recommended Framework.

The objectives of the Yemen reconstruction project should aim to transform the country to a better state than before the war. The public and private sectors, NGOs, and local administration must be involved in this process from the beginning to guarantee legitimacy and local ownership. In the end, it is local actors that will shoulder the burden of actualizing these plans (Rogers, 2018). For this reason, the strategic dimension of planning is a necessary element in development planning processes, as any phased development plan must be framed by a future vision and strategic perspective, which can be reflected through long-term



*Figure 9.5* Recommended Framework for the Key Pillars and Elements for Post-Conflict construction phase.

strategies. Therefore, the focus should be on objectives and policies, especially those related to the outcomes or results of activities, aimed at strengthening the role of the executive organs of the state and achieving them by choosing the best means and methods represented by programmes, projects and other activities.

Focusing on the outcomes and results of activities, along with developing indicators to measure them and setting targets for those indicators, will contribute to enhancing the efficiency of the performance of implementers, given that performance standards are set directly to the objectives of the activity.

## Conclusion

Security and safety are one of the biggest pillars of a nation's prosperity, followed by more open economies and improvements in people's living conditions. The institutional system and formal and legal social structures are necessary to protect the basic freedoms of individuals and guarantee their rights to influence and actively participate in state decisions and policies.

Therefore, improving the country's security and stopping the war is a must. So is improving the quality of state institutions by improving their effectiveness, accountability and transparency. This leads directly to stimulating economic prosperity in the short term and has a significant long-term positive effect on achieving sustainable development and building a solid national economy.

A change in the mind-set and culture is essential for strengthening institutions, as well as for development strategies, policies, plans, and their monitoring and assessment, and, in turn, for achieving the SDGs. Adopting an integrated approach to policy making is necessary to ensure policy coherence and secure participation in decision making. This should be supported by a package of regulatory and market-based measures, to ensure that the proposed policies, plans, and programmes are economically viable, socially equitable, and environmentally acceptable. Adopting a transparent, accountable, and participatory approach is a prerequisite for achieving this end.

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# 10 Yemen Healthcare Priorities Post-Conflict

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## **Introduction**

Before the 2015 war, Yemen's healthcare system faced numerous weaknesses and limited access to services. Maternal mortality was high at 365 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013 (World Health Organization, 2014), and under-five mortality was 53 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013 (Yemen National Health and Demographic Survey (Y-NHDS, 2013). However, there were some improvements from 2003 to 2014, including increased life expectancy between 2003 and 2014, from 63.7 to 68.8 years, infant mortality decreased from 60.1 to 40.4 per 1000 births, and maternal mortality decreased from 374.3–241.5 per 100,000 births (Qirbi and Ismail, 2017).

Yemen's healthcare system had three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary care. Primary healthcare consisted of health centers and units that provided basic services, while secondary care was offered in district and governorate hospitals. Tertiary care was concentrated in specialised hospitals and medical centers in major urban areas (WHO, 2010). Rural areas often lacked access to essential services, leading to preventable diseases and limited maternal and child healthcare access. In 2013, only 45% of the population had access to healthcare within an hour's walk (World Bank, 2013).

Despite challenges, there were improvements in health indicators before the war. For instance, under-five mortality decreased by 65% from 1985 to 2011 (Figure 10.1, 8.1, YDHS, 2013); neonatal mortality rates declined from 32 to 26 per 1000 live births between 1999–2003 and 2009–2013, and infant mortality rates declined from 61 to 43 per 1000 live births. Maternal mortality ratio declined by 59.5% from 2003 to 2013 (Figure 10.2, 9.2 Y-NHDS, 2013). The Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) was introduced in 2009 to enhance primary healthcare, and in 2013, a \$50 million grant aimed to strengthen the healthcare system and improve maternal and child health services (World Bank, 2013).

Since 2015, Yemen has endured a devastating conflict, resulting in a profound humanitarian crisis. Critical infrastructure, including the healthcare system, has been decimated, leaving Yemen ill-prepared to address the healthcare needs of its population (Al-Awlaqi, 2020). Many hospitals and clinics were damaged or destroyed with only half of health facilities operating at full capacity, lacking

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-11

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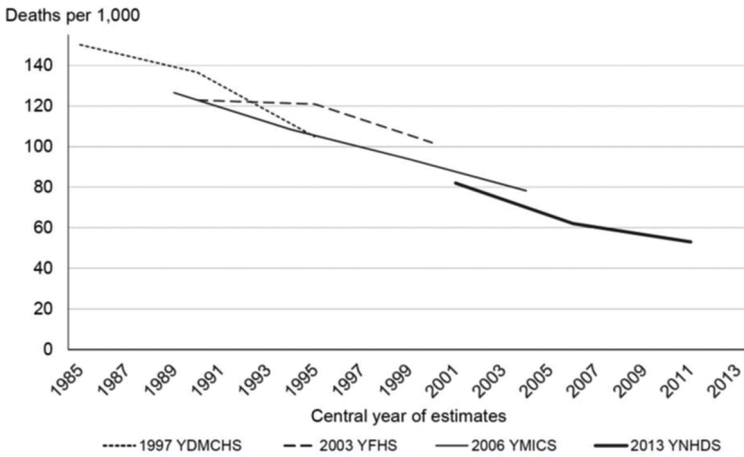


Figure 10.1 Trends in Under-5 Mortality, Yemen 1985–2011.

Source: Yemen Demographic Health Survey, 2013.

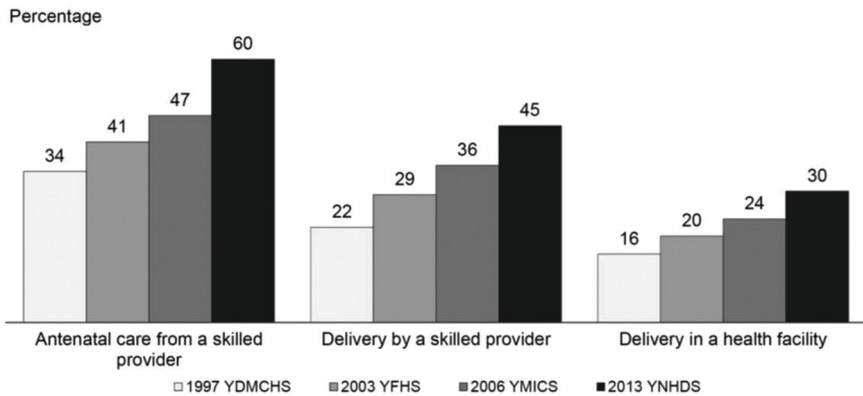


Figure 10.2 Trends in Maternal Care Indicators, Yemen 1997–2013.

Source: Yemen Demographic Health Survey, 2013.

essential medicines, medical equipment, and supplies (HeRAMS, 2020). Escalating violence has driven healthcare professionals out of the country or hindered their ability to work, exacerbating the shortage of skilled personnel (Alwazazi et al., 2023).

The destruction of the healthcare system has plunged millions of Yemenis into dire circumstances (WHO, 2024). Limited access to essential healthcare services

has led to rising morbidity and mortality rates, along with a significant decline in health indicators (El Bcheraoui, 2018; World Bank, 2021). Fundamental medical necessities like immunizations, prenatal care, and chronic disease treatment have become scarce, endangering vulnerable populations, especially women and children (World Bank, 2021). Yemen's healthcare crisis is compounded by challenges such as malnutrition and the spread of infectious diseases. Malnutrition rates have surged, causing widespread stunting and wasting among children. Inadequate access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene practices has contributed to outbreaks of diseases like cholera and diphtheria, further straining the fragile health system (Ng Qx et al., 2020).

Moreover, the displacement of millions of Yemenis due to the conflict has added pressure to healthcare infrastructure in host communities, as displaced individuals seek medical assistance within an already overburdened system (Qirbi and Ismail, 2017; Ng et al., 2020).

This chapter systematically reviews health system priorities in post-conflict settings focusing on Yemen, aiming to identify strategies, challenges, and knowledge gaps for effective support and to ensure that it meets the population's health needs. In terms of methodology, a literature review was conducted in databases: PubMed, Web of Science, and others, including grey literature from United Nations and relevant health organizations working in Yemen, including Yemen Relief Web. Search strategy included tailored keywords and MeSH terms for Yemen's post-conflict health system. Keywords included "Yemen," "health system," "humanitarian crisis," "post-conflict," and others. Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed articles and grey literature and excluded articles without full-text access. This methodology comprehensively reviews relevant literature on Yemen's post-conflict health system priorities. Limitations include the scarcity of peer-reviewed articles on Yemen's health system, particularly post-conflict priorities.

### **Post-Conflict Health System Priorities**

Rebuilding Yemen's post-conflict health system is a complex, long-term process requiring collaboration among stakeholders: government, donors, humanitarian entities, civil society, and communities. It is a vital prerequisite for achieving peace, stability, and development. Yemen must establish a comprehensive, resilient health system. Key measures encompass rehabilitating and expanding healthcare facilities, especially in remote and conflict-affected regions, enhancing primary healthcare (PHC), bolstering workforce capabilities, ensuring sufficient supplies, strengthening infection prevention and control (IPC), reinforcing surveillance, and engaging communities (Martineau et al., 2017; Chaudhury et al., 2020).

Yemen's post-conflict health system faces complex challenges, requiring targeted immediate, medium-, and long-term interventions and sustained investments. Immediate priorities include comprehensive maternal and child health improvements, outbreak prevention, mental health services, and primary care strengthening. Medium-term priorities entail continued healthcare system

investments, non-communicable disease management, health system governance, financing, and enhanced health information systems. Long-term priorities require sustained investments in infrastructure, healthcare workforce development, health education, environmental health, and health research and innovation. These measures will contribute to reduced morbidity, mortality, community resilience, and long-term recovery.

Accurate population health and health system indicators are critical for assessing the conflict's true impact and developing targeted post-conflict health priorities. Reliable data is essential to comprehend diverse health needs, identify area-specific system gaps, and formulate effective responses. Methods for collecting data include Demographic and Health Surveys and Health System Rapid Assessment and Monitoring (Marzouk et al., 2023). Common data collection methods are outlined (Banatvala and Zwi, 2000; Nickerson et al., 2015; Levy and Sidel, 2016).

**Health surveys:** gather data on the health status of the population, including morbidity and mortality rates, and the availability and accessibility of healthcare services (Üstün et al., 2003).

**Analysis of health indicators:** such as infant and maternal mortality rates, vaccination coverage rates, and incidence rates of communicable diseases, to assess the impact of the conflict on the health of the population (Goldsmith, 1972).

**Health facility assessments:** of healthcare facilities, including hospitals and clinics, to determine the extent of damage, the availability of medical supplies and equipment, and the capacity of healthcare workers to provide services (Nickerson et al., 2015).

**Key informant interviews:** with key informants, including healthcare workers, community leaders, and government officials, to gather information on the impact of the conflict on the health system and the population (Gilchrist, 1992).

**Epidemiological investigations:** to identify outbreaks of communicable diseases and to determine the factors contributing to the spread of disease (Levy and Sidel, 2016; Institute of Medicine, 2000).

**Cost-benefit analysis:** to assess the economic impact of the conflict on the health system and the population, including the cost of healthcare services and the economic impact of morbidity and mortality (Brent, 2023).

## Immediate Priorities

### Primary Health Care

Reports indicate that just 51% of health facilities are operational (HeRAMS, 2018, 2020), lacking essential resources like personnel, equipment, and medicines (ICRC, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Approximately 20.1 million people lack basic healthcare access (ICRC, 2021; World Bank, 2021), especially impacting women and children, with less than 50% of births attended by skilled personnel (ICRC, 2021). This has led to the resurgence of preventable diseases, including the largest

recorded cholera outbreak in history, diphtheria, measles, and polio (USAID, 2023). Moreover, over 10 million children and 5 million women lack proper healthcare access (UNICEF, 2022).

A critical short-term priority is strengthening access to quality primary healthcare (PHC), serving as the initial point of care. Enhancing the PHC system aids early diagnosis, reduces secondary and tertiary care burdens, and promotes better health outcomes (Starfield et al., 2005; Macinko et al., 2009). A robust PHC system is foundational for Yemen's healthcare framework.

PHC facilities must provide a wide range of services, including maternal and child health, family planning, immunisations, nutrition, mental health, non-communicable disease management, and emergency care. This holistic approach minimises service fragmentation and ensures continuous care, emphasising early intervention and timely treatment.

Furthermore, adopting a comprehensive health information system (Braa et al., 2007) in PHC facilities streamlines patient management, data collection, monitoring, and assessment. Components may include electronic medical records, disease registries, and streamlined reporting channels, facilitating informed decisions, resource allocation, and improved care quality, particularly in vaccination coverage evaluation.

Community engagement is equally vital in designing, implementing, and reviewing PHC services. It enhances health literacy, promotes preventive measures, encourages proactive healthcare-seeking behaviour, and empowers individuals and communities for better health outcomes (O'Mara-Eves et al., 2015). Community health workers play a significant role in disseminating health education and providing basic healthcare services at the grassroots level.

In PHC strengthening, prioritise the following programmes.

## **Specific Health Programme**

### ***Malnutrition***

Yemen has one of the world's highest rates of food insecurity, according to reports from food insecurity monitoring organizations (IPC, 2023). In the first half of 2023, 781,000 individuals experienced emergency-level food insecurity, while 2.45 million faced crisis-level insecurity. Projections indicate a worsening situation for the latter half of 2023, with an estimated 2.8 million in crisis-level and 1.1 million in emergency-level food insecurity.

Moreover, over 2.3 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition, with approximately 450,000 experiencing severe acute malnutrition and at risk of dying (Alves RNP, 2022). Early 2023 reports indicated 456,000 children under five requiring treatments for acute malnutrition, including over 97,000 with severe malnutrition (IPC, 2023). Furthermore, nearly 260,000 pregnant and lactating women face acute malnutrition. The situation is expected to deteriorate in the second half of 2023, resulting in an estimated 500,000 acutely malnourished children, including approximately 100,000 severely malnourished.

Addressing malnutrition is a crucial component of an immediate health response in Yemen post-conflict. Strategies may encompass food aid, improved access to clean water, and increased availability of nutritional supplements.

Enhancing Yemen's malnutrition response requires a multi-faceted approach involving government, international organizations, humanitarian agencies, and local communities. Key strategies include:

Increase nutrition programme coverage and capacity, particularly for children under five, through community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) programmes and ensuring the availability of therapeutic foods (Renzaio et al., 2022), and an effective supply chain, for procurement, distribution, and storage. In addition, identify and reach vulnerable populations, including pregnant and lactating women (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Integrating nutrition services into the primary healthcare system by training healthcare workers, integrating nutrition screening and treatment into routine services, and ensuring access to essential medicines and supplements (Renzaio et al., 2022).

Community engagement through interventions like mother support groups, community health workers to disseminate nutrition information, provide counseling, and promote behaviour change, and involvement of community and religious leaders and local organizations (Bait et al., 2019).

Addressing underlying causes to develop nutrition-sensitive interventions such as improving access to safe and nutritious food, promoting appropriate infant and young child feeding practices, and enhancing nutrition education (Sharma, 2021). Moreover, investing in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure to prevent diarrheal diseases, and advocating for increased funding and support (Mshida, 2018).

Collaborative efforts with international donors and NGOs are vital to mobilise resources and raise awareness about the severe malnutrition crisis in Yemen, emphasising the long-term benefits of investing in nutrition.

### ***Infectious Diseases***

Yemen has witnessed severe outbreaks in recent years, including a historic cholera epidemic with over 2.18 million suspected cases (WHO EMRO, 2019). The destruction of water and sanitation services has exacerbated water-borne diseases, while low immunisation coverage has led to diphtheria, measles, and other preventable diseases (UN, 2023). These crises are compounded by a collapsing healthcare system, inadequate infrastructure, and medical supply shortages.

A comprehensive approach is vital to combat infectious diseases in Yemen. Strengthening disease surveillance is foundational for early detection and response (WHO, 2022a). A network of healthcare facilities, laboratories, and community health workers, trained in case identification and real-time data reporting and analysis, is essential.

Expanding immunization coverage is crucial (WHO, 2019c). Strengthening routine immunization services and the cold chain system ensures access, particularly

for vulnerable populations. Public awareness campaigns, supported by community engagement, can promote infection prevention and behavioural change (Jain et al., 2022).

Infection prevention and control measures in healthcare facilities are paramount (WHO, 2019b; 2022b). Hand hygiene, waste management, sanitation, and personal protective equipment use are crucial, requiring healthcare worker training and resource provision.

Vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue pose significant threats (AlGaradi, 2015; Al Amad et al., 2020; Allan et al., 2023). Control strategies encompass mosquito control and community awareness campaigns. Others include access to diagnosis and treatment and strengthening primary healthcare services.

Promoting health education and awareness within communities, including information dissemination on disease transmission, and prevention methods, can empower individuals and communities (Wang et al., 2018). Collaboration among the government, healthcare providers, international organizations, and community-based organizations is pivotal for effective surveillance, prevention, and response.

These strategies must adapt to Yemen's evolving infectious disease landscape, prioritizing continuous evaluation and adaptation based on epidemiological changes.

### ***Medium-Term Priorities***

In Yemen, medium-term health priorities demand sustained investments in healthcare, with a focus on rebuilding primary healthcare. Priorities include improving maternal and child health, addressing non-communicable diseases, strengthening health governance and financing, and enhancing health information systems.

### ***Maternal and Child Health***

During Yemen's conflict, infant and under-five mortality rates surged from 2014 levels from 53 deaths per 1,000 live births, and 73 deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively, to over 100 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016 (El Bcheraoui et al., 2018). Chronic malnutrition rose from 39% of children under five years of age to 50%, and to affect 2.3 million children (Alves et al. 2022). Maternal mortality increased by 15% from 2013 (UN, 2019; Butt et al., 2022), with an estimated 12 daily maternal deaths in 2018. UNICEF reported 1.1 million anemic pregnant/lactating women in 2018. A study found 40% of the population lived at least two hours from emergency obstetric care (Garber et al., 2020).

To enhance maternal and child health, Yemen needs infrastructure development, healthcare worker training, family planning, nutrition interventions, and improved health information systems.

Reconstruction should prioritise rural and underserved regions healthcare infrastructure to guarantee equitable access to maternal and child health services (Das et al., 2018; Rutherford, 2019). Training for community and primary healthcare

workers, including midwives, is crucial (WHO, 2018). This will increase skilled healthcare professionals, antenatal check-ups, health education, breastfeeding, postpartum contraception, and postnatal care.

Expanding family planning and supporting pregnancy spacing is vital (UNFPA, 2022), focusing on overcoming cultural and social barriers that hinder effective family planning practices. Nutrition interventions must be integrated into maternal and child health services to combat high malnutrition rates in these groups (Nguyen et al., 2017). Focus should include providing nutrition education, ensuring access to nutritious foods and supplements, promoting exclusive breastfeeding, and encouraging appropriate complementary feeding practices. Finally, strengthening health information systems for evidence-based decision-making, enhance accountability, and facilitate the tracking of progress.

### ***Mental Health***

Since 2015, Yemen has faced war, cholera, COVID-19 outbreaks, causing severe physical and psychological crises (Alhariri et al., 2021). Frequent bombing raids have induced collective war-related fear and trauma (Alhariri et al., 2021). A 2016 survey reported 79% of Sanaa school children with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Al-Ammar et al., 2018). High trauma, anxiety, and depression levels persist, yet Yemen lacks adequate mental health services and trained personnel (Alhariri et al., 2021). Stigma further deters seeking care (Saleh et al., 2008).

Addressing mental health requires commitment, resources, and a multi-sectoral approach (Alhariri et al., 2021). Efforts should ensure medication availability, improve access, and foster understanding and acceptance (Fricchione et al., 2012). Enhancing services involves training and deploying mental health professionals, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses, for assessment, diagnosis, and treatment, in addition to integrating the services into primary healthcare to improve accessibility and ensure a continuum of care (Fricchione et al., 2012).

Promoting community-based mental health care can help reach individuals who may not have access to formal healthcare facilities (Castillo et al., 2019). This includes training community health workers and traditional healers in basic mental health assessment and support. Peer support groups and community-based organizations can also play a vital role in providing psychosocial support and reducing stigma associated with mental health issues.

Raising awareness to reduce stigma is crucial (Javed et al., 2021). Conducting public awareness campaigns through various media channels, community events, and educational institutions can help educate the population about mental health and the importance of seeking help. Encouraging open discussions and testimonies from individuals with lived experiences can contribute to reducing stigma and promoting a supportive environment.

Trauma-informed care is crucial due to widespread exposure to violence and trauma (Sweeney et al., 2018). Therefore, it is vital to train professionals to recognise and address trauma-related symptoms and provide specialised interventions, such as trauma-focused therapies, and create safe and supportive environments.

Moreover, provide psychosocial support and counseling services to help cope with stress, grief, and other emotional challenges, including individual and group counseling sessions, stress management techniques, and resilience-building activities (WHO, 2022c). Also, collaborating with community leaders, religious institutions, and local organizations can help deliver psychosocial support programmes tailored to the cultural and social context of Yemen.

Capacity building of mental health professionals and healthcare providers is crucial (Alhariri et al., 2021). Providing professional development programmes, training on mental health assessment, diagnosis, and evidence-based interventions can enhance the quality of care (Fricchione et al., 2012). Additionally, integrating mental health components into the curricula of healthcare education programmes can help equip future healthcare professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Developing a comprehensive mental health strategy, coordinating efforts for resource allocation, among stakeholders, including the government, healthcare providers, humanitarian agencies, and civil society organisations, and sharing best practices can help strengthen the mental health response in Yemen (Alhariri, 2021).

Integrating mental health into the healthcare system ensures sustainability and accessibility (WHO, 2022c). This involves adding mental health components to primary care, training general healthcare providers in mental healthcare, and creating referral systems for specialised care as necessary (Funk et al., 2008). Integration into education and employment sectors enhances holistic support and well-being.

### **Surveillance, Early Warning System and Emergency Response**

Yemen's health surveillance relies on the Electronic Integrated Disease Early Warning System (eIDEWS) established in 2013, initially with 6 sentinel reporting health facilities. It has since expanded to approximately 2000 facilities, covering 37% of all health facilities, monitoring 28 diseases (WHO EMRO, 2023). Plans to upgrade the system in 2019 to include more sentinel sites and enhance the application platform did not materialise. An evaluation in 2016 noted timeliness issues, with only 1/5 of alerts verified within the first 24 hours of detection (Dureab et al., 2020).

Strengthening Yemen's disease surveillance and early warning systems is crucial for outbreak detection, response, and prevention amid conflict and fragile healthcare infrastructure to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases and protect the population's health (Abduljalil et al 2023; Nakiire, 2019). This involves establishing a robust reporting system, training healthcare workers in case identification and reporting, and forming rapid response teams (Nakiire, 2019).

Key steps include creating a network of healthcare facilities, laboratories, and community workers for active disease monitoring (WHO EMRO, 2023). Training healthcare staff in case identification and data collection is essential (WHO EMORO, 2023). Establishing communication channels and enabling quick data sharing between facilities, labs, and authorities allows the timely sharing of data, allowing for the prompt analysis of trends and patterns (Goel et al., 2023). Moreover, there is a need for strengthening laboratory infrastructure and capacity

for accurate and timely disease diagnosis and confirmation, ensuring availability of diagnostic tools, reagents, skilled personnel, and expanding networks at the national and regional levels (Goel et al., 2023).

Yemen has faced humanitarian crises and outbreaks. Enhancing emergency preparedness and healthcare facility capacity involves developing response plans, training staff in disaster management and emergency care, and equipping facilities (WHO, 2019d). These measures revitalise and expand healthcare facilities’ operational capacity, ensuring quality healthcare delivery.

### Governance and Financing

Yemen’s health sector faces consequences from prolonged conflict, economic decline, and institutional collapse. Many of the health facilities are not functional, and access to healthcare has declined significantly due to dwindling health infrastructure, and weak governance (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, the conflict led to a divided governance, with two governments controlling different regions, further disrupting healthcare governance.

Before the war, Yemen’s health system relied on external or private funding (World Bank, 2021). Government spending dropped from 1.16% to 0.43% of GDP between 2005 and 2015 (Figure 10.3 (Figure 4 in WB report)). During the conflict, external organizations primarily funded the health system through international and national NGOs (Figure 10.4 (Figure 6 in WB report)). However, funding sharply

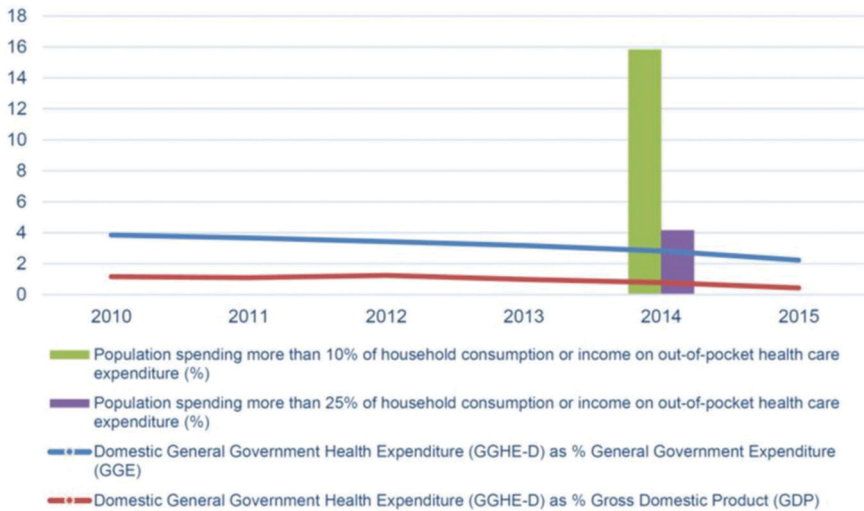


Figure 10.3 Public Health Expenditure and Household Health Spending, Yemen 2010–2015.

Source: World Bank Report, 2021.

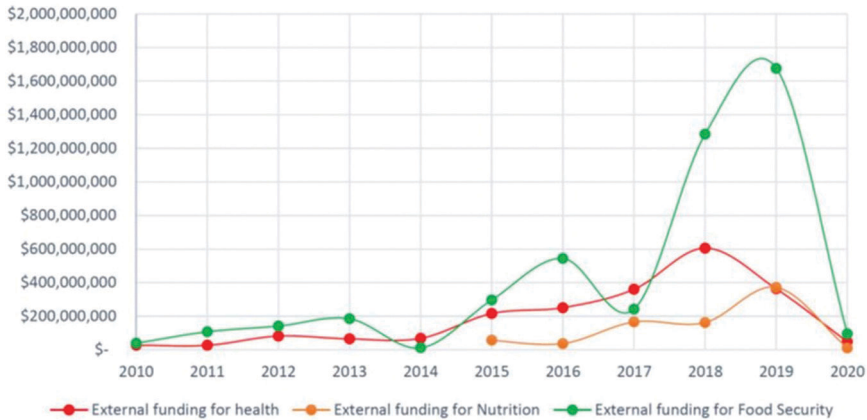


Figure 10.4 External Funding for Health, Nutrition, and Food Security, Yemen 2010–2020.

Source: World Bank Report, 2021.

decreased in 2020, and the economy contracted by an estimated 50% since 2015 (Aghajanian and Mele, 2023).

Yemen must enhance coordination and management of its fragmented, under-resourced health sector (World Bank, 2021). This involves improving leadership and governance of the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP) at various levels, formulating a national health strategy, and securing sustainable funding. Strengthening health system governance ensures healthcare delivery efficiency.

Improving healthcare financing and infrastructure development is necessary for accessible and affordable quality healthcare (Langlois et al., 2020). Enhanced financing reduces out-of-pocket expenses, while infrastructure investment improves access to primary care facilities and hospitals.

### Infection Prevention and Control

Healthcare-associated infections, particularly surgical site infections, rise in conflict zones like Yemen due to various factors. The war and blockade have caused healthcare quality to decline, with workforce shortages, disrupted supply chains, and attacks on health facilities and staff (World Bank, 2021). Inadequate hospital infrastructure, resource scarcity, lack of staff education on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), insufficient IPC training, and high visitor numbers further hinder IPC efforts (Lowe et al., 2021). These factors result in soaring infection rates, compounding existing issues and burdening hospitals and their IPC programmes.

Strengthening IPC in Yemen is crucial for addressing the healthcare crisis and improving overall health (Sengupta et al., 2019). Rigorous measures are essential, including training healthcare workers in proper hygiene, ensuring personal protective equipment availability, establishing surveillance systems, and enforcing infection control protocols (WHO, 2016; Storr et al., 2017).

In Yemen's severely weakened health system, implementing effective IPC is challenging but vital. The conflict disrupted basic services like clean water access and sanitation (Qadri et al., 2017), creating conditions for disease transmission and preventable outbreaks. Therefore, comprehensive IPC training for healthcare workers is imperative, covering standard precautions, waste management, sterilization techniques, and proper use of protective equipment.

### **Essential Medications and Equipment**

In 2018, only 58% of 30 vital essential medicines were available in Yemen's healthcare sector (Mohamed et al., 2020). UN agencies sounded an urgent call for medicines in 2017 (UN News, 2017). Ensuring access to essential medications and equipment is critical for Yemen's healthcare system (WHO, 2001; 2004). A consistent supply of essential medicines, vaccines, and medical supplies is essential (WHO, 2001), especially in remote and conflict-affected areas (WHO, 2019d).

Multiple steps need to be implemented per WHO (2019) guidelines:

1. Establish reliable procurement and distribution systems by collaborating with international organizations, NGOs, and pharmaceutical companies, and develop efficient distribution networks to reach healthcare facilities countrywide.
2. Create strategic stockpiles of essential medications and equipment to mitigate shortages during emergencies. Develop supply chain management systems, including inventory management, forecasting, and monitoring, to maintain adequate stock levels and prevent stockouts.
3. Implement quality assurance and regulatory measures to ensure the safety, efficacy, and quality of medications and equipment. Establish or strengthen regulatory bodies to monitor pharmaceutical product and medical device quality, enforce standards, and conduct inspections to prevent substandard products.
4. Collaborate with international partners, such as health organizations, donor agencies, and humanitarian groups, to procure and supply essential items. Leverage their expertise and resources to overcome logistical challenges and ensure a reliable supply.
5. Promote local manufacturing of essential medications and equipment to reduce dependency on imports. Invest in local manufacturing capabilities, provide technical assistance, and support capacity building for a more resilient healthcare system.
6. Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track item availability, accessibility, and quality. Regular assessments and data collection will identify gaps, address challenges, and inform evidence-based improvements in procurement and distribution processes.

### **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)**

The extended Yemen conflict worsens healthcare challenges, especially non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases, becoming prominent causes of morbidity and mortality (IHME, Yemen Country Data, 2023). Strategies to combat NCDs in Yemen involve raising public awareness about risk factors such as unhealthy diets, inactivity, tobacco, and qat chewing, early detection, and health check-ups (El-Wajeh and Thornhill, 2009; Budreviciute et al., 2020). Some measures that can be used to address these issues include enhancing healthcare infrastructure, training professionals, and expanding healthcare access in urban and rural areas. Also, implement policies like higher tobacco and sugary beverage taxes, promoting healthy diets, encouraging physical activity (Singh et al., 2011), and establishing clubs for young adults as alternatives to qat chewing.

Health systems must adopt guidelines for early detection, screening, and make diagnostic tools available (WHO WHA, 2013a). Other measures include ensuring affordable access to NCD medicines (NDA Alliance), training healthcare professionals in patient-centered NCD care, establishing a robust NCD surveillance system for informed policies and resource allocation (WHO WHA, 2013b).

Addressing NCDs requires coordinating with various sectors including health, education, urban planning, and agriculture, NGOs, international agencies, and the private sector (WHO, 2013c). Research investments are needed to understand NCD epidemiology and promote innovation, including telemedicine and digital health solutions. Moreover, training programmes should enhance the skills of healthcare professionals, community workers, and educators; in addition to evidence-based NCD policies and action plans, alongside political commitment, and resource allocation (WHO WHA, 2013b).

Addressing NCDs demands sustained effort and collaboration among stakeholders. Yemen's unique challenges, including conflict and humanitarian crises, require adaptability to the local context. Long-term post-conflict health priorities necessitate investments in infrastructure, workforce development, health education, environmental health, and research and innovation. These measures can reduce morbidity and mortality, strengthen community resilience, and support long-term recovery.

### **Healthcare Workforce Development**

Yemen's healthcare worker shortage, worsened by war and unpaid salaries, stands at an estimated 10 healthcare workers per 10,000 people, only a quarter of the international standard of 41/10,000 (USAID, 2020). Strengthening Yemen's healthcare system hinges on a competent, skilled, and motivated workforce (Roome et al., 2014). Active recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, midwives, community health workers, and auxiliary staff, is crucial (Abelson et al., 2020). Placing them in underserved areas (Haakenstad et al.,

2022) and using task-shifting and sharing strategies can expand essential service reach (Orkin et al., 2021).

To maintain a consistent and skilled healthcare workforce, competitive salaries with enticing incentives and benefits are necessary for talent attraction and retention (Bärnighausen and Bloom, 2009). Continuous training programmes, especially for primary healthcare workers, should focus on clinical guidelines, preventive care, health promotion, and community outreach (Bodenheimer and Pham, 2010). Prioritising healthcare professionals' safety and well-being (Elnakib et al., 2021) and offering professional development opportunities ensures retention and growth. Empowering healthcare personnel significantly elevates care quality and patient health outcomes.

Addressing the shortage of healthcare professionals through tailored training initiatives can strengthen the entire healthcare workforce, from primary care providers to specialised doctors and nurses (Makuku and Mosadeghrad, 2022). Investing in health awareness and promoting healthy habits can mitigate chronic disease impact, leading to improved health outcomes and cost savings. In essence, by emphasising workforce value, training, safety, and continuous development, Yemen can build a more resilient and effective healthcare system (Makuku and Mosadeghrad, 2022).

## **Environmental Health**

Yemen faces environmental health challenges, including water scarcity, poor sanitation, and air pollution (WHO, 2023a). Over-extraction and contamination of water resources from untreated sewage and industrial waste stress Yemen's water sources (Lackner and Al-Eryani, 2020). Inadequate access to clean water and sanitation has led to waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid fever (Federspiel and Ali, 2018). Yemen also contends with air pollution, notably high particulate matter and sulfur dioxide emissions from industry and transportation (UNEP, 2016).

Upholding environmental health is paramount for enhancing the health outcomes of Yemen's population. Environmental health encompasses various elements, including the quality of air, water, and food. To fortify environmental health in Yemen, several measures listed below are essential:

Enhancing access to clean water stands as a fundamental measure. Clean water is crucial to fend off waterborne diseases, such as cholera, which are rampant in Yemen (Batterman et al., 2009; Dureab et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2020). Investing in water treatment facilities, bolstering infrastructure, and launching educational initiatives can markedly improve access to potable water.

The promotion of safe food practices. By advocating for such practices, the incidence of food-related ailments can be curtailed. This encompasses educating food handlers, ensuring stringent food safety checks, and strengthening the infrastructure that underpins food storage and preparation.

Combating air contamination, especially in urban areas, involves championing the adoption of cleaner energy alternatives, imposing stricter controls on vehicles and industrial emissions, and enhancing public transportation systems.

Curtailing exposure to hazardous compounds, including pesticides and industrial agents to reduce health adversities such as respiratory conditions and specific cancers (Ye et al., 2013). This requires rigorous regulations, consistent monitoring of substances, endorsing safer technological alternatives, and amplifying educational outreach that targets both workers and the broader community.

Lastly, implement a proficient waste management system for preventing disease spread and shielding the environment (Pépin et al., 2014, WHO/UNICEF, 2015), through investment in waste management infrastructures and awareness drives to ensure waste undergoes safe disposal.

Essentially, advocating for environmental health in Yemen requires a comprehensive strategy that includes clean water, food safety protocols, improved air quality, minimised hazardous exposure, and effective waste management. With such efforts, the frequency of illnesses can be reduced, elevating the overall health prospects for the population.

### **Health Research and Innovation**

Yemen's healthcare system, though fragmented, requires a boost in health research and innovation to address its unique health challenges (Zakham et al., 2019). Several essential approaches can be adopted:

*Increased Funding:* Allocate more financial resources to health research, drawing from government budgets, global partnerships, and private sector investments to fuel innovation and deepen understanding of Yemen's health issues (Charani et al., 2022).

*Enhanced Research Capacity:* Equip researchers with necessary tools and knowledge, improve research infrastructure quality, and establish dedicated research institutions and collaborative frameworks (Al Serouri et al., 2018).

*Cultivate Collaborations:* Encourage partnerships, whether with international bodies or local Yemeni researchers, to facilitate knowledge dissemination, create influential research alliances, and stimulate cutting-edge research (Charani et al., 2022).

*Promote Innovation Culture:* Support healthcare start-ups, earmark funds for innovative ventures, and create an environment conducive to inventive thinking within the healthcare sector.

*Application of Research Findings:* Ensure research outcomes are not just documented but applied in real-world scenarios through outreach programmes, collaborations with healthcare practitioners, and educational initiatives for decision-makers and the public (Erismann et al., 2021).

In summary, supporting health research and innovation in Yemen involves meticulous attention to research funding, capacity-building, synergistic collaborations, fostering innovation, and the practical application of research insights. With a robust framework in place, Yemen can gain a deeper understanding of its health challenges and devise innovative strategies for resolution.

## **Rebuilding Health Facilities**

Approximately 50% of Yemen's healthcare facilities have been damaged or destroyed due to the ongoing conflict (HeRAMS, 2020). Prioritising their repair and rehabilitation is crucial, ensuring they meet safety and functionality standards. This initiative should include renovating structures, repairing medical devices, and improving critical utilities like power and water systems.

Addressing geographic disparities in Yemen's healthcare system is essential for equitable access to services. Focus on expanding healthcare infrastructure in underserved areas, especially remote and conflict-affected regions (WB, 2021), to ensure all Yemeni citizens have access to essential healthcare.

The cost of reconstructing Yemen's health system depends on conflict damage severity and Yemeni population needs. However, it is evident the financial burden will be substantial due to extensive facility damage, lack of medical provisions, equipment, and the need to train and hire healthcare professionals.

The World Bank estimated recovery and reconstruction costs in 16 Yemeni cities at US\$20 billion to US\$25 billion over five years (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, the cost of reconstruction and health service delivery ranged from US\$1.3 billion to US\$1.6 billion over five years (Table 10.1, Table 4.3 in WB report). Note that these cities represent only a fraction of war-affected areas in Yemen and exclude major population centers like Ibb and Hajjah.

Given the above statistics, a conservative estimate for renovating Yemen's health infrastructure over five years is over US\$5.0 billion. This covers renovating medical facilities, restoring vital health services, procuring medical supplies and devices, and recruiting and training healthcare personnel. However, it is important to acknowledge that these cost estimates might not fully capture the extent of devastation and nuanced population needs. Additional resources may be necessary for a comprehensive healthcare system restoration. It is crucial to recognise that not investing in the healthcare system could have even greater long-term economic and social consequences. Investing in Yemen's healthcare system improves population health, well-being, and contributes to the country's stability and development.

Neglecting Yemen's health system restoration has far-reaching implications. The ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis have compromised health, making people vulnerable to malnutrition, infectious diseases, and psychological distress. Ignoring the healthcare crisis can lead to increased morbidity and mortality, especially among women and children, as preventable diseases can escalate.

A weakened healthcare system limits access, particularly in conflict-affected areas, creating barriers to essential medical care. This situation raises the risk of infectious disease outbreaks with the potential of spread to other countries. Declining health and restricted access can hamper economic productivity, imposing higher medical costs on the population and the country. In essence, overlooking Yemen's healthcare reconstruction has alarming consequences. Global commitment to rebuilding and strengthening this system is urgent to prevent intensified suffering and mortality.

Table 10.1 Recovery and Reconstruction Needs by City over Five Years in US\$ million

City or type	Short-term (year 1)		Medium-term (years 2–5)		Total (over 5 years)	
	Low estimate	High estimate	Low estimate	High estimate	Low estimate	High estimate
Al-Dhale	4.6	5.6	18.3	22.3	22.8	27.9
Aden	31.5	38.5	126.1	154.1	157.7	192.7
Al-Hazm	2.6	3.2	10.6	12.9	13.2	16.1
Amran	10.3	12.6	41.4	50.5	51.7	63.2
Bayhan	7.0	8.6	28.0	34.3	35.0	42.8
Dhamar	5.5	6.7	22.1	27.0	27.6	33.7
Hudaydah	15.9	19.5	63.8	78.0	79.7	97.5
Khoka	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.8	1.0
Lahj	3.6	4.4	14.5	17.7	18.2	22.2
Lodar	2.7	3.3	10.7	13.0	13.3	16.3
Ma'rib City	3.5	4.3	14.1	17.2	17.6	21.5
Mocha	3.3	4.0	13.1	16.1	16.4	20.1
Rada'a	0.8	0.9	3.0	3.7	3.8	4.6
Saada	15.4	18.9	61.8	75.5	77.2	94.4
Sanaa	94.3	115.2	377.2	461.0	471.5	576.2
Taiz	52.9	64.7	211.7	258.8	264.7	323.5
Infrastructure reconstruction, total all cities	211.9	258.9	847.5	1,035.8	1,059.3	1,294.7
Service delivery restoration, total all cities	42.4	51.8	169.5	207.2	211.9	258.9
<b>Grand total, all cities</b>	<b>254.2</b>	<b>310.7</b>	<b>1,017.0</b>	<b>1,243.0</b>	<b>1,271.2</b>	<b>1,553.7</b>

Source: World Bank Report, 2021

## Responsibility for Reconstruction

Rebuilding Yemen's healthcare system relies on multiple stakeholders: the Yemeni government, international agencies, and benefactors. The government must ensure healthcare services, but due to the conflict and humanitarian crisis, its capacity has diminished. International support is crucial in revitalising healthcare. Entities like WHO and UNICEF play key roles in strengthening Yemen's healthcare. They provide medical supplies, train professionals, and support health centers in conflict zones.

Financial backers of reconstruction efforts are vital. They must fund initiatives to reinstate healthcare, revitalise facilities, and strengthen the system. Benefactors can be nations, foundations, or aid organisations. National authorities, especially the Ministry of Public Health and Population, must collaborate with international agencies to coordinate efforts, prevent duplication, and ensure equitable

coverage. Lessons from countries like Cambodia and Mozambique highlight the importance of avoiding donor-driven efforts (Lanjouw et al., 1999; Pavignani and Colombo, 2001; Waters H. et al. 2007).

In summary, Yemen's healthcare reconstruction requires cooperation between the Yemeni government, international organisations, and donors. Collective efforts can rejuvenate the system, improving healthcare access and outcomes for citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The protracted conflict has severely damaged Yemen's healthcare infrastructure, resulting in a dire humanitarian crisis. Millions of Yemenis seeking medical attention face significant obstacles. Limited healthcare access has led to increased illness and mortality rates, especially among vulnerable populations. Achieving peace, coupled with substantial investments in Yemen's healthcare reconstruction, is essential to alleviate collective suffering and chart a hopeful path forward.

Several cost-effective strategies with immediate and positive impacts on Yemen's population health exist. Immunisation, due to its affordability and compatibility with existing healthcare mechanisms, can significantly reduce infectious diseases like measles, polio, and hepatitis. Health education, encompassing healthy lifestyles, nutrition, hygiene, and disease prevention, can improve overall health metrics through community initiatives, public messages, and educational programmes.

Addressing malnutrition, particularly among children under five, presents a critical challenge in Yemen. Implementing inexpensive methods such as providing nutritional supplements, promoting exclusive breastfeeding, and enhancing food access can counter malnutrition, enhancing the health prospects for Yemen's children.

Improving water and sanitation quality, including access to clean water and hygienic amenities, can effectively reduce the spread of waterborne illnesses. Simple measures like fostering a culture of handwashing, distributing water filters, and upgrading sanitation infrastructure can profoundly benefit the population's health.

Amplifying primary healthcare services enhances healthcare accessibility and reduces the burden on higher-level facilities. Measures in this domain include increasing the availability of essential medicines, improving the skills of healthcare personnel, and establishing robust patient referral mechanisms. These measures not only enhance the quality of primary care but also lead to broader healthcare cost savings.

Overall, adopting these cost-effective strategies can strengthen Yemen's public health, setting the stage for more comprehensive system-level improvements. While international organisations recognise Yemen's humanitarian crisis and provide relief and aid, the scale of Yemen's healthcare crisis presents formidable challenges in meeting the extensive needs. Therefore, efforts should encompass the reconstruction of destroyed healthcare infrastructure, ensuring consistent electricity and water supplies, adherence to infection prevention protocols, and the provision of essential medications and medical equipment.

To establish a resilient primary healthcare system in Yemen, critical endeavors involve improving the structural integrity of primary healthcare facilities, expanding their presence and accessibility, and concurrently enhancing transportation infrastructure, particularly in isolated areas, to streamline the population's access to healthcare services.

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# 11 Education Recovery in Post-Conflict Yemen

## Challenges and Opportunities

*Tawfik Sultan Al-Hakimi*

### Introduction

This study is an attempt to understand the question of education recovery in Yemen after the end of the current civil war. Since it began in late March 2015, this conflict has exacted an immense humanitarian toll, and its adverse repercussions have impacted all aspects of life. Of particular concern is the fragmentation of the Yemeni educational system and the dispersal of its constituent parts among the belligerent parties, which are articulations of Islamist, regionalist, and political party forces. As the hostilities tore the national public space apart, these forces asserted their grip over the educational institutions in the areas under their control. In view of the severe and nationwide short- and long-term detrimental effects of this situation, it necessitates an interactive sociological analysis connecting the concrete realities of the educational system and its institutions with the general context of education recovery in order to identify the challenges and available opportunities for effective recovery. Toward this end, I applied Pierre Bourdieu's structural cognitive model to shed light on the nature and impacts of the subordination of the Yemeni educational institutions to the control, strategies and calculations of the warring factions. The study also relied on field research using survey and focus group techniques designed to cover the variables of the study, the most important of which are: educational stage, regional location, and political affiliation, including that of the factions that exert the greatest influence over the educational system.

Looking ahead to the post-conflict stage, the study also aimed to forge a vision for the most important requirements for education recovery as a national and developmental priority. It is impossible to overstate the attention that should be given to this priority if the education system is to contribute effectively to sustainable human development needs and creating the conditions for the peace and well-being to which Yemeni society aspires. In this spirit, the vision emphasises empowerment and accountability, while seeking to strengthen community, civil society and international efforts to advance the Yemeni educational system in line with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which recognise that education and development must be integrally linked to a rational concept that renders education a fundamental human right and a basis for ensuring the actualisation of other rights.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-12

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## **Methodology**

The sociologist Johan Galtung, the principal founder of peace and conflict studies, defines conflict as a dynamic process between adversarial forces whose incompatible goals put them on a collision course. In the process, the structures, attitudes, and behaviours of the opposing individuals or groups change and express themselves in aggression, hatred, and symbolic or non-symbolic violence, which eventually erupt in armed conflict. In this context, the belligerents variously seek to protect, achieve, or destroy goals, for the underlying logic of conflict stems from the fact that each side has certain goals it seeks to achieve, irrespective of society's goals and general interests (Galtung, 1969, 191). The ongoing conflict in Yemen exemplifies this definition.

In 2023, there were 27 active conflicts worldwide, none of which showed signs of improving. “This means that 2 billion people, or a quarter of the entire global population, currently live in conflict-affected areas” (The Legatum Institute, 2023, 57), one of which is Yemen. Crises and armed conflicts are barriers to adequate access to education. According to global estimates, “128 million children of primary and secondary school age, including 67 million girls, are out of school in conflict-stricken countries” (Justino, 2014, 2–6). Education, therefore, is of the highest priority both in the phase of the initial national and international humanitarian response to a conflict and in the post-conflict reconstruction phase. The dual goals of reform and reconstruction present both significant opportunities and formidable challenges for societies emerging from conflict. Many analyses “suggest an increased appreciation for the importance of early investment in education as a necessary initial step in post-conflict reconstruction” (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2005, pp. 85). For Yemen, such investment is extremely urgent, given the essential role education plays in securing durable peace and social cohesion, building human capital for the labour market, poverty eradication, and sustainable human development (UNESCO et al., 2015, 7).

In keeping with the problematic context of this study, as well as with national needs and regional and international efforts to nudge the belligerents into engaging in a peaceful conflict-resolution process leading to a lasting peace, I have encapsulated the study's focal concern in the following question: What are the challenges and opportunities for education recovery in post-conflict Yemen?

If this question sets the central task, namely, to identify the challenges and opportunities for post-conflict education recovery in Yemen, its subsidiary questions yield the following sub-objectives:

- Provide an overview of the state of the Yemeni educational system before the conflict.
- Analyse the impact of the conflict on the educational system organisationally, systemically and developmentally.
- Identify the challenges facing post-conflict education recovery.
- Clarify the available opportunities for post-conflict education recovery.

- Present a forward-looking vision for the requirements of effective education recovery, guided by the belief in education's crucial role in fostering peace and sustainable development.

Few studies have examined the realities, challenges, and opportunities for post-conflict education recovery in Yemen from a sociological perspective. This study aims to fill that gap as it pursues its dual quest to contribute to the knowledge ecosystem and to further the recovery and developmental role of the Yemeni educational system.

This study drew on Pierre Bourdieu's structuralist constructivist model, a realist cognitive approach that combines understanding, explanation and interpretation in analysing the opinions of agents (i.e., members of dominant groups or forces) and society on education recovery and its developmental role, to devise a methodology that aimed to throw into relief the salient connections and mechanisms of common cause or conflict, competition, and domination and control that govern the various institutions of the educational system. These relations and mechanisms are further elucidated through the application of the main techniques of qualitative research, including interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and content analysis.

The interviews were conducted from 20 February to 11 March 2024. Out of concern for the participants' safety, their names and other identifying information have been kept confidential upon their request. Only the interview number is mentioned in the citations following interviewee quotations. The study brought to bear analytical, comparative and system method approaches to processing the information collected in the interviews and focus groups. Among the latest scientific research tools, system method is noted for viewing the subject/problem under study as an integral and interconnected whole, as opposed to a discrete and independent event, thereby facilitating methodological integration.

To obtain the necessary information from the various educational institutions (such as ministries of education), this study utilised purposive sampling in the selection of survey respondents and focus groups. The survey sample consisted of 19 professors and educational leaders of both genders. Nine were management leaders of educational institutions (schools, academies, universities, educational administrations) and ten were professors and researchers. Collectively they had 9 to 33 years of professional experience in the education system. There were four focus groups. Two were made up of professors and researchers working at institutions of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, while the other two groups consisted of lay people. The purpose of composing the survey and focus groups on this manner was to cover the diverse variables, the most important of which are:

- Educational stage: public education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education and scientific research.
- Regional affiliation: the study focused on three governorates – Sanaa, Hadhramaut and Taiz – as representative of northern, southern, and central Yemen, respectively.

- Ideopolitical affiliation: This variable includes the dominant forces that have the greatest impact on the educational institutions in the aforementioned governorates, namely:
  - The internationally recognised Government of Yemen (GoY), which controls the southern governorates and parts of the northern governorates. It includes diverse forces among its ranks, one of which is the regionalist Southern Movement, a secessionist movement that demands the return to the pre-unification phase before 22 May 1990.
  - The political party forces, the most important of which are the General People’s Congress, the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserist Popular Unionist Party, and the Arab Baath Party.
  - The Islamist forces which “claim an Islamic (doctrinal) authenticity that entitles them to dominate the educational institutions ... and control and administer them according to their strategies, calculations, and their ideopolitical frame of reference” (Qaed, 2023, 488). These forces include the Muslim Brotherhood’s political wing, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (the Islah Party), diverse Salafist groups, and the Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement. The latter controls most of the governorates of northern Yemen.

The study was carried out from February to April 2024.

### **Educational Institutions Before the Conflict: Reality and Consistency of Dysfunction**

The Yemeni educational system did not rank highly in global indexes in the pre-conflict period, especially during the first decade of this century. Indeed, it could not even begin to compete as it could not meet the basic requirements for educational quality (World Economic Forum, 2015, p. 17). Major deficiencies in the system, managed by its three ministries (the ministries of Public Education, Technical Education and Vocational Training, and Higher Education and Scientific Research), explain why.

On the eve of the conflict, the Public Education Ministry operated 16,587 schools, 88.94 percent in rural areas and 11.06 percent in urban areas. Most of them lacked the technical requirements for the educational process and many even lacked proper school infrastructures as 335 operated out of residential apartments or “temporary” housing and 319 had no building at all. In addition, 281 schools were temporarily closed, 156 were under construction, and 84 were permanently closed due to sociopolitical disputes over how they were run. Public education services continued to fail to meet society’s needs (Supreme Council for Educational Planning, 2014, 128).

According to the most recent census, 5,504,859 members of the population fell in the 6–14 age bracket, of which 2,815,466 were male and 2,689,393 were female (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2004). Of these, there were 2,576,626 male students and 2,024,697 female students, or a total public school student population of 4,601,323. In other words, nearly a million children in 2004 were deprived

of access to education. To these we can add the high dropout and absentee rates, especially among girls, as “about 77 out of every 100 female students do not complete basic education” (Supreme Council for Educational Planning, 2014, 14). Obviously, the school age population has since risen in tandem with the steady increase in population.

In addition to the lack of infrastructure, public educational institutions are deficient in the academic credentials of their human capital. Out of 229,393 teachers engaged in the public school system, only 0.30 percent have master’s or doctorate degrees, 32 percent have secondary school certifications or less, and 22 percent have a post-secondary school diploma. Otherwise put, 54 percent of the human capital available for public education lack a university-level qualification. Nevertheless, a large percentage of them work in the primary and secondary schools under the Ministry of Public Education (Qaed, 2023: 207).

The situation is even worse at the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) level, where the infrastructure and quality of education are severely lacking. A total of 92 public institutes are listed in this category. They are attended by 35,270 students, the majority of whom are male, and staffed by 3,675 teachers, of whom 81 percent are male. The ten community colleges affiliated with the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training fare no better. With a total enrolment of 3,250 students, of whom 31 percent graduated in 2013, these colleges are staffed by 372 teachers, 74 percent of whom are male. Like the schools under the Public Education Ministry, the TVET institutes are generally deficient in the academic qualifications of their staff. Most of their teachers have technical or vocational degrees, but only small percentages of them have master’s or doctorate degrees.

The state of the system under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research corresponds to that of the TVET sector. According to the most recent official report (2013), 82,004 students were enrolled in the country’s ten universities. Some 37 percent studied in the applied science departments (applied physics, chemistry, mathematics) and their corresponding departments in the schools of education, while 63 percent studied in the theoretical sciences departments, which include the liberal arts and law. Relevant figures indicate that most of those enrolled in the applied sciences and theoretical sciences are male. The public universities are staffed by 7,960 professors, 78 percent of whom are male. Only 5 percent of them academically qualify for a full professorship and 11 percent qualify for an associate professorship.

More crucially, all TVET and higher education and scientific research institutes fail to tailor their programmes to developmental needs, which entails integrating education and training courses, orientations, and training outputs with the economic activities, needs and practices in the surrounding environment. In Yemen, 54 percent of TVET institutes follow the technical education system of two years of study after secondary school; 13 percent follow the vocational training system, which is three years of study after basic education; and 33 percent follow the combined technical and vocational, i.e., polytechnic, system (Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training, 2014). TVET institutes are not distributed

equitably across the country. Most are concentrated in the major urban centers, such as Aden, Sanaa, Taiz, Hudaydah, Ibb, and Hadhramaut, while they are far and few between in the other governorates. This is particularly true of the peripheral governorates which have only one such institute located in the governorate capital. None exists in the rural areas.

As for the higher education institutes or universities, they have a total of 111 faculties of which 44 are in the applied sciences and 67 in the liberal arts. Among the latter, there are 34 faculties of education, which is to say that 51 percent of the liberal arts faculties specialise in educational affairs (Supreme Council for Educational Planning, 2014, 3–5). It is important to note that faculties copy their course syllabi from each other across the university system, and the same applies to the various departments of the TVET institutes. This is indicative of their incompatibility with social and developmental needs, on the one hand, and the political, regional, and tribal factors related to their establishment, on the other (Qaed, 2023, 335).

In general, the dysfunctions of the educational system primarily stem from the absence of an educational policy attuned to sustainable development needs and the scientific and technological transformations in the global space. Instead, arbitrariness, extemporaneousness and irrationality rule in the management of the operations of the educational institutions. This, combined with other organisational shortcomings, the low academic quality of human resources, a decreasing emphasis on capacity-building and the technical and technological development of human resources have ensured that the educational system's outputs are academically underqualified and poorly equipped to keep pace with and meet the needs of a rapidly changing labour market, and to contribute effectively to sustainable development (Qaed, 2023, 473).

### **Challenges of Post-Conflict Education Recovery**

The brutal conflict in Yemen has created immense challenges and threats to education recovery nationwide and rehabilitating education's developmental role. Identifying the nature of these challenges is a crucial and urgently needed step toward overcoming them. The field research conducted for this study identified the following as the most salient challenges:

#### ***An Educational System Reduced to a War Environment***

As the hostilities in Yemen fragmented the national public space, the combatant forces took over its institutions, including those of the educational system. From the outset of the fighting, they militarised them, using schools and other educational facilities for shelter, weapons depots, mustering troops and other such purposes. These facilities thus became vulnerable targets for opposing forces. The Saudi and Emirati-led Arab coalition was particularly egregious in its systematic bombardment of educational buildings. "Many institutes, schools, community colleges, university faculty buildings, and other educational infrastructure were

subjected to air strikes and shelling in the skirmishes between combatant forces” (Focus Group 2). According to UN sources, due to the war some 2507 schools have sustained damage, become makeshift shelters for internally displaced people, or are utilised by armed groups, thus turning them into military flashpoints. Dozens of educational institutions, especially schools, will remain closed for years to come because they are situated in the middle of minefields. Indeed, entire villages have quite simply become restricted zones for the same reason (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2021, p. 8). This means that the lives of students and teachers will remain at risk whether due to the detritus of war, such as landmines and unexploded ordnance, or because of the rampant proliferation and unregulated sale and possession of weapons.

### ***Reconfiguration and Fracturing of Educational Institutions***

As the belligerents asserted control over the educational institutions in their respective areas, each side claimed a compound constitutional-national-revolutionary-religious-doctrinal-liberational mandate to run the institutions as they saw fit, while denying that right to their adversaries and refusing to recognise the academic qualifications of the institutes’ graduates.

To reinforce their self-claimed prerogatives, “each warring group imposed members of their ranks onto the administrative bodies of schools, universities, academies, and educational departments, including the ministries of education. [The criteria] were not the academic qualifications, specialised skills or credentials of these members, but rather their loyalty and dedication to the group’s Islamist and political ideology, since the aim was to turn educational institutions into incubators for ideological indoctrination” (Interviews 2, 3 and 9). At the same time, the belligerent groups suppressed and arrested everyone who opposed them. In their view, each member or supporter of a dominant force is a partial reason why educational bodies should operate according to that force’s strategies. That is because these members/supporters reify the subordination and subservience to the dominant force to which they are affiliated and whose interests they seek to achieve. They also embody the symbolic violence and the arbitrary habitus that each of the dominant forces strives to impose on the operations of educational institutions. The imposition of the arbitrary habitus erodes adherence to existing rules and laws governing bureaucratic behaviour. These rules and laws had been devised to ensure the proper performance of an educational establishment; however, either the imposed elites have never acquired a familiarity with these rules and norms in their education and professional training, or they consciously choose to discard them. Consequently, they are rarely manifested in their behaviours and practices (Qaed, 2023, 487).

The educational system has thus been structurally dismembered, and its constituent parts are now subordinated to the adversarial forces. “Educational institutions have been turned into barracks. Most members of the dominant forces carry firearms, from pistols to machine guns, inside schools, universities, institutes, and education administrative offices. They refuse to leave them outside” (Focus Group 2). This is a clear example of symbolic violence informing material violence,

which is dressed in various national, religious, or liberational guises and wielded through diverse pretexts and mechanisms in an attempt to give it an aura of social and institutional legitimacy” (Qaed, 2023, 489).

This state of affairs aligns with Bourdieu’s and Passeron’s assertion that the configuration of power relations is shaped by the mutual dependence between the agents and the power field in which they operate. It is characterised by a dynamic that features periods of tension and disequilibrium as well as phases of stability and equilibrium, which are states of domination (Qaed, 2023, 386). However, what is missing from this assertion, as pertains to our subject, is the absence of society, in its overarching national sense, against the backdrop of the absence of a unified central system of government and the prevalence of the factional dominance of the parties to an armed conflict, in their diverse ideopolitical manifestations, especially the Islamist forces and those pushing to partition the national space in accordance with their regionalist and factional political ends and strategies. All the main political parties are distributed among these forces as a product of the divisions in the political system and the stakes its institutions’ leaders have in playing a part at various levels of the conflict to safeguard their interests or fend off the violence of other forces. These parties, it should be stressed, derive their legitimacy, not from a national constitutional frame-of-reference, but by dint of their military strength and support from foreign powers.

### ***The Inability of the Educational System to Interpret and Translate Social and Developmental Needs***

The educational system has been deprived of the will and organisational ability to reinterpret social and developmental needs. Reinterpretation is a systemic mechanism that enables the educational system to read the flows of societal demands through its own internal mechanisms and to determine its relationship with its environment, protect its organisational boundaries and retranslate them if the demands are consistent with its educational policy. However, because of the domination of the belligerent forces and their control over the educational institutions, the system is unable to solidify and interconnect its internal structure (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2007, 385). Furthermore, the system has lost the foundations of rational thought and autonomy, as it is no longer open to diverse social systems after having been reduced to disparate, closed and unconnected entities subordinated to the reproduction of the distorted factional selves of the dominant forces.

This has given rise to many challenges to education recovery and sustainable development in general. Foremost among them are high non-enrolment and dropout rates. Over 2 million school-age children are out of school while “more than 400,000 have been pushed out of school directly by the war.” There are concerns that many of these children may not be able to return to school if they do not receive the necessary support. More generally, the conflict has internally displaced more than 4 million people who are currently “living in over 1,500 unplanned and squalid camps.” They urgently need support for survival, yet the “security situation remains unpredictable and dire, with humanitarian access to vulnerable populations,

including for the delivery of basic education services, severely constrained.” If existing schools are unable to furnish appropriate educational opportunities, the mounting rates of abject poverty have aggravated the problem. “According to the most recent data, nearly half of all Yemenis lived in poverty in 2014. National poverty rates are now estimated to have jumped to around 80 per cent. More than 8 in 10 children are thought to live in families that do not have enough income to meet their basic needs.” The situation is so severe that “8.1 million children need emergency education assistance across Yemen – a significant increase from the 1.1 million reported pre-crisis in December 2014” (UNICEF, 2021: 5–6).

### *The Arbitrary Pedagogic Management of the Educational Institutions*

The dominant forces are haphazard and unmethodical in the way they operate the educational institutions under their control. This is evidenced in attitudes, behaviours, and practices that betray indifference to national interests (Qaed, 2023, 488) and appropriate the rights of education professionals. As one of the interviewees put it, “One of the main challenges facing education recovery is the deprivation of education professionals of their various rights by the belligerent forces” (Field Interviews). The result is the destruction of the pillars of education: “An estimated 171,600 teachers – or two thirds of the teaching workforce – have not been paid a regular salary for four years,” a UNICEF report observed in 2021 (UNICEF, 2021, 7). That period has since exceeded seven years for a large portion of educational staff. However, many receive irregular payments of a half-month’s salary from time-to-time (in Ramadan and on Eid al-Adha, for example), especially in the areas under the control of the Ansar Allah movement. As for teachers working in areas under the control of the internationally recognised Government of Yemen (GoY) and forces affiliated with it, they are unable to make ends meet with the salaries they receive due to the high cost of living and the deterioration of the national currency (Interviews 8, 9, 18 and 19). Moreover, due to the “irregularity and interruption in the payment of monthly salaries, trainers now work only one day a week and teachers halve their daily hours” (Interviews 10–19).

Administrative neglect has also caused educational institutions to forfeit their vital educational function. “All staff members are preoccupied with the search for sources of livelihood” (Focus Group 4). This “puts 4 million children, in addition to large numbers of dropouts and unenrolled school-age children at risk of losing their opportunities for education, as unpaid teachers are forced to stop teaching and find other ways to support their families.” Moreover, many teachers have migrated abroad in search of a living, which opens space for the factions to appoint agents who lack the necessary academic and professional qualifications. “Most teachers and trainers in the technical and vocational education and training sector require technical and professional competencies and should have at least bachelor’s or master’s degree certificates” (Interviews 7, 13, 14, 17, 18 and 19).

The same phenomenon occurs in the public education institutions. “The warring parties replaced teachers who quit over the disruption in their salaries with loyal followers, most of whom only have secondary school diplomas and some of whom

are mosque preachers who graduated from traditional *kuttab* schools, meaning they basically know how to read and write” (Focus Group 3). This is consistent with other studies which have found that teachers often bear a high cost in times of conflict. For example, during the civil war in Rwanda (1990–1994), “more than two-thirds of primary and secondary school teachers were killed or fled.” During the conflict in Cambodia (1964–2016), one of the longest conflicts in modern history, “the carnage was even greater, leaving the system virtually without trained or experienced teachers.” After the conflict in Timor-Leste (1975–1999), the post-conflict education recovery there encountered major difficulties as there were “almost no trained or qualified personnel for its secondary system and no access to tertiary education. These effects ravage the education process.” They also constituted a “formidable roadblock” on the path to education recovery and development in these countries (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2005, xii).

The institutions that fall under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research experienced the same arbitrariness. The study’s field research showed how the parties to the conflict imposed their agents onto the staffs of public universities, “without regard for competitive academic standards” (Focus Group 1), with the result that there are “leaders of educational institutions who are unqualified and bring down pedagogic standards” (Focus Group 2). Moreover, “some of the parties to the conflict in Yemen stipulated that master’s and doctorate degree students had to obtain the approval of the party’s cultural advisor at the university for their choice of thesis subject. That individual is vested with the absolute power to approve or reject something that is beyond his academic expertise, yet his authority surpasses that of the academic boards of the university departments and faculties” (Focus Group 2).

This is consistent with a previous study of mine which found “a narrowing scope of scholastic freedom in the academic space, which has grown weaker and more divided, as some of the academic disciplines have been pressed into the service of the dominant forces’ drives to revive a particular intellectual heritage” (Sultan, 2018, p. 136). In addition, the parties to the conflict have created new public universities which they have shackled with regional affiliations subject to their military control. Most of Yemen’s 22 governorates have established a public university in their capital city, bringing the number of these institutions up to 19. Of these 42 percent were founded in the period from 2016–2022, and include the universities of Mareb, Mahra and Abyan.

Of greater importance is the arbitrariness of pedagogic action as practiced by the agents the dominant forces have installed in the educational institutions. The material is presented in a pedagogically distorted manner, without any logical coherence, as these agents are devoid of the required academic and professional qualifications and skills. Another manifestation of their educationally unsound behaviours and practices is their failure to teach the required curriculum in full during the academic year (Interviews 10–19). The consequent gaps this has left in the students’ knowledge base could disadvantage them at higher educational levels and weaken the educational output in general. Furthermore, “the phenomenon of cheating as a student’s right has proliferated.” There are no longer any controls on

pedagogical inputs. In fact, cheating is now protected by those in charge of education who “lack academic, administrative, and cultural capacities as well as patriotic loyalty” since they are merely agents of the dominant forces (Interviews 7, 9, 10, 11, and 15).

It comes as little surprise, given the foregoing, that the study participants variously assessed the state of the education system as “catastrophically dysfunctional,” “going from bad to worse,” “approaching the abyss,” “deteriorating and with poor outputs desperate to obtain certificates by any means.” Some participants fear that the intractable problems they encountered in the institutions in which they teach could jeopardise the development and very future of Yemeni society. Of particular concern to them is that, not only do the agents of the dominant forces spread the practice of cheating but “they also falsify certificates for students who did not even attend the exams” (Interviews 10–15). There were cases in which “no more than five students attended the exam for a particular subject, only for that figure to rise to 20 in the report submitted to the faculty dean and university president. When you ask your department head how that came about, he answers that they [i.e., the students who did not show up for the exams] are fighting on the fronts, defending the nation in stands of honour, so you have no right to question or object” (Interviews 11, 12 and 13).

In like manner, most of the participant educational leaders assert that “most of the graduates of the educational system lack the most basic academic capacities” (Interviews 2–9). They attribute this to “the absence of education policies, the lack of a culture of serious academic inquiry, the shortage of intellectual capital in the educational institutions, the stagnation of academic curricula, and the educational programmes’ lack of commitment to the professional and skill-building support for the students to equip them for the labour market, which renders them incompatible with developmental needs” (Focus Group 1). Consequently, “graduates of the educational process are unequipped to join the workforce because they are unqualified and inexperienced, while confidence in their lacking skills sharply contrasts with their poor educational performance and the views of labour market employers towards them” (Interview 16). Indeed, “some students get into university without even knowing how to read and write properly” (Focus Groups 2, 3 and 4).

When considering the persistent malfunctioning of the Yemeni education system, we must not underestimate the ramifications of the very limited capacities of the human capital it is producing. This creates another challenge that needs to be addressed in addition to the economic, healthcare, political and other deficiencies in the social systems that are already weakened and hampered by a very narrow fiscal space (UNICEF, 2021, 6). Education recovery thus faces a multifaceted developmental challenge which, in turn, necessitates rebuilding the capacities of many of the outputs of the educational system in the post-conflict period as they have become sources of illiteracy, paucity in labour skills and capacities, and other such ills. If left unaddressed, these outputs could become intractable obstacles to society’s development.

***Multiple Identities Shunt Aside the Single Organisational Identity of the Education System***

The loss of an educational system's organisational identity under the dominance of warring forces deprives it of the ability – according to systemic theory – to determine the measures to transform it and, hence, to configure its systemic identity (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2007, p. 385). As my field research found, “Education [institutions] have become virtually owned by the warring militias, which are the first to undermine education through the practices of their agents, twisting the content of educational curricula to conform to the ideological orientations of the group. This is especially true of the Ansar Allah movement, the Muslim Brotherhood as represented by the Islah party, the secessionist Southern Movement and the Salafist groups. The political parties, such as the General People's Congress, the Yemeni Socialist Party and the Nasserist Popular Unionist Party contribute to this, all of which makes it difficult to reunify the education system in Yemen” (Focus Groups 1 and 2).

That the dominant forces have asserted their control over educational institutions is not a random phenomenon. It is an organisational priority for them and part of the implementation of their strategies to manufacture their factional identities. Each group seeks to inculcate their ideology, cultural principles and values in students' minds and to direct the students' behaviours, practices and intellectual, cultural, and daily life representations. The purpose is to create a factional identity within educational and social institutions to counter their adversaries' factional identities, and from there to impose this identity to replace the general national identity. Consequently, “education now serves to perpetuate social division” in Yemen (Nagi, 2021, p. 2). It additionally entrenches the fragmentation of a unified national identity, especially given the absence of a legitimate authority able to assert its will and sovereignty over the entire country. In this context, the warring parties vie with each other in the promotion of their strategies and interests by expanding their control over the educational institutions in the framework of their competition to control the public authorities and the national space in general.

***Strict Islamist, Regionalist, and Political Party Quotas in the Administration of Educational Institutions***

The belligerent political, Islamist and regionalist forces have imposed strict quotas on many educational administrative centers. These quotas are primarily determined by these forces' relative military strength and political weight, by dint of which their militias secure control over territory and its resources, which they exploit to sustain and perpetuate their hegemony. Yet, while “the leadership positions in the educational institutions are tightly controlled by the warring parties, they leave a margin for the participation of their allies in the higher, middle and lower management tiers.” This applies “in particular to the religious [i.e., Islamist] groups and the political parties allied with them” (Interviews 2 and 9).

But the quotas are strict. One of the curious aspects of this brutal conflict is that “the administrative positions in some educational institutions (universities, ministries, administrations) have remained vacant for years following a promotion or death [of an agent of one of the warring parties] as no replacement would be appointed by the party with the power to do so until one of its members or agents obtained the academic credentials that would render them eligible for the position” (Interview 9). Toward this end, the warring party will “provide officers among their ranks [or agents] with financial grants from its own resources to obtain a university degree, because they are currently only eligible for posts that require no more than a secondary school certificate. In addition, it will offer them a daily living stipend to encourage them to attend classes, even though their academic success will be guaranteed” (Focus Group 2).

Meanwhile, “other warring parties operate through the GoY’s Ministry of Higher Education to fund their agents through government grants or cultural exchange scholarships to obtain master’s or doctorate degrees.” However, “some Islamist forces and regional forces [i.e., the Southern Movement] hold the strings to such grants and scholarships and control the higher education space in general. Therefore, they divvy up the grants between them by quotas, leaving set percentages for other political forces [i.e., political parties and Salafist forces]” (Focus Group 1: Interviews 2, 8 and 10).

In pursuing this funding strategy, the warring parties aim to prepare trustworthy agents to occupy leadership positions in educational or other institutions in the post-conflict future. Accordingly, through their current practices in the educational institutions, they are effectively reproducing certain social and Islamist factional groups, thereby generating class gaps between sectors of Yemeni society. They are simultaneously depriving Yemen’s human resources, and above all the most promising and meritorious among them who are unaffiliated with the warring parties, from opportunities to develop their academic capacities.

### *The Educational System’s Lack of a Peace Culture*

Study participants agreed that pedagogic aims and substance have been reduced to rote learning. Such learning, moreover, was taking place in the absence of a culture of peace and friendship. “Educational institutions have become environments for disseminating the culture of hatred and hostility, and the culture of violence and death,” they said (Field Interviews). This is the result of the warring parties’ utilisation of pedagogic action and educational content to construct a learning, teaching, and educational administrative habitus that serves their strategies and interests.

The habitus is a system for the durable dispositions (values, customs, norms) that inform the ways the individual thinks, makes judgments and behaves and that are inculcated through pedagogic action through the institution of the family and educational, religious, political, governmental and civil society establishments. The habitus thus renders the dispositions transferable from generation to generation, entrenching the ideas and judgements that individuals in a society use to determine their behaviours and life practices, and the representations of the self, the family,

society, and the surrounding world (Qaed, 2023, p. 47). In such a habitus, learners, teachers and educational leaders become the product of the dispositions inculcated through the pedagogic action, shaping their knowledge structure and educational institutions, thereby enabling them to produce new generations that embody and manifest the behaviours and culture of the dominant forces.

In the Yemeni case, various closed sub-national cultures took root among the educational institutions during the conflict, masking their aims and agendas. These cultures are imbued with modes of blind and irrational fanaticism particular to the respective cultures of the dominant and mutually hostile Islamist, regionalist and political party forces, all of which have a legacy of conflict with strongly ingrained ideopolitical and regionalist conformist tendencies that are inimical to all who oppose them. Their inflammatory demagogic discourse, especially that used by extremist Islamist groups, often hurls accusations of heresy and apostasy against their political and ideological opponents when it serves their military and political ends. Regionalist secessionist forces use similar tactics “to mobilise opposition against all who oppose their separatist outlooks and behaviours, regardless of the opponents’ regional and political affiliations and outlooks” (Focus Group 1). The Southern Movement forces referred to here lay claim to a mandate to control and govern the southern governorates. Some participants hold that the “religious [Islamist] groups and Southern Movement forces are trying to disseminate their conflict culture in the areas under their control, including in the educational institutions. It is a culture that is inimical to teaching and learning, which promotes ideas that have no scientific foundation, and that fosters a culture of violence, killing, and aggression against all who disagree with them” (all four Focus Groups and Interview 11).

The belligerents have thereby turned the country’s educational institutions into fertile environments for the spread of aggressive and incendiary discourse, stigmatising opponents as traitors to the homeland or to the faith, or as agents and mercenaries of regional and international powers. Learners and teachers are also being psychologically, culturally and religio-politically primed for the ranks of this or that faction on the battlefronts. Worse yet, the Sanaa-based Mwatana Organization for Human Rights has “documented hundreds of incidents of the recruitment of children under the age of 18. All parties to the conflict across Yemen’s governorates have recruited and used children excessively...since the outbreak of the conflict.” Recruitment of children is defined as “the recruitment of children under 18, whether boys or girls, for use by an armed military group as frontline combatants, for security missions, as cooks, porters, spies, or for logistic and sexual purposes” (Mwatana, February 2024).

The warring parties in Yemen are likely to intensify the competition to expand and tighten their control over the educational system as each seeks to achieve an “absolute distinction from others” (Al-Khaled, 2020, p. 18). In the context of a “culture of violence that legitimizes violence,” these actors “strive to gain power with a structure that oppresses and exploits people” and forces them into submission (Ercoşkun, 2021, pp. 2–5). The spread and growing prevalence of this culture has been facilitated by the diminishing role of political parties, NGOs and

other civil society organisations in fostering a culture of peace because they have partnered with the main belligerents. This is another factor that increases the likelihood that this culture and its associated behaviours will stoke further violence, especially given the continuing fragility of the truce and the state of no-war, no-peace that has existed since 2022 until the time of writing this study in April 2024. In the absence of any frames-of-reference guaranteeing peace, this culture and the commensurate prioritisations in the warring parties' political value scales, may bring them into conflict with some or all the social forces that reject that culture or with international powers.

### ***Squandering the Resources of the System of Education and Commodification of its Services***

The study participants agree that a main challenge to education recovery in Yemen is the dominant forces' failure to allocate the necessary funds to cover the operating costs of schools, universities and other educational institutions. They simultaneously remark on the irony that those same forces have turned the institutions under their control into sources of revenue to finance their military and expansionist strategies. For example, educational sectors at the local and regional level have been pressed by all the belligerent factions into organising fund-raising campaigns to collect financial and material donations from students to support this or that faction's missile, drone, or other fighting units at the fronts. Also, some warring parties "exact monthly dues of up to 1,000 rials per student in public schools to pay the salaries of substitute teachers who have been engaged to replace the teaching staff who left their jobs due to the interruption in their salaries. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in the schools controlled by the Houthis" (Focus Group 3).

The belligerent groups have devised other ways to collect money from students to pay for public education services. In addition to raising the fees for tuition and extracurricular activities, they have added extra courses or "parallel tracks" that students are obliged to pay for out of their own pockets. This is especially prevalent in higher educational institutions and in the TVET sector. The courses and programmes are not designed with any thought to developmental objectives or the quality of outputs, but rather to capitalise on the financial capacities of all willing to pay the high enrolment fees. Some have remarked on a degree of relaxation on admissions tests and the high rates of applications from secondary school students. In general, "the revenues of the TVET institutes and universities are considerable and include the post-graduate (master's and doctorate) tuition fees which are paid by the students" (Focus Groups 3 and 4). Of course, "no one can know how the revenues the educational institutions receive are spent" (Focus Groups 1 and 2) due to the lack of all official oversight from, for example, the Central Organization for Control and Auditing (COCA) and the Supreme National Authority for Combatting Corruption (SNACC). But there is no doubt that the revenues are squandered through the financial and administrative corruption that pervades the educational institutions. A telling case involves the construction of an educational building

by an international organisation that has helped support education in the country during the conflict. “Although the construction was paid for by the international organisation, when the leaders of the [dominant] group inaugurated the building, they said it was funded from the university’s revenues. They had deducted the amount in question and distributed it among those with the right connections” (Interview 4). “The scale of corruption in the educational institutions [under the control of the dominant forces] is unbelievable. Government oversight agencies are absent or kept out, while civil society [organisations], the most important of which are teachers’ syndicates, do not dare to question those in charge about the abuse of resources. These resources could have covered the disrupted salaries of university professors, making it possible for the educational process to resume regularly. But everyone fears the violence of the dominant forces, especially after the physical liquidation of some professors and education officials” (Focus Groups 1 and 2).

The foregoing helps explain why the dominant forces protect corruption through symbolic and non-symbolic violence and immunise their agents from accountability.

### **Available Opportunities for Post-Conflict Education Recovery**

Surmounting the challenges of education recovery entails knowing the available opportunities. These may take the form of many factors or phenomena upon which it is possible to build practical strategies for recovery. The following are the views and opinions of the participants of this study on the available opportunities:

#### ***Recovery Opportunities Associated with the Education System***

- The existence of educational infrastructure, despite the shortage of technical equipment and the fact that dilapidated structures must be renovated, and the buildings destroyed under the bombardment of the coalition forces must be rebuilt.
- The existence of human capital. The system still possesses a pool of academic competencies despite the brain drain or the movement of teaching staff to the private education sector in response to the irregularity or interruption of their salaries. In addition, a considerable amount of human capital is available outside the education system because they have been expelled or excluded from employment by the ideopolitical forces or deep state agents (especially at the higher academic level) for reasons related to the conflict, competition, or the prevailing exclusionist tendencies and factional quota demands that existed both before and during the crisis. These people constitute an additional pool of academic and practical skills and expertise that can be tapped for the purposes of education recovery and integrating it with developmental needs. It goes without saying that much of the available human capital must be rehabilitated and developed to equip it with the skills and knowhow commensurate with local and global scientific transformations in science, technology, knowledge and development.

***Available Opportunities Related to the Environment Surrounding the Educational System***

- Mounting social pressure for education recovery and development, and the general social desire to provide children with a formal education. Yemeni parents, in general, take considerable pains to ensure their children remain enrolled in school, despite adverse circumstances and economic straits. Education is widely seen as the only way out of the cycle of warfare, strife, poverty, and ignorance and the only way for Yemen to achieve stability, development and prosperity (Focus Groups 3 and 4). Testimony to this can be found in the relatively high indicators, such as enrolment figures, recorded in public and private education institutions (schools, universities, academies) during the conflict, despite the problems related to pedagogic quality and outputs.
- The existence of a collective awareness conducive to education recovery. Yemeni society aspires to bring its education system up to date with global transformations in all fields of life. Participants attributed the country's underdevelopment to "the failure of the education system to build innovative individuals equipped to promote industrial, agricultural and technological advancement." They also argue, "Countries only succeeded in attaining sustainable development through their attention to education and educational development." Such outlooks, which run deep in the collective consciousness, are indicative of a social environment supportive of education recovery and open to inspiration from the experiences of others, especially countries that have experienced circumstances like those in Yemen.
- Continued international support. Participants observed that "international organisations that have been working in Yemen since before the outbreak of the conflict will offer programmes that contribute to the recovery and development of education in the post-conflict period." Many participants also believe that regional and international governments and organisations can offer more than just material support for education recovery. They can also encourage political commitment to education and to the implementation of provisions of international and regional human rights treaties and conventions that enshrine the right to education and underscore its intrinsic relation to other human rights (UNESCO et al., 2015, 4–8).

In this regard, an evaluation of the work undertaken by international organisations in Yemen during the conflict confirms that they have contributed to slowing the collapse of the fragmented system. Nevertheless, there remains an urgent need to improve access to inaccessible or difficult-to-access areas in the country to ensure that people there can be assisted as effectively as possible. This applies above all to the areas controlled by Ansar Allah, where organisations encounter the most obstruction to their humanitarian interventions and their attempts to exercise oversight over the implementation of their interventions (UN/OCHA, 2022). The report concludes that urgent measures are needed to address the security conditions that constrain

the work of UN and other international, regional, and local organisations, thereby enabling them to more effectively implement crucial interventions in education recovery. Such measures are essential to identifying the priorities of quality assistance and strengthening accountability, so as to improve how aid, including education recovery assistance, reaches people and how it is perceived and received (UN/OCHA, 2022).

- The existence of a culture of community participation. Since the 1960s, Yemeni society has contributed to making educational services available, whether through individual efforts in collaboration with governmental bodies or in cooperation with international drives to develop education in Yemen. Such efforts inherently require community participation in the implementation of the provided services, whether materially (through the provision of sites, building materials or water) or financially through donations. Such participation gives community members a sense of ownership which encourages them to help with the maintenance and upkeep of the service. The private sector has also contributed actively to the development of public education, often by investing in the education sector which many entrepreneurs view as potentially lucrative. Evidence of this can be seen in the growth of the private education sector at the primary, secondary, vocational and higher educational levels during the conflict. Of course, other factors have contributed to the proliferation of private sector education during this period. Many parents fear the ideological indoctrination of their children by Islamist groups, or that their children will be recruited to the battlefronts because of these groups' absolute control over public education institutes. Other parents want to ensure that their children receive as decent an education as possible, although participants agree that the quality of private education is not much better than that of public education since quality is often sacrificed to profit, a factor that has contributed to degrading the status and importance of education and academic research.

### **Prospects for Education Recovery and its Effective Role in Advancing Sustainable Development**

Most of the study participants shared a pessimistic outlook for the future of post-conflict education in Yemen. The majority feared education would be negatively impacted and imperilled while the views of others ranged between scepticism and cautious optimism. Applying a process of reflexivity to explain their responses, the participants reasoned causally, linking the current dire state of education to its prospects against the backdrop of a bleak political, economic and quality-of-life horizon: “The protracted conflict is hugely damaging to the struggling economy, threatening the government’s ability to sustain essential services. 42.8% of the population are undernourished and more than 7 million are at risk of famine, placing Yemen 165<sup>th</sup> [out of 167 countries] for Nutrition globally” (The Legatum Institute, 2023, p. 47). Participants agreed that the following basic requirements were essential for education recovery and promoting its developmental role:

- Institutionalised government: This necessitates creating an institutionalized authority that acquires its legitimacy through a democratic participatory process and dedicates itself to sustainable educational development.

In this framework, an independent and autonomous national body commission should be formed. Deriving its legitimacy from parliament, it would consist of eminent experts in education, economics, technology, and development, and undertake the following tasks:

- Formulate a national education policy. Drawing on established sources of educational philosophy and principles, the policy should promote compliance with the latest scientific and developmental standards and criteria and aim to achieve sustainable development within the parameters of the needs, requirements and transformations in local, national, regional and global contexts.
- Systematically and scientifically review and amend educational syllabi and programmes. Particular attention should be paid to the TVET and higher education and scientific research levels, in which new courses would be introduced to build specialised knowledge and skill sets. Courses and content should be based on an analysis of the social and developmental needs of society, thereby contributing to sustainable development, improving employment prospects for graduates, and reducing unemployment, poverty and other widespread ills.
- Oversee a radical overhaul of educational curricula to bring them up to date with the innovations of the current scientific and technological revolutions and to conform with the needs of the labour market. Curricula design should be grounded in sound academic, national, developmental, religious and cultural foundations. Above all, it should aim to strengthen the values and principles that foster a culture of peace and social cohesion. This should apply to all educational levels, but especially to the curricula for the applied courses at the TVET and higher education levels, as some study participants observed “a diminishing culture of peace in the applied courses in TVET and higher education programs” (Interviews 13–19). Primary and secondary school curricula should also include components that seek to counter cultural values, principles and behaviours conducive to hatred and the perpetuation of conflict, especially “among young people [and agents of the warring parties] who acquired or grew habituated to [such attitudes] in the course of the conflict” (all four Focus Groups). The importance of this cannot be overstated as education is the main avenue to transforming the individual and collective conscience in a manner conducive to developing a culture of peace and a sustainable development culture, in general. It is also crucial to strengthening national identity as a bulwark against the resurgence of the factional identities that prevailed during the conflict.
- Rebuild educational institutions on scientific, national and developmental foundations, to harden the education system’s institutional boundaries against arbitrary interventions and unify its systemic and organisational identity. This reconstruction process should aim to promote inclusiveness, fairness, transparency and accountability across all institutions, and to enhance the quality of the

educational output and the efficacy of the educational system in reinterpreting and retranslating the social and developmental needs of Yemeni society.

- Build the capacities and skills of the human capital that serves the educational system, especially the manpower that had been incorporated into the system according to the criteria of the dominant forces and that currently serve as teachers, employees or administrative officials despite their lack of the appropriate academic, cultural and administrative qualifications.
- Engage human resources (teachers, trainers, academics, administrators) based on established principles and criteria of eligibility and merit and provide for the continual in-service development of their academic and professional qualifications and expertise. Attention should also be paid to improving their standards of living, which is also crucial to enabling them to participate as effectively as possible in the advancement of education through institutional structures that encourage their contributions.
- Promote the use of all available modern techniques and technologies in pedagogy and learner acquisition while phasing out outmoded conventional methods.
- Introduce continuing education programmes to build the capacities of students and graduates who had not been able to appropriately develop their academic, professional and life skills so that they can participate effectively in the developmental process.
- The system of education must be organisationally and financially independent and free of all control by political party, Islamist, or regionalist forces. All possible measures should be taken to ensure it is never bent to the service of narrow interests.
- Sufficient funding sources must be made available to enable the unimpeded implementation of educational policies. All revenues and outlays must be subjected to strict oversight by specialised governmental agencies and civil society bodies, ensuring “genuine reforms across the diverse sectors of [the ministries of] education” (Interview 6). The necessary allocations must also be earmarked for the reconstruction, renovation, reequipment and upgrading of educational infrastructure and facilities, especially schools and institutes that have been destroyed and pillaged of their furniture and equipment.
- A broad array of governmental, community, private sector stakeholders and international developmental partners should be encouraged to participate and work in concert to marshal immediate and continuous support for the development of the education system and its reorientation toward the realisation of the principles of compulsory education for all, gender equality, and linking outputs to sustainable development goals. Work will also be needed to change the prevailing organisational and social culture and values that the warring parties had instilled in the educational system and its social environment during the conflict. These values and cultural attitudes should be replaced by a pro-development culture that fosters justice, fairness, the social impetus for education and learning, and serious scientific research inspired by the need to promote sustainable development, technological indigenisation, and Yemen’s ability to compete as a peer in the global space.

## Conclusion

The war in Yemen has been catastrophic for the educational system. It has aggravated and compounded its already existing flaws and difficulties, rendering it unable to operate in accordance with pre-conflict strategies and assumptions for all their pros and cons. It was therefore even less able to interpret and translate society's developmental needs in keeping with Millennium Development Goals, especially those related to the aims of free and compulsory education which are to build human capital as both the pillar and goal of sustainable human development. Meanwhile, the quality of education and its outputs deteriorated across the board of its various institutions, which fragmented as they fell under the control of the rival belligerents and were torn from were all national constitutional and legal stratification frameworks. The system thus lost its self-productive coherence and consistency, its ability to direct and enforce reform and transformation, and its control over its organisational and developmental identity. It is no longer able to ensure the restoration of its unity.

This situation is primarily the product of how the educational institutions were shaped under the control of the warring factions, which stripped them of their foundations of rational decision-making. Every faction imposed its own strategies and assumptions on the institutions in the regional/territorial spaces under their control. Although worn and frayed by the war, they were pressed into the service of intensifying the conflict by the dominant forces, particularly the Islamist and regionalist ones. In general, all the dominant forces have channelled pedagogic action and content into indoctrinating learners, teachers and education administration officials with the aim of furthering these forces' ideopolitical aspirations and agendas by reproducing the values, outlooks, and sociocultural relations that serve to build and reinforce their factional identities in the surrounding social and educational environment. The disparate and conflicting factional identities pose an ongoing threat to social cohesion, peace, national unity and national identity, because they are bolstered and protected by the rival forces' strategies of symbolic and non-symbolic violence.

These factors clearly inhibit the recovery and reunification of the educational system. But as though the system is not in a sufficiently critical state, its institutions are now run by individuals – the agents of the dominant forces – who lack the academic qualifications and skills commensurate to educational and administrative needs. Their comportment and practices, moreover, defy the rules and norms of bureaucratic behaviour which presumably should seek to promote effective performance of these educational institutions. In such an educational environment it becomes nearly impossible to ensure the quality of the classroom environment, instruction, and the educational process in general. This is the source of a convergence of opinion among all interviewees and focus groups. All believe that the most formidable challenges to post-conflict education recovery reside primarily in the warring parties' continued determination to bend the educational institutions to their ends through their instruments of domination, control and coercion. As each side has barricaded itself in its

unrelinquishable ideological shell, the result has been an almost inevitable escalatory spiral.

With the waning resistance of the individuals and groups once able to devise mechanisms to counter the forceful intrusions into the education system, the dominant forces tightened their grip over the institutions under their control. However, their impacts on them were not even, because the Islamist and regionalist forces dominated the hegemonic hierarchy in the educational sector. The other political and political party forces arrayed themselves along the adversarial divides in accordance with their interests and in varying clientelist arrangements. However, with respect to education, the relationship was primarily based on opinions and attitudes toward education and pedagogic content, especially regarding the religious and social science subjects (which are among the main vehicles for ideological indoctrination); the distribution of quotas in the educational administrative cadres; and the perceptions and attitudes of the dominant parties' agents in the system toward those of their adversaries, as well as toward each other. Such dynamics have served to perpetuate the conflict, as they reinforce the hierarchy of symbolic and non-symbolic violence and the arrangements of financial and administrative corruption among the agents of the belligerent forces who run the educational institutions. In short, these institutions have become environments permeated by conflict-driven behaviours, competitiveness, arbitrariness, and the manufacture of ignorance in the service of the strategies and interests of the warring factions.

The very real and formidable challenges facing education recovery in Yemen and the limited opportunities available for it given the current realities necessitated the formulation of a concept for urgent recovery responses aiming to promote the educational system's role in forging peace and sustainable human development. But for this to occur, there must exist a new political vision for the reconstruction of the legitimate political system in accordance with the concept and principles of the institutionalised state. For education, this vision should include the creation of a specialised academic body (an institutional framework) tasked with introducing systematic reforms to facilitate the development of the education system's institutional capital and to promote and secure its institutional autonomy. In this regard, particular attention should be given to ordering priorities and sequencing interventions, ensuring the active participation and collaboration of diverse efforts, and marshalling sufficient resources.

In light of the foregoing, the main message of this study is that the conflict not only created considerable challenges, but it also brought a great opportunity to reform the educational system. Given the extensive structural divisions that plague it and the severe degradation of all its assets and resources, it will take intensive efforts to both rebuild and reunify it. These two drives should proceed in tandem, as education is a crucial component of any strategy to deescalate and minimise the risks of a backslide into conflict.

To conclude, in embarking on this study, I sought to contribute to opening new horizons for scholars and researchers interested in the in-depth study of education recovery and the state of the educational system in Yemen, in general. I believe the study has pointed the way to overcoming some formidable obstacles to field

research, and above all, the constraints the warring factions imposed on critical studies they felt were not in line with their interests. Hopefully, it will encourage more contributions of this sort, as they will still be needed. The fact is that the circumstances surrounding the educational system and its future prospects are fraught with both current and unforeseeable risks, clouding the horizons for peace in the short term and beyond. The warring parties must demonstrate the credibility of their stated willingness to work for peace, to repudiate the culture of violence and the physical annihilation of adversaries, and to stop turning to regional and international powers for backing against opponents at home. Once that occurs, Yemen will have a pivotal opportunity for a dynamic process of education recovery.

Unfortunately, so far, all this remains out of reach. The logic of conflict still prevails among the factions, driven by a thirst to attain and monopolise power, dominate Yemeni society, and secure exclusive control over the country's resources and other sources of wealth. Such are the aims of the warring parties in the pursuit of building their combat, security and economic capacities. That is why they are exploiting the resources that are the most crucial to the fragile national economy and the welfare of the Yemeni public. It is why they are channelling the country's petroleum resources, public utilities and other public service sectors and their revenues into the service of their narrow factional ends. The belligerents in the current conflict form a complex web of closed and self-identifying clusters of clientelist networks. To an alarming degree, they have become at once the main actors in manufacturing the humanitarian crises gripping Yemeni society and the main beneficiaries of these crises.

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# Conclusion

*Khalil Fadl Osman and Mona Hedaya*

The persistent recurrence of war and conflict has shaped modern Yemen, leaving a legacy of destruction, human suffering, disruption of livelihoods, and social dislocations and divisions. As is generally the case in wars and conflicts, civilians in Yemen bear the brunt of the costs of war. When a war or conflict is raging, scholarship tends to focus on its root causes, its destructive and harrowing impact, and/or possible ways of mitigating its effects or ending it. The approach we have adopted in this book is different in an important respect. While taking stock of the multifaceted aspects of the ongoing conflict in Yemen, this book has sought to integrate a futurist perspective, whereby a deep look into various dimensions of the conflict is paired with informed insights on post-conflict reconstruction—highlighting potential directions and scenarios and unpacking the complex interplay of multi-sectoral challenges that lie ahead. In this approach, we have been guided by our firm belief that conflict and post-conflict reconstruction are in many ways intertwined. Accordingly, a meaningful speculative glimpse into and fuller engagement with the issues and challenges of future postwar reconstruction in Yemen requires adequate understanding of the conflict and the contentious issues at stake. It is our sincere hope that policymakers and other stakeholders in the process of post-conflict recovery and reconstruction will find the insights presented in this volume useful and take them into account if and when this process takes off. Needless to say that the sooner this process starts, the better, especially for Yemenis reeling from the deadly horrors of war.

## **Yemen: Geostrategic Rivalries and Peace Dividends**

Home to an ancient civilization, Yemen has been a crossroads of peoples, cultures, commerce, and geostrategic interests of regional and international powers. By dint of its location at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen holds significant geostrategic importance. Yemen's geographic location along the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a major artery, cargo channel and choke point for global trade, makes it an attractive target for a host of regional and international players. Little wonder that external actors from near and far were increasingly drawn to Yemen over the past years as the country became progressively engulfed in conflict.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003631644-13

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The importance of the 30-kilometer-wide Bab al-Mandab Strait to international trade and supply chains is amplified by its proximity to the Suez Canal, another strategic chokepoint for international trade, and the Strait of Hormuz, another critical transit route for global energy exports from the Middle East, making Yemen also important for global energy security (Al-Ashwal, 2021). It is estimated that 15 percent of global seaborne trade passes through the waters of Bab al-Mandab each year. That includes nearly one-third of global container shipping traffic using international sea routes, 12 percent of the international maritime transit of oil and 8 percent of liquified natural gas (LNG) traded by sea (Dennard et al., 2024). It goes without saying, therefore, that the security of Yemen has significant direct consequences for global maritime trade and energy security.

By extension, ensuring stability in Yemen through diplomatic and economic engagement would benefit countries that rely on the sea lanes and global supply chains passing through Bab al-Mandab. For example, Ansar Allah attacks on ships in the Red Sea have had significant adverse economic repercussions for Egypt's economy, exacerbating fears of a total economic collapse. The attacks have forced many ships that normally sail through the Suez Canal, Egypt's largest source of foreign currency, to reroute around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, which is a longer and more expensive route for shipping companies. This has resulted in severe loss of revenues from the Suez Canal for Egypt. On 5 September 2024, Danish shipping giant A.P. Moller-Maersk announced that the number of ships passing through the Suez Canal had, since Ansar Allah started to target shipping in October 2023, dropped by 66 percent. By the same token, on 26 December, an Egyptian government source put the rate of decline in revenue from the Suez Canal in 2024 compared to 2023 at 60 percent (*Business Today*, 2024; Reuters, 2024).

The geopolitical dynamics of the Yemen conflict are highly intricate. They are shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external rivalries and conflicts. The ongoing civil war has turned the country into a battleground for broader Middle Eastern rivalries. Beyond regional actors, global powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, have vested interests in Yemen. The presence of extremist groups like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State further complicates the security landscape, mainly by providing a pretext for a host of international counterterrorism, including military, efforts in the country. These overlapping interests and interventions make Yemen's not just a national crisis but a global geopolitical flashpoint where competing agendas influence not only the trajectory of conflict but also the prospects for peace and stability.

Although the origins of the conflict in Yemen reside in a complex and longstanding tangle of internal societal, historical and structural problems and factors, it has turned into a proxy war pitting Saudi Arabia and Iran – and their allies. The grinding sectarian turmoil that has engulfed the Middle East has been aptly described as a “cold war” (Gause III, 2014). Indeed, the Middle East's march toward the current sectarian conflagration has been largely fueled by the long-running regional cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Of course, other regional players, notably Türkiye, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, have also leapt or been drawn into the fray, prompted in large part by a common desire

to counter the spread of Iranian influence into Yemen. But Saudi Arabia and Iran remain the central regional players in this cold-war-style confrontation complete with pernicious polarisation and interventions in internal wars. The two rival Muslim regional powers saw in Yemen's important strategic location opportunities to expand their power and regional influence (Koshaimah and Zou, 2023). Beyond ideological and sectarian concerns, the pursuit to carve out a niche of influence in Yemen presented the two rivals with a host of potential geopolitical and economic gains, including prospects to "facilitate trade, navigation and access to oil reserves" (Manea, 2024, 673).

For Iran, moreover, expanding its influence in Yemen would enable it to augment the power, reach and prestige of its "Axis of Resistance." By forging a strategic alliance with Ansar Allah, Tehran expanded its strategic depth to the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, thus boosting its ability to sidestep US sanctions, challenge regional rivals, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, enhance its maritime capabilities, both commercial and military, and exert pressure on global trade routes and Western strategic interests in the Middle East and Horn of Africa regions (Dennard et al., 2024).

On the other hand, by seeking to expand its sway over Yemen, Saudi Arabia aims to bolster its regional dominance, keep Iranian influence at bay, undermine the growing power of a rising regional foe, viz. Ansar Allah, and safeguard its southern flank. However, the Saudi-led intervention in 2015 has transformed the conflict in Yemen from a domestic affair to an internationalised civil war. From Riyadh's vantage point, expanding Saudi influence in Yemen is of vital importance for its security and interests, including the realisation of its much-touted Vision 2030, which envisions the building of a string of hotels, resorts, and restaurants, as well as residential areas, along the country's Red Sea coast. While this strategic calculus has fueled Saudi involvement in the conflict, it also highlights how Riyadh's long-term interests may be better served through stability rather than protracted confrontation (Baabood, 2023).

Beyond alignment of interests with Saudi Arabia, however shaky and fleeting, geopolitical calculations have also shaped the UAE's growing involvement in the Yemeni conflict. Expanding control over Yemen figures as an important plank in the UAE's rimland strategy that aims to establish itself as a regional power, boost its status as a global maritime player, and dominate international waterways and ports in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa (Manea, 2024). By establishing naval bases in Eritrea, Somaliland, and Yemen's Socotra Island, as well as acquiring control over key ports such as Berbera in Somalia and Assab in Eritrea, the UAE seeks to secure critical maritime chokepoints. This expansion not only enhances its trade and security interests but also allows it to counter regional adversaries, such as Iran and Türkiye, while strengthening its influence over vital global shipping routes (Zoubir, 2024).

The Saudi-led coalition has enjoyed significant support from the US, as well as from other Western nations such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. This support is impelled by economic, security, and geopolitical considerations. Ensuring the security of Saudi Arabia has long been a cornerstone for US foreign

policy in the Middle East. The US has provided the Saudi military campaign in Yemen with extensive military aid, advanced weaponry and intelligence support. Primary US goals include safeguarding the Saudi borders, containing Iran's influence in the Middle East, and ensuring the free flow of oil and commerce from Bab al-Mandab Strait. Counterterrorism has been a primary concern of US foreign policy toward Yemen since the early 1990s, when AQAP gained a growing foothold in the country. One consequence of the chaos created by the conflict has been enabling Jihadist organizations, namely AQAP and Islamic State, to expand their presence and build safe havens in Yemen (Robinson, 2023). Mounting concerns in US foreign policy circles over this phenomenon have been reflected in US State Department warning in a 2019 report of the continued ability of US-designated terrorist groups "to exploit the political and security vacuum created by the ongoing conflict" (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2019, 158). Over the years, Jihadist groups have continued to retain presence and influence in some parts of Yemen despite the setbacks they suffered by continued counterterrorism operations.

The special US-Israel partnership has also influenced Washington's involvement in Yemen, deepening its entanglement in broader great-power rivalries and transforming Yemen into a global geopolitical flashpoint. The Bab al-Mandab Strait, situated at the southern mouth of the Red Sea, has transformed the Yemeni coastline into a key arena for the projection of influence by major actors such as the United States, China, and Russia (Blanchard, 2024; Zoubir, 2024). For the US, securing maritime trade routes has long been a stated priority, yet its posture in Yemen has increasingly reflected the imperatives of great-power politics and alliance management, particularly its alignment with Saudi Arabia and Israel. While framed in terms of counterterrorism and freedom of navigation, Washington's involvement has often privileged the strategic interests of its regional partners over a coherent approach to peacebuilding or conflict resolution. Meanwhile, China's commercial dependence on Red Sea shipping lanes within the scope of its Belt and Road Initiative has pushed Beijing to quietly expand its diplomatic and economic footprint in the region. Russia, for its part, has pursued military and port access agreements across the Horn of Africa, seeking to assert naval presence near Yemen's waters. Together, these dynamics underscore how Yemen's conflict has become embedded in wider geopolitical rivalries, which intensify the internationalisation of the war and raise the costs of escalation for all actors involved.

Building on this broader strategic alignment, since October 2023, the US response to the Red Sea escalation has been increasingly shaped by its strategic partnership with Israel—alongside longstanding concerns related to energy security, counterterrorism, and the free flow of maritime trade. Israel perceives Iran's backing of Ansar Allah as part of Tehran's broader strategy to expand its influence and threaten Israeli security, particularly through the Axis of Resistance, which includes Hezbollah and other non-state armed groups. As a result, since Ansar Allah began their attacks in response to the Israeli military campaign against Gaza following the Hamas-led 7 October attack on Israel, the US has taken a more active role in countering Ansar Allah—not only in support of Saudi Arabia and the

UAE but also as part of Washington's commitment to safeguarding Israeli interests (Blanchard, 2024).

Sustainable peace and reconciliation continue to elude Yemen. The weight of Yemen's turbulent history is too great; and so are ongoing regional rivalries and the competing interests of external actors. Despite intermittent ceasefires and diplomatic efforts led by the United Nations and other international mediators, distrust between warring factions, coupled with foreign interventions by a host of external actors, continues to hinder long-term stability. Additionally, economic hardships, humanitarian crises, and the presence of extremist groups further complicate the prospects for a lasting resolution. Without a comprehensive and inclusive political settlement, Yemen risks prolonged instability, exacerbating regional tensions and threatening vital global trade routes.

Yet amid these overlapping rivalries and enduring instability, the geostrategic logic that once fueled conflict might also enable a new logic of peace. Yemen's location—long seen as a source of external meddling—could be reconceptualised as a foundation for regional cooperation and shared prosperity. Recognising the mutual benefits of securing maritime routes and promoting economic integration may offer a constructive entry point for engaging conflicting parties in a broader peace framework. In the same way that the eruption and escalation of conflict in Yemen has set into motion a welter of tribulations for the country and beyond, establishing sustainable peace in Yemen is likely to cause a cascade of gains for Yemen and the wider region. However, resolving Yemen's conflict and ensuring successful post-conflict reconstruction is a tall order and protracted, difficult slog, but still undeniably useful. It would require international and regional cooperation and, at one and the same time, contribute to easing broader regional rivalries and tensions.

### **What We Learned**

Taken together, the analyses in this volume not only deepen our understanding of the conflict's roots and ramifications but also illuminate various pathways toward postwar reconstruction and peacebuilding. By detailing the multifaceted nature of Yemen's ongoing conflict and its broader geopolitical context and implications, this volume seeks to enhance our understanding of the complexities of state-building and peacebuilding in a post-conflict Yemen, emphasising the interplay between local political dynamics and international interests. The diverse insights from our contributors paint a complex, yet vivid, picture of the issues at stake that form the main historical, structural and immediate causes of the conflict in Yemen. They also address the multitude of possibilities for their peaceful resolution and the dynamics that have the potential to hinder or push the process forward. It should be noted, in this context, that one important point emerging from this volume is the importance of not losing sight of Yemen's unique cultural traditions and historical experiences when designing and implementing peace initiatives. Such contextual awareness is crucial for ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are not only effective but also sustainable. Methodologically, the contributors employed diverse approaches and data

types, including quantitative analyses of demographic statistics, climate-related datasets, and economic performance metrics, field interviews, and qualitative inquiries. Through this methodological blend, our volume provides both macro-level and micro-level perspectives on conflict and peacebuilding in Yemen.

The importance of history cannot be gainsaid. Several chapters have waded into the long historical roots of and defining moments in the conflict in Yemen. Mona Hedaya and Wadee Al-Arabeed's exploration of Yemen's conflict through five distinct stages offers crucial historical insights that help frame our understanding of the conflict's dynamic nature. While the chapter shows how the context of the conflict has developed and changed over time, it underscores the importance of learning from the past and adapting peace strategies to the evolving context of Yemen's political landscape. Narrowing their focus on a specific contentious issue, namely federalism, Bakeel Al Zandani and Youcef Bouandel show how federalist arrangements, initially thought to provide a way out of Yemen's political crisis following the removal of Ali Abdullah Saleh from power, ended up intensifying political divisions and speeding up the country's slide into an internationalised civil war. However, Zandani and Bouandel remain confident that decentralisation holds promise for peace and stability in Yemen, provided that it is founded on inclusiveness and balanced administrative arrangements.

Internal conflicts do not unfold in isolation from wider geostrategic environments and interests. Policies by foreign actors have a bearing on internal political crises and conflicts. Moreover, foreign actors are often drawn to internal disputes and conflicts either by interference or outright intervention, or by the conflict parties' quest for outside support. In many cases, external push and internal pull factors combine to shape the foreign actors' involvement in internal conflicts. Two chapters, namely, those written jointly by Mahjoob Zweiri and Nesibe Hicret Battaloglu and individually by Khalil Fadl Osman, look at the purposive and unintended effects of the involvement of a few key external state actors in the conflict in Yemen. Zweiri and Battaloglu examine the destabilising internal divisions engendered or deepened by the not-too-subtle competition between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – two neighboring countries that spearheaded the military intervention in Yemen launched by a coalition of nine Arab countries in March 2017. The military operations of the Saudi-led intervention enjoyed various forms of US support. Khalil Osman's examination of US foreign policy toward Yemen sheds light on the dire implications of the progressive securitisation of Washington's Yemen policy for the country's cohesion and stability. His detailed investigation illustrates how the securitisation of US foreign policy toward Yemen stemmed in large part from deference to the interests of America's regional allies, primarily Saudi Arabia and Israel, and led to deeper US military entanglement in Yemen. His chapter demonstrates how the securitisation of US foreign policy toward Yemen has constricted Washington's role in constructively and adequately addressing the crises and conflicts that unfolded in the country since the 1990s. Securitisation, Osman argues, has bred neglect of critical issues in Yemen like corruption, economic decline, human rights, and water shortages, and lack of or insufficient commitment to promoting a negotiated, inclusive conflict settlement.

There has been no shortage of rounds of third-party diplomatic initiatives, since the toppling of Saleh in 2011, to put an end to the raging violent conflict in Yemen. None of these attempts has yet been able to reach a final settlement. In their contributions, two authors, Shoqi Al-Maktary and Arwa Mokdad, turn their attention to the flaws and failings of the peace process in Yemen. Shoqi Al-Maktari's chapter provides a postmortem account of the failure of diplomatic initiatives that make up the peace process in Yemen and critically assesses the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of international mediators. His examination identifies a host of structural factors that made past attempts at resolving the conflict in Yemen inured to failure, including lack of inclusivity, defective design, inadequate proposed agreements, and lack of proper implementation monitoring. On her part, Arwa Mokdad utilises primary data obtained from field research and interviews to examine why mediation efforts by local and regional actors have been more effective at resolving conflict in Yemen, than international, namely UN, third-party interventions. Her analysis shows that, notwithstanding their biases, whether positively or negatively, toward certain conflict parties, local and regional peace mediators are invested in peace in Yemen, whereas international mediators are either not fully invested in peace or, even, have an outright stake in the conflict. This, according to Mokdad, is a fine, but crucially important, difference that helps to explain why local and regional peace mediations have had a better chance of success in Yemen than international ones.

Learning from past failures is necessary for guiding or steering the peace process in Yemen toward a successful and sustainable end. Ensuring that peace is irreversible in Yemen hinges on addressing a host of residual issues and legacies of conflict, foremost among them is the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of fighters. In her chapter on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), Julia Palik highlights the critical role of societal healing and the reintegration of combatants into civilian life as foundational to lasting peace. Based on lessons learned from past DDR experiences, Palik emphasises that DDR efforts in Yemen must be context-sensitive and supported by international funding and expertise to ensure their success.

Reaching the sunny uplands of sustainable peace and stability in Yemen is also inextricably linked to good governance. Abdulghani Gaghman's forward-looking analysis of post-conflict governance underscores the necessity of restoring integrity and effectiveness to Yemen's institutions. This involves not only political and administrative, but also economic, revitalisation, which is crucial for sustainable peace and stability. Moving the lens of inquiry to a more focused, issue-centric analysis, Aisha O. Jumaan and Tawfik Sultan Al-Hakimi provide a deep look into the challenges and opportunities for postwar reconstruction in the two critical sectors of health and education, respectively. As fundamental pillars of human security, these two sectors are pivotal not only for immediate recovery, but also for laying the groundwork for long-term societal resilience, development, and sustainable peace. Finally, examining the future climate-related trials and tribulations awaiting Yemen, Bikem Ekberzade argues for integrated national and international responses to these challenges and proposes ways to mitigate their effects and, in

turn, preclude the possibilities that climate-related challenges would contribute to a reversal of peace.

### **Challenges, Pressing Questions and Future Directions**

A common thread that can be gleaned from many of the contributions to this volume is that post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen needs to be decolonised by taking the country's history and cultural complexity seriously. Yemen has a very rich culture. Anchoring post-conflict reconstruction in common cultural norms can serve as a unifying force and help heal societal fractures. Accordingly, rooting peace agreements and reconstruction strategies in Yemeni realities is important for sustained post-conflict peacebuilding and stabilisation. Accordingly, post-conflict reconstruction planning in Yemen needs to consider indigenous knowledge, traditional Yemeni mechanisms and processes, and cultural values, while not compromising democratic principles and modern advances in good and accountable governance and administration. Surely, maintaining a practical and realistic *modus vivendi* between tradition and modernity is never easy and requires creativity. Regardless of the structure of the future institutional arrangements of political governance and power-sharing in Yemen, they must be designed in a way that ensures inclusivity, equal opportunity and uniform citizenship for all Yemenis, including women and youth.

However, a hybrid model of governance – one that respects traditional tribal mechanisms while integrating modern democratic principles – could offer a novel pathway to stability. This model would leverage Yemen's tribal structures, which have historically played a significant role in local governance, and blend them with transparent, deliberative democratic processes that enhance accountability and representation. Also, our contributors underscore the success of local and regional peace efforts over broader international intervention. Peacemakers in Yemen are called upon to build on this by incorporating into their initiatives a grassroots peacebuilding model where local communities are empowered to manage their reconciliation processes.

Poverty had been a pervasive and intractable problem in Yemen. Even before the onset of the war in 2015, Yemen was for years rated among the poorest countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The ongoing conflict has exacerbated this problem. Years of economic dependence on oil and external assistance have intensified Yemen's vulnerability to external shocks, pressures, and conflicts. Economic recovery planning should be aimed at fostering win-win country-wide economic opportunities. While it is only natural to expect hydrocarbons exports to play a role in post-conflict economic recovery, there is a need to promote economic diversification. This entails the identification of and support to sectors with high income-generation and job-creation potential such as agriculture, fisheries, and renewable energy. Reforms would also need to be implemented to strengthen the regulatory framework to encourage foreign direct and private sector investment in key economic sectors. The Yemeni diaspora could play a pivotal role in the country's reconstruction through remittances, investments, and skills' transfer.

Encouraging the diaspora to invest in local businesses, participate in rebuilding efforts, and transfer knowledge and skills could significantly boost post-conflict recovery and development. Such a comprehensive post-conflict strategy would not only reduce unemployment and poverty but also decrease the economic incentives for continuing the conflict and the war economy.

We firmly believe that post-conflict reconstruction in Yemen must privilege human security. Given the importance of health and education as a prerequisite for human security, rebuilding Yemen's educational and healthcare systems with innovative approaches adapted to post-conflict realities is essential. Good health and access to quality education go a long way toward empowering Yemenis to lead fulfilling lives and be productive members of their society by enabling them to participate fully in the economic, social and political life of their country. Gearing post-conflict reconstruction toward building a more secure and prosperous future for Yemenis is essential for promoting stability and sustainable development.

Addressing the environmental challenges and resource scarcity that fuel conflict in Yemen is crucial. Implementing sustainable water and land management practices could mitigate some of the environmental stresses that contribute to social tensions. There is a need to restore the water supply network and ensure the reliable distribution of water. This is a tall order that would require the revival, restoration and empowerment of water management authorities, mediating local and regional water-sharing agreements, and securing the pullout of armed groups from the sites of wells and water-storage facilities. International cooperation and investment in sustainable technologies and infrastructure are essential to these efforts.

Working on this volume required a great deal of contemplation of the future. Throughout this work, it became evident to us that the path to peace in Yemen, as elsewhere, is anything but straightforward. It demands a comprehensive approach that tackles political, economic, social, and environmental challenges simultaneously. The chapters in this volume address several aspects of the conflict, peacebuilding, and reconstruction in Yemen. They also help identify several areas that are ripe for further research. Given the dynamic nature of Yemen's conflict and its international implications, future studies could focus on the long-term effectiveness of peace agreements and federalism within a fragmented society as Yemen's. One such under-researched topic is the role of youth in peacebuilding processes. It is important for solid social science research to feed policymaking on how the youth can be more actively included in political transitions. Comparative studies with other post-conflict regions could also provide valuable insights into the success factors for international aid and reconstruction efforts.

As this volume highlights, Yemen's path to peace and stability is fraught with challenges yet filled with potential. The enduring spirit and resilience of its people, alongside committed international support, can forge a future marked by peace and prosperity. It is our sincere hope that the insights in this volume would help policymakers, scholars, and Yemeni national and international actors refine and improve their efforts to support Yemen not only to navigate its way out of conflict but to thrive in its aftermath. Our collective engagement and thoughtful intervention can turn hope amid turmoil into a sustainable reality for Yemen. The fate

of Yemen rests on our collective commitment to fostering a just, inclusive, and sustainable peace. Let this volume steer our endeavors toward a resolution that respects the resilience and aspirations of the Yemeni people.

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