

Background Guide

Arab League



Yemen Civil War [Houthi Uprising]

Letter From Executive Board

Hello delegates,


Welcome to Shri MUN 2016, and especially, welcome to the Arab League. We are looking forward to two days of intense debate on this unique agenda.

This introduction is necessary for you to read before you begin your research to give you a direction for your research as well as the debate that will follow. This guide is not by any means the end of your research, it is simply an indicator for more extensive research. At the conference, we will be looking for your interpretations and use of facts rather than simply your ability to recite figures, so research well enough to indulge in original debate.

This Background Guide is divided into two parts: Part I - MUN 101; Part II - Our Agenda. The first part will take you through ways in which you must analyse any given agenda and so on, while the second part will deal with our agenda specifically- events leading up to the crisis and the specifics of the parties involved. Such knowledge is necessary for one to assess the situation in depth and therefore resolve the crisis in the most effective ways.

Refer to the various resources mentioned in the 'Resources' tab on the Shri MUN website and you can always email us if you have doubts. Write your emails to shrimun@gmail.com and in the subject box mention your committee [Arab League].

So make sure you read the background guide well and research beyond this basic framework. We are looking forward to two days of intellectually stimulating debate that will leave us all richer with knowledge.



Best of luck,

Your Executive Board.

Karunya Banerjee

Kunal Dhanda

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Part I: MUN 101

'Yemen Civil War (Houthi Uprising)'

That statement happens to be the agenda we will be discussing this MUN and is quite straightforward to understand. However, it is still important for you to analyse your agenda thoroughly. This step can make or break your conference. If you understand the intricacies and implications of your agenda, then 60% of your job is done.


Once the agenda has been broken down into its constituent terms, it becomes easy to focus your research on these key topics. This committee does not however have much of an analytical agenda, but more of a crisis one. This, in essence, means that your research must focus on the events that took place in this crisis so that you will be aware of the flow of events, their resolution and thus you will be

able to apply your research to tackle the various crises you are presented with.

Breaking down this agenda is possible though, and can be done as the following:

1. **Yemen** - Research on the history of the country
2. **Civil War** - What it is, examples, how it unfolds.
3. **Yemen Civil War** - Specific causes and events of this war. Who are the parties involved? What are their demands?
4. **Houthi** - Who? What? When? Where? How?
5. **Houthi Uprising** - What? When? Why? How?

By breaking down the agenda, you now have 5 items to research on. Focus on these 5 their details to ensure that you are well versed with all aspects of this agenda.



Part II: Our Agenda

Part I clearly defines your avenues of interest regarding basic research for this agenda. Part II now hopes to lead you to understand the absolute minimum you need to know about this agenda before you begin your research. Following is an extensive timeline of Yemen, including the most important events that shaped the country all the way from the 1500's.

TIMELINE OF GENERAL EVENTS

1500s - Ottomans absorb part of Yemen into their empire but are expelled in the 1600s.

1839 - Aden comes under British rule, and when the Suez Canal opens in 1869 serves as a major refuelling port.

1849 - Ottomans return to north, but later face revolt.

1918 - Ottoman empire dissolves, North Yemen gains independence and is ruled by Imam Yahya.

1948 - Yahya assassinated, but his son Ahmad beats off opponents of feudal rule and succeeds his father.

1962 - Imam Ahmad dies, succeeded by his son but army officers seize power, set up the Yemen Arab Republic, sparking civil war between royalists supported by Saudi Arabia and republicans backed by Egypt.

South Yemen formed

1967 - Formation of People's Republic of Yemen, comprising Aden and former Protectorate of South Arabia.

1969 - Marxists take power in south, rename state People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and reorient economy, society and foreign policy towards Soviet bloc.

1971 - Thousands flee to north following crackdown on dissidents. Armed groups formed in bid to overthrow government.

1972 - Border clashes between two Yemens, ceasefire brokered by Arab League.

1978 - Ali Abdallah Saleh becomes president of North Yemen.

1979 - Fresh fighting between two Yemens. Renewed efforts to unite the two states.

1982 - Earthquake kills 3,000.

1986 - Thousands die in the south due to political rivalry. President Ali Nasser Muhammad flees the country and is later sentenced to death for treason. New government formed.

North and South Unite

1990 May - Two Yemens united as Republic of Yemen with Mr Saleh as president, as Soviet bloc implodes. Tension between former states endures.


1992 - Food price riots in major towns.

1993 April - Coalition government formed, made up of ruling parties of former north and south.

1993 August - Vice-President Ali Salim al-Baid withdraws to Aden, alleging that south is being marginalised and southerners are being attacked by northerners.

Attempted Split

1994 May - Saleh declares state of emergency and dismisses al-Baid and other southern government members following political deadlock and sporadic fighting. Former armies that failed to integrate square off on old border. Al-Baid declares independence of



Democratic Republic of Yemen. Northern forces capture Aden, southern leaders flee abroad and are sentenced to death in absentia.

1995 - Yemen, Eritrea clash over disputed islands in Red Sea.

Al-Qaeda Attacks

2000 October - US naval vessel USS Cole damaged in al-Qaeda suicide attack in Aden. Seventeen US personnel killed.

2001 February - Violence in run-up to disputed municipal polls and referendum, which back extension to presidential term and powers.

2002 February - Yemen expels more than 100 foreign Islamic clerics in crackdown on al-Qaeda.

2002 October - Al-Qaeda attacks and badly damages oil supertanker MV Limburg in Gulf of Aden, killing one and injuring 12 crew members and costing Yemen dear in lost port revenues.

2003 April - The 10 chief suspects in the bombing of the USS Cole escape from custody in Aden. Two are re-captured in 2004.

Houthi Insurgency

2004 June-August - Hundreds die as troops battle Shia insurgency led by Hussein al-Houthi in the north.

2004 August - Court sentences 15 men on terror charges, including bombing of Limburg tanker in 2002.

2004 September - Government says its forces have killed dissident cleric Hussein al-Houthi, the leader of a revolt in the north.

2005 March-April - More than 200 people are killed in a resurgence of fighting between government forces and supporters of the slain rebel cleric Hussein al-Houthi.

2005 May - President Saleh says the leader of the rebellion in the north has agreed to renounce the campaign in return for a pardon. Minor clashes continue.



2005 July - Police and witnesses say at least 36 people are killed across the country in clashes between police and demonstrators protesting about a cut in fuel subsidies.

2005 December - More than 60 people are killed when a landslide destroys a mountain village around 20km from Sanaa.

2006 March - More than 600 followers of slain Shia cleric Hussein al-Houthi who were captured following a rebellion he led in 2004 are released under an amnesty.

2006 September - President Saleh wins another term in elections.

2007 January-March - Scores are killed or wounded in clashes between security forces and al-Houthi rebels in the north.

2007 June - Rebel leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi accepts a ceasefire.

2007 July - Suicide bomber attacks a tourist convoy killing eight Spaniards and two Yemenis in the province of Marib.

2007 August - Citizens banned from carrying firearms in Sanaa. Demonstrations without a permit are outlawed.

2007 October - Volcano erupts on the Red Sea island of Jabal al-Tair where Yemen has a military base.

2007 November - Clashes between Yemeni tribesmen and army personnel protecting a Ukrainian oil company leave 16 people dead in the south-eastern Shabwa province.

2008 January - Renewed clashes between security forces and rebels loyal to Abdul-Malik al-Houthi.

2008 April - Clashes with troops as southern Yemenis protest against alleged northern bias in state job allocation. One man killed.

2008 March-April - Series of bomb attacks on police, official, diplomatic, foreign business and tourism targets. US embassy evacuates all non-essential personnel.

2008 September - Attack on US embassy in Yemeni capital Sana'a kills 18 people, including six assailants. Six suspects arrested.



2008 October - President Saleh announces arrest of suspected Islamist militants allegedly linked to Israeli intelligence.

Demands For Reform

2008 November - Police fire warning shots at Common Forum opposition rally in Sanaa. Demonstrators demand electoral reform and fresh polls. At least five protesters and two police officers injured.

2009 February - Government announces release of 176 al-Qaeda suspects on condition of good behaviour.

2009 August - The Yemeni army launches a fresh offensive against Shia rebels in the northern Saada province. Tens of thousands of people are displaced by the fighting.

2009 November - Saudi Arabia says it has regained control of territory seized by Yemeni rebels in a cross-border incursion.

2009 December - Yemen-based branch of al-Qaeda claims it was behind failed attack on US airliner. The government calls on the West for more support to help it combat the al-Qaeda threat.

2010 February - Government signs ceasefire with Houthi northern rebels, which breaks down in December.

2010 September - Thousands flee government offensive against separatists in southern Shabwa province.

2010 October - Global terror alert after packages containing explosives originating in Yemen are intercepted on cargo planes bound for the US.

2011 January - Tunisian street protests encourage similar demonstrations in other countries, including Yemen. President Saleh pledges not to extend his presidency in 2013 or to hand over to his son.

2011 June - After months of mounting protests, President Saleh is injured in rocket attack and flown to Saudi Arabia, returning home in September.

2011 September - US-born al-Qaeda leader Anwar al-Awlaki is assassinated by US forces.



Unity in Government, Growing Violence

2011 November - President Saleh agrees to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Unity government including prime minister from opposition formed.

2012 February - Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi inaugurated as president after uncontested elections.

2012 September - Defence Minister Muhammad Nasir Ahmad survives car bomb attack in Sanaa that killed 11 people, a day after local al-Qaeda deputy head Said al-Shihri is reportedly dead in the south.

2012 November - A Saudi diplomat and his bodyguard are shot dead in Sanaa. Security officials say the assailants, who opened fire on the diplomat's convoy, were dressed in police uniforms.

National Dialogue

2014 January - National Dialogue Conference winds up after ten months of deliberation, agreeing a document on which the new constitution will be based.

2014 February - Presidential panel gives approval for Yemen to become a federation of six regions as part of its political transition.

2014 July - Tribesmen blow up the country's largest oil pipeline, disrupting supplies from the interior to a Red Sea export terminal.


2014 August - President Hadi sacks his cabinet and overturns a controversial fuel price rise following two weeks of anti-government protests in which Houthi rebels are heavily involved.

Houthi Takeover

2014 September - Houthi rebels take control of most of the capital of Yemen, Sanaa.

2015 January - Houthis reject draft constitution proposed by government.

2015 February - Houthis appoint presidential council to replace President Hadi, who fled to Aden southern stronghold.



2015 March - Islamic State carries out its first major attacks in Yemen - two suicide bombings targeting Shia mosques in Sanaa in which 137 people are killed. Houthi rebels start to advance towards southern Yemen. President Hadi flees Aden. Saudi-led coalition of Gulf Arab states launches air strikes against Houthi targets and imposes naval blockade.

2015 June - Leader of Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula, Nasser al-Wuhayshi, killed in US drone strike in Yemen.

2015 September - President Hadi returns to Aden after Saudi-backed government forces recapture the port city from Houthi forces and launch advance on Aden.

TIMELINE OF AL-QAEDA IN ACTION

1992 December - Bombers hit hotel in Aden formerly used by US marines - first known al-Qaeda attack in Yemen.

2000 October - Suicide attack on destroyer USS Cole in Aden.

2002 October - French tanker Limburg damaged by bomb-laden boat.

2007 July - 8 Spanish tourists, 2 local drivers killed by car bomb.

2008 September - 16 killed in car bombings outside US embassy.



2009 January - Saudi, Yemeni al-Qaeda branches merge to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

2009 August - AQAP bomber dies in failed bid to kill Saudi deputy interior minister.

2009 December - 'Underwear bomber' Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to down US airliner in plot claimed by AQAP.

2010 October - Parcel bombs, thought to have been made by al-Qaeda and dispatched in Yemen, found on US-bound cargo planes.

2011 May - AQAP fighters take control of southern city of Zinjibar.

2011 September - Al-Qaeda-linked, US-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki killed in US air raid.

2012 February - Suicide attack on presidential palace kills 26 Republican Guards on day that President Hadi is sworn in. AQAP claims responsibility.

2012 May - 96 soldiers are killed by suicide bomber in Sanaa. AQAP claims the attack.

2012 June - Army retakes Zinjibar from AQAP after month-long offensive.



WHO ARE THE HOUTHIS

Officially known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), the Houthi rebels began as a theological movement that preached tolerance and peace in the early 1990s. The Houthi movement originally held a considerably broad-minded educational and cultural vision. A religious group affiliated with the Zaydi sect of Shia Islam, the Houthis maintain a stronghold in the northern province of Saada.

The group started as a gathering called the 'Believing Youth Forum' in the early nineties, then, it fell into internal strife between two lines; the first called for more openness, while the second urged sticking to the traditional legacy of the Shia sect.

Ironically, Hussein Bader Addian al-Houthi, the founder of the group, was in favour of the first line. The movement turned to arms in 2004 on grounds of self-defence when the first war with the government erupted.

Tensions between Yemeni security forces and the Houthis first flared when the group's supporters protested in mosques in the capital, which then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh saw as a challenge to his rule. Saleh ordered the arrest of some group members, and urged their then-leader, Hussein al-Houthi, to stop the protesters from disturbing worshippers.

The first war began when Saleh sent some troops to the province of Saada to arrest Hussein, who refused to curb his supporters. Hussein al-Houthi was killed in 2004

after Saleh sent government forces into Saada. The years-long intermittent war ended in a ceasefire agreement in 2010.

In 2011, the Houthis were among many forces that took part in the revolt against Saleh. The group has been strongly opposed to one of the central recommendations of the National Dialogue Conference: the transformation of Yemen into a federal state of six regions. Under the proposed reconfiguration, Saada province, which has historically been the Houthis' stronghold, would be linked to the Sanaa region.

The Houthis have demanded a greater share of power in the federal government, and that the north be designated its own region. In documents released by whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks, US defence analysts suggested the Houthis were unlikely to demand independence, and would continue towards their stated aim of regional autonomy.

The Houthis are capitalising on widespread frustration with the government and the recent rise in fuel prices to rally support and extract political concessions," April Longley Alley, a Yemen specialist with the International Crisis Group, told the AFP news agency last year.

What is happening now appears to be increasingly dangerous political bargaining as part of the Houthis' bid to become a dominant political force in the north and in the national government. In their rise to power, the Houthis recorded a series of important victories over government and rival tribal groups.

In summer 2014, supported by tribes loyal to Saleh, the Houthis captured Amran from the Hashid tribal federation, and inflicted a humiliating defeat on the powerful al-Ahmar clan, co-founders of the rival Sunni Islamist Islah party. The Houthis' political rivals, the Islah party has accused the Shia rebels of being a proxy of Iran and trying to restore the Zaydi imamate that ruled Yemen until 1962. Islah has repeatedly accused the movement of creating unrest in Amran and other regions as part of a plan to seize control of the capital Sanaa. The Houthis have historically been concerned with reviving Zaydism amid the increasing influence of Salafism. Since Yemen's 2011 uprising, the Houthis appear to have participated in more sectarian conflicts.

A year after the start of the revolt, which led to the overthrow of Saleh, the Houthis besieged a religious school controlled by Salafis in Saada. The Shia Muslim rebels said the institute was being used to recruit foreign fighters, but the Salafis said the incident was an attempt by the Houthis to strengthen their hold on the province.

Hundreds died in the clashes, which ended when the Salafis agreed to leave the province. Later clashes, in cities closer to the capital, pitted the Houthis against the Islah party and army brigades allied to it.

"The Islah party... fears Ansar Allah will take revenge for [Islah's] participation in the former regime's [Saleh's regime] wars in Saada," Usama Sari, a pro-Houthi journalist, told Al Jazeera. According to Sari, the Houthis have accused Islah of inciting people against them, and allegedly encouraging some army regiments to fight them.

Meanwhile, Hadi's government and other opponents have frequently accused Iran of arming the Houthis. The government said it seized arms cargoes originating from Iran that were heading to the rebels in the north, but the Houthis have disputed accusations of foreign help.

Unlike his predecessor, Hadi, who took power in 2012 following Saleh's removal, originally took a less confrontational stance towards the Houthis, prompting the ire of Islamist parties, who accused him of closing his eyes to alleged Houthi crimes.

Mohammed Nasser Ahmed, Hadi's minister of defence, said the country's armed forces were "neutral and stand at an equal distance from everyone". The Houthis had moved into mainstream politics in Yemen, after holding 35 seats in the National Dialogue Conference.

The political talks brought together 565 delegates from across Yemen's political spectrum, including tribal and religious groups, and independent women's and human rights activists. Following the Saudi-led intervention, Hadi has called on the Houthis to surrender their weapons and for their leaders to turn themselves in.

MAIN CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

Fuel subsidy backlash: Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, Hadi's government lifted fuel subsidies in July 2014. The Houthi movement, which had attracted support beyond its base with its criticisms of the UN transition process, organized mass protests demanding lower fuel prices and a new government. Hadi's supporters and the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated party, al-Islah, held counter rallies.

Houthis seize power: The Houthis captured much of Sana'a by mid-September 2014. Reneging on a UN peace deal brokered that month, they consolidated control of the capital and continued their southward advance. Hadi's government resigned under pressure the following January, and the Houthis declared a constitutional fiat.

Armed forces split: Military units loyal to Saleh aligned themselves with the Houthis, contributing to their battlefield success. Other militias mobilized against the Houthi-Saleh forces, aligning with elements of the military that remained loyal to the government. Southern separatists ramped up their calls for secession.

Saudis launch military intervention: After the Houthi reached Aden, Hadi went into exile in Saudi Arabia, which launched a military campaign, primarily fought from the air, to roll back the Houthis and restore the Hadi administration to Sana'a.

MAIN PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT



The **Houthis** began in the late 1980s as a religious and cultural revivalist movement among practitioners of Zaydi Shi'ism in northern Yemen. The Zaydis are a minority in the majority-Sunni Muslim country, but predominant in the northern highlands along the Saudi border, and until 1962, Zaydi imams ruled much of the region. The Houthis became politically active after 2003, opposing Saleh for backing the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The Houthis repeatedly fought the Saleh regime—and, in 2009, an intervening Saudi force. In post-Saleh Yemen, the movement gained support from far beyond its northern base for its criticisms of the UN-backed transition. However, in its push to monopolize power, it has alienated one-time supporters, writes the International Crisis Group.

Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, though deposed in 2011 amid popular protests and elite jockeying, has gained in popularity among some Yemenis who have grown disillusioned with the transition. He and his son Ahmed Abdullah Saleh command the loyalty of some elements of Yemen's security forces, tribal networks, and the **General Peoples' Congress (GPC)** political party. Their alliance with the Houthis is a tactical one: Saleh's loyalists oppose Hadi's government, feel they were marginalized in the transition process, and seek to regain a leading role in Yemen.

Iran is the Houthis' primary international backer and has reportedly provided the Houthis with military support, including arms. Yemen's government has also accused Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese ally, of aiding the Houthis. Saudi Arabia's perception that the Houthis are primarily an Iranian proxy rather than an indigenous movement has driven Riyadh's military intervention. But many regional specialists caution against overstating Tehran's influence over the movement. (Iranians and Houthis adhere to different schools of Shia Islam.) The Houthis and Iran share similar geopolitical interests: Iran seeks to challenge Saudi and U.S. dominance of the region, and the Houthis are the primary opposition to Hadi's Saudi- and U.S.-backed government in Sana'a.

President Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, the internationally recognized president, returned to Yemen after eight months of exile in Saudi Arabia in November 2015, but he remains confined to the presidential palace in Aden and it is unclear whether he commands much authority beyond there.

Saudi Arabia has led the coalition air campaign to roll back the Houthis and reinstate Hadi's government. Riyadh perceives that Houthi control of Yemen would mean a hostile neighbor that threatens its southern border. It also considers Yemen a front in its contest with Iran for regional dominance, and losing Sana'a would only add to what it perceives as an ascendant Iran that has allies in power in Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus. Riyadh's concerns have been compounded by its perception that the United States is retrenching from the region and that its nuclear accord with Iran will embolden Tehran. Journalist Peter Salisbury writes that Saudi Arabia may be trying to restore its long-standing strategy of "containment and maintenance" vis-à-vis its southern neighbor: Keep Yemen weak, and therefore beholden to Riyadh, but not so weak that state collapse could threaten it with an influx of migrants. The conflict is the first major one undertaken by the new king, Salman, and a test for his son, Defense Minister Mohammad bin Salman, who is pursuing a more adventurist foreign policy than his predecessors.

Saudi Arabia has cobbled together a coalition of **Sunni-majority Arab states**: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and the UAE. (That includes all the Gulf Cooperation Council states except for Oman.) The operation seems to consolidate Saudi Arabia's leadership over the bloc, which has split over other regional issues, and signals consensus against allowing Iran to gain influence in Yemen. But in practice, only the UAE has played a significant military role, including contributing ground troops that enabled Hadi's return to Aden.

The United States has backed the Saudi-led coalition, albeit reluctantly, along with the **United Kingdom** and **France**. U.S. interests include maintaining stability in Yemen and security for Saudi borders; free passage in the Bab al-Mandeb, the chokepoint between the Arabian and Red Seas through which 4.7 million barrels of oil per day transit; and a government in Sana'a that will cooperate with U.S. counterterrorism programs. In the current conflict, Washington has provided the Saudi-led coalition with logistical and intelligence support. It is also the largest provider of arms to Saudi Arabia, and in November 2015 approved a \$1.3 billion sale to restock depleted munitions. But while the United States continues to support coalition operations, U.S. officials have pressed the Saudis for restraint, warning that the intensity of the bombing campaign was undercutting shared political goals.

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION


With a poverty rate of more than 50 percent, Yemen was the Arab world's poorest country prior to the Houthi offensive and Saudi-led air campaign. The conflict has pushed the country to the verge of famine.

The UN estimated in January 2016 that 2,800 civilians had been killed since the escalation in March—60 percent of them in air strikes (only the Saudi-led coalition has

these capabilities). Civilians have been targeted by both sides, in violation of international humanitarian law, a UN panel of experts found. Among the violations the panel cited was Saudi Arabia's declaration of the entire city of Saada as a "military target"; the city has seen some of the war's worst devastation, including the destruction of a hospital run by the international relief organization Doctors Without Borders. Elsewhere, the coalition and resistance fighters have targeted hospitals and schools, the panel found. It noted that Houthi forces have committed war crimes, as well, including in their siege of the city of Taiz.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

To ensure good debate and resolution of crises, you, as delegates, must come pre-prepared with answers to certain questions that include, but are definitely not limited to:

1. What is the main cause fought for by the Houthi rebels and how can it be peacefully resolved?
 2. What measures have been taken in the past to resolve this conflict, if any?
 3. How effective were these measures, and if not, why were they ineffective?
- 

4. How does this crisis affect your country?
5. What has your country done to aid in the peacemaking process?
6. What is your country's stand on this conflict?

Sources and Additional Resources

This Background Guide has been created using some of the links given below. These links also include possible sites for you to begin your research from and then divulge into deeper readings:

1. Council of Foreign Relations - Backgrounder: Yemen's Civil War
<http://www.cfr.org/yemen/yemen-crisis/p36488>
2. Midwest Diplomacy - Demystifying Yemen's Conflict
<http://midwestdiplomacy.com/2015/01/26/demystifying-yemens-conflict/>
3. BBC - Yemen Profile - Timeline
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704951>
4. Al Jazeera - Profile: Yemen's Houthi Fighters

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2009/08/200981294214604934.html>

5. Al Jazeera - Who are the Houthis in Yemen?

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/yemen-houthis-hadi-protests-201482132719818986.html>

NOTE:

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