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Yemen in 2023: Conflict and status of peace talks



Summary

- 1 Brief history of the conflict
- 2 Peace negotiations in 2022 and 2023
- 3 Other aspects of the international response

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Summary

In 2014, fighting broke out in Yemen between the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi (backed militarily by a Saudi-led coalition from 2015) and the Houthis (an Iran-aligned Yemen group, who currently control northern Yemen, including the capital, Sana'a).

Since 2022, there has been some progress towards a political settlement. This included President Hadi handing power to a presidential council in April 2022, a ceasefire from April to October 2022, and further negotiations in 2023.

This Commons Library research briefing provides a summary of the conflict and recent negotiations. A separate briefing, [UK aid and Yemen's humanitarian crisis](#), describes the humanitarian situation and value of UK aid.

Origins of the conflict and current status

The [conflict has its origins in 2011](#), when President Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to resign following popular protests. Following an UN-backed transition negotiated by the Gulf Cooperation Council, President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi took power in 2012. Despite attempts to negotiate a fresh political settlement, conflict broke out in 2014 and Sana'a was captured by the Houthis. In 2015, a Saudi-led military coalition, whose members included Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE, intervened to support Hadi.

[Yemen is now divided](#) between the Houthis in the north and the internationally recognised Government, which controls much of the south and east of the country. The Houthis, who [emerged in northern Yemen](#) in the 1990s, are one of several [Iran-aligned armed groups](#) in the Middle East. The United States says [Iran provides the group with military support](#), though the US does not currently designate the Houthis as a [foreign terrorist organisation](#).

During the 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict, the [US has shot down Houthi missiles and drones approaching US ships](#) and the Houthis have [launched missiles and drones against Israel](#). In previous years, the Houthis have also conducted drone and missiles attacks against [Saudi Arabia](#) and [the UAE](#). In September 2023, the Houthis [attacked Bahraini troops](#).

Authority in southern Yemen is split between the Government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a UAE-backed separatist group. In 2020, the two agreed to [enter into coalition](#). However, tensions remain and in 2023 [the STC said it is prioritising a separate southern state](#) in peace talks.

Before the 2022 ceasefire, fighting was [focused on the city of Marib](#), which is the last northern stronghold of Yemen's recognised Government. The UN

Development Programme estimates [377,000 individuals have been killed as a result of direct and indirect causes](#) from the conflict between 2014 and 2021.

Negotiating a political settlement

The UK is the penholder for Yemen at the UN Security Council, meaning it takes the lead on council activities, including drafting resolutions. The [UK has called for an “inclusive peace under UN auspicious”](#) and in 2023 backed [initiatives by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen](#) and [talks brokered by Oman](#).

The first nation-wide ceasefire in the conflict for six years was agreed in April 2022. The truce was renewed twice but [expired in October 2022](#).

In 2022, Hadi also handed power to a Presidential Leadership Council. International Crisis Group cite [pressure from Saudi Arabia and the UAE](#) for the action, with both states pledging financial support to the council shortly after the announcement. The UK and United States were among those to [welcome Hadi’s action](#), but the Houthis argue the government [remains illegitimate](#).

Since the expiry of the ceasefire in October 2022, there has been [no return to the level of violence that occurred beforehand](#). As described above, however, the Houthis have launched some external attacks in 2023.

During 2023, [there have been further peace talks](#) between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, brokered by Oman. A [major prisoner swap](#) occurred in April 2023. In Spring 2023, both [the UN](#) and [UK](#) welcomed these initiatives and argued momentum was building for peace.

The decision of [Iran and Saudi Arabia to re-establish diplomatic relations in March 2023](#) was expected to further facilitate negotiations towards a more permanent ceasefire or settlement to the conflict. To date, neither have been reached. Speaking in August 2023, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen said [trust between the parties remained “low”](#). [Challenges to a settlement](#) include divisions in the southern presidential council, liability for the payment of public sector wages, economic support, and the influence of external powers.

Human rights abuses and arms sales

The UN, NGOs and UK Government have raised concerns about [human rights abuses committed by all sides](#) (PDF) in the conflict. These include indiscriminate shelling of civilians and air strikes against civilian areas.

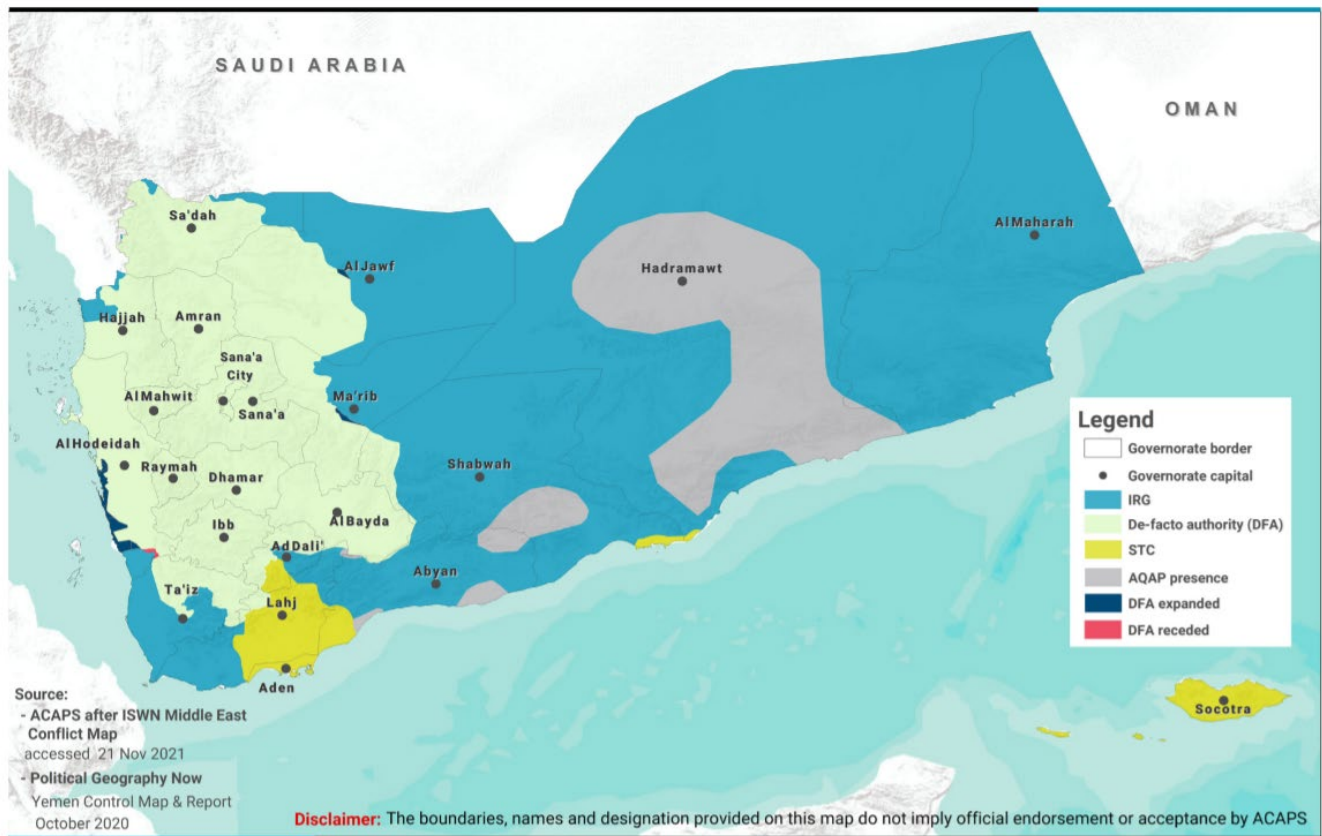
[UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia](#) have proved controversial, as the Saudis have been accused of committing breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL) during its military operations in Yemen. The UK Government has argued [there is “not a clear risk”](#) that these UK military exports are used to violate IHL.

1 Brief history of the conflict

Current political control

The Houthis hold much of north and western Yemen, including the capital Sana'a.¹ The internationally recognised Government shares control over the south and centre of Yemen with the Southern Transitional Council (STC).

Areas of control as at 21 November 2021



Notes: Situation as of 21 November 2021. Zones of control are largely unchanged. “IRG” stands for internationally Recognized Government of Yemen, meaning that previously led by Hadi and now led by the Presidential Leadership Council. “DFA” (De facto authority) is a reference to the Houthi Group. STC stands for “Southern Transitional Council”, AQAP means “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”.

Copyright: [Yemen: Civil unrest and worsening humanitarian situation in southern governorates](#), 29 November 2021 from ACAPS. Licensed by [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#).

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, [Yemen’s tragedy: War, stalemate, and suffering](#), 5 February 2021

Transition from President Saleh to President Hadi, 2011-2012

The conflict has its immediate origins in 2011, when protests took place against President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ruled Yemen from 1990 to 2012. The [Gulf Cooperation Council](#), backed by the UN, subsequently negotiated a transition plan for Yemen. President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi was elected President in 2012 for a two-year transition period.²

Before 1990, Yemen was two states: the northern Yemen Arab Republic, which Saleh ruled from 1978 before becoming President of a unified Yemen, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south.³ Religious divisions largely paralleled the political borders: Sunnis are the majority in the south and east, while Shia Muslims are mainly found in the North around Sana'a.⁴

The Houthis are Zaydi Shias, a minority group in Yemen and the Middle East, and known officially as Ansar Allah. They emerged in northern Yemen in the 1990s, as part of a reaction against Saudi influence over Yemen's Government and also being motivated by a desire to protect Zaydi Shias.⁵ Some fighting took place between the Houthis and Saleh's Government in the 2000s and with Saudi Arabia before 2011.⁶

The Commons Library research briefings, [Yemen](#), 2010, and [Yemen on the brink of civil war?](#), 2011, provide more on this period.

Houthi capture of the capital, Sana'a, 2014

Despite attempts from 2012 to resolve political divisions and agree a new constitution, negotiations between the parties broke down in January 2014.

In September 2014, the Houthis launched an attack on the capital Sana'a, capturing it and much of northern Yemen.⁷

The Houthis are one of several Iran-aligned groups in the Middle East that are competing against Arab Gulf states, predominately Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for influence. They are also hostile towards Israel and US influence.⁸ The United States says Iran has provided a range of military equipment to the

² [Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?](#), BBC News, 19 June 2020. Unless stated, all sources accessed October 2021, October 2022 and November 2023.

³ [Yemen: Who was Ali Abdullah Saleh?](#), Al-Jazeera, 5 December 2017

⁴ European Council on Foreign Relations, [Mapping the Yemen conflict](#), 19 October 2015

⁵ Washington Institute, [Saudi Arabia's war with the Houthis: Old borders, new lines](#), 9 April 2015

⁶ Brookings Institute, [Who are the Houthis, and what are we at war with them?](#), 18 December 2017; Wilson Center, [Who are Yemen's Houthis?](#), 7 July 2022

⁷ [Houthi Rebels take over Yemen's Hodeida port: Residents](#), Reuters, 15 October 2014

⁸ Commons Library, [Iran's influence in the Middle East](#)

Houthis during the conflict.⁹ As set out in section 3.3, the Houthis are subject to a series of international sanctions.

While around 70% of the Yemen population live in areas controlled by the Houthis,¹⁰ the Government originally led by Hadi remains the internationally recognised government of Yemen, being endorsed in UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) (see below box).¹¹

The Commons Library research briefing, [Yemen: Back to the brink](#), 2015, provides more on this initial period of conflict.

UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015)

In April 2015, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2216 (2015). All members of the UN Security Council supported the resolution, aside from Russia, which abstained.¹² The resolution built on [UN Security Council Resolution 2201 \(2015\)](#).

Resolution 2216 (2015) “reaffirmed” the support of the Council for the legitimacy of the Government of President Hadi and “reiterated” its support for the unity and territorial integrity of Yemen. It “demands that the Houthis immediately and unconditionally” end the use of violence, withdraw from areas they have seized, including Sana’a, relinquish their arms and refrain from threats or provocation towards other states (among other demands).¹³

In 2022, the UK Government, as penholder at the UN Security Council for Yemen, said it stands ready to support negotiations to replace the resolution “when there is a real consensus on a political settlement.”¹⁴

For a list of UN Security Council resolutions on Yemen, including those imposing sanctions against the Houthis, see the UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen, [Security Council resolutions](#).

Entry of Saudi-led coalition, 2015

In March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, which included Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was invited to intervene by the Hadi Government. The Saudis, like most of the Gulf states that joined the coalition,

⁹ US Department of State, [Country reports on terrorism 2021: Iran](#), 2023

¹⁰ Brookings Institute, [The Houthis after the Yemeni ceasefire](#), 27 January 2023

¹¹ [UN Security Council Resolution 2216 \(2015\)](#) (PDF)

¹² UN, [Security Council demands end to Yemen violence, adopting resolution 2216 \(2015\)](#), 15 April 2015

¹³ [UN Security Council Resolution 2216 \(2015\)](#)

¹⁴ HC Deb, [3 November 2022](#), c463WH

are Sunni-majority countries that sought to reduce Iranian influence and remove a source of instability in the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁵

The intervention was supported by the Obama Administration, who provided some logistical and other support for the air operations.¹⁶ The UK also backed the coalition as a means to restore Hadi, though was not a party to the conflict.¹⁷ Around 5,000 coalition air strikes were reported in 2015, though these fell to 1,200 in 2019.¹⁸ Successive air strikes against Houthi-controlled areas resulted in calls to suspend arms sale to Saudi Arabia (see section 3.2).

The coalition also implemented a naval and air blockade against Yemen to prevent Iran from supplying the Houthis, requiring ships to undergo security checks. The UN also implemented a [monitoring mechanism](#) in 2016. Some of these restrictions have been lifted in recent years.¹⁹

The Commons Library research briefing, [Yemen at War](#), 2017, provides more on the entry of the Saudi-led coalition and arms sales, during this period.

The changing US approach to the conflict

Obama Administration

In 2015, the Obama Administration backed the Saudi-led coalition as a means of restoring the then Hadi-led Government and to support [UN Security Council Resolution 2216 \(2015\)](#) which demanded the Houthis disarm.²⁰ However, the Administration became more critical towards the Saudi-led operation and, in 2016, halted some arms sales to Saudi Arabia.²¹

Trump administration

While President Trump restored arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Congressional opinion during his Presidency suggests American support has waned. In 2019, the Democrat-controlled House and Republican-controlled Senate both voted to end American military assistance for Saudi Arabia in Yemen.²² President Trump successfully vetoed the Resolution.²³

¹⁵ [Sunnis and Shia in the Middle East](#), BBC News, 19 December 2013

¹⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, [Obama's war of choice: Supporting the Saudi-led air war in Yemen](#), 25 September 2015

¹⁷ Lords Select Committee on International Relations, [Yemen: Giving peace a chance](#), HL 290, 2019, paras 25-33

¹⁸ Carnegie Middle East Center, [What does Biden's Yemen policy mean for Saudi Arabia?](#), 12 February 2021

¹⁹ International Crisis Group, [Brokering a ceasefire in Yemen's economic conflict](#), January 2022

²⁰ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [Biden and the war in Yemen](#), 14 April 2021

²¹ [US to halt some arms sales to Saudi, citing civilian deaths in Yemen campaigns](#), Reuters 13 December 2016

²² [Yemen War: Congress votes to end US military assistance to Saudi Arabia](#), The Guardian, 4 April 2019

²³ Brookings Institute, [Where Trump's vote leaves the Yemen resolution](#), 18 April 2019

Biden Administration

In February 2021, President Biden announced the US would stop supporting offensive operations in Yemen in support of the Saudi-led coalition, including ending arm sales (some arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE have since been resumed).²⁴ President Biden also said the conflict “has to end” and appointed a new Special Envoy, Tim Lenderking, to achieve this.²⁵

Under the Biden Administration, the United States has removed the Houthis from the State Department’s foreign terrorist organisation list, which had been put in place under the Trump Administration.²⁶ The UN said the designation of the Houthis as terrorists had threatened to disrupt the flow of aid and commercial commodities into Yemen.²⁷

Weakening of Saudi coalition, 2017-2019

The Saudi coalition has weakened since it first intervened. In 2017, Qatar was expelled from the coalition during the [wider “Qatar crisis”](#),²⁸ and in 2019 the UAE announced most of its forces would be withdrawn from Yemen.²⁹

The UAE and Saudi Arabia have been in tension over Yemen: In 2019 the UAE conducted airstrikes against Hadi-led Government forces in support of their separatist allies, the Southern Transitional Council (STC).³⁰ Analysts cite several factors for the UAE’s withdrawal in 2019, including support for the Southern separatists and considering the conflict unwinnable.³¹

Fighting around Marib, 2021-2022

In February 2021, the Houthis escalated their attacks on the city of Marib, which is the last northern stronghold of the internationally recognised Government (being previously part of the North Yemen state prior to 1990).

²⁴ Commons Library research briefing, [China and the US in the Middle East](#), August 2023, section 4.1

²⁵ Carnegie Middle East Center, [What does Biden’s Yemen policy mean for Saudi Arabia?](#), 12 February 2021; White House, [Remarks by President Biden on America’s place in the world](#), 4 February 2021

²⁶ US Department of State, [Revocation of the terrorist designations of Ansar Allah](#), 12 February 2021

²⁷ UN, [The decision to designate the Houthis \(Ansar Allah\) a foreign terrorist organisation \[...\]](#), 2 February 2021

²⁸ [Qatar row: Saudi and Egypt among countries to cut Doha links](#), BBC News, 5 June 2017

²⁹ Middle East Institute, [The UAE drawdown in Yemen is a welcome step \[...\]](#), 11 July 2019

³⁰ [UAE carries out air strikes against Yemen Government forces to support separatists](#), Reuters, 29 August 2019

³¹ [Saudi-UAE: Despite turmoil geopolitical goals remain steadfast](#), Al-Jazeera, 16 July 2021

From September 2021, fighting intensified in the region, with the Houthis making significant progress.³² However, in January 2022 the Southern Transitional Council and Hadi Government successfully counter-attacked and recaptured much of the territory lost in 2021.³³

Marib is important to both sides: it is considered the last stronghold of the internationally recognised Government in northern Yemen and holding it would strengthen the position of either side in any future negotiations.³⁴

Escalation in 2022 also saw a marked use of airstrikes by Saudi-led coalition forces.³⁵ In December 2021, Saudi-led air raids on Sana'a also caused the delivery of UN aid to the city to be temporarily halted.³⁶

2022: Hadi stands down and ceasefire agreed

Creation of the Presidential Leadership Council

In April 2022, President Hadi permanently handed executive power to a Presidential Leadership Council (PLC). The International Crisis Group argues the creation of the Council:

- Reflected pressure from Saudi Arabia and the UAE for Hadi to stand down following military defeats and an inability to control all the factions and parties within his government. Following the announcement, the two countries collectively announced US\$3 billion in financial aid for Yemen.
- Was an attempt to broaden the political base of Yemen's internationally recognised government. Membership is equally split between northerners and southerners.³⁷

The UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and United States have publicly offered their backing to the PLC Government.³⁸

Control of southern Yemen by the internationally recognised Government is complicated by the presence of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC). There were armed clashes between the STC and Hadi Government in

³² [Houthis rally in north Yemen as their fighters push south](#), Reuters, 21 September 2021

³³ Washington Institute, [Breaking point: Consolidating Houthi military setbacks in Yemen](#), 19 January 2022

³⁴ Fikra Forum, [The battle for Marib: The challenge of ending a stalemate war](#), 9 July 2021

³⁵ [Yemen: UN urges investigation into Saudi-led coalition air raids](#), Al-Jazeera, 22 January 2022

³⁶ [Saudi-led coalition strikes halt UN aid flights to Yemen's capital](#), France 24, 21 December 2021,

³⁷ International Crisis Group, [Behind the Yemen truce and presidential council announcements](#), 8 April 2022

³⁸ FCDO, [Yemen: Quad joint statement](#), 24 September 2022

2018, 2019 and 2022, in which the STC captured Aden (the temporary capital). They had formed a coalition government in 2020.³⁹

Ceasefire from April to October 2022

In April 2022, following UN-led negotiations, the first nation-wide truce in six years came into force. All air and ground attacks from within and outside Yemen were halted for an initial period of two months.

Analysts saw the decision as a reflection of neither side making significant recent progress: Houthi attacks in Marib had stalled and attacks on the UAE and Saudi Arabia were high in early 2022.⁴⁰

The ceasefire was renewed twice but expired in October 2022. The UN says the ceasefire led to a reduction in civilian casualties and allowed the docking of fuel ships.⁴¹

Although the ceasefire was not extended, the UN said talks in late 2022 had been “constructive.”⁴² Some of the elements of the ceasefire, such as allowing commercial flights between Sana’a and Jordan and fuel ships entering the port of Hodeidah in Houthi-controlled Yemen, continued into 2023.⁴³

The UK Government expressed regret at the expiry of the ceasefire and called on the Houthis to engage constructively with the UN.⁴⁴

October 2022 to present: Low-level fighting

Speaking in August 2023, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, said that there had been no return to the level of violence that occurred before the ceasefire, though tensions had continued:

hostilities on the frontlines have not returned to pre-truce levels and civilian casualty numbers have significantly declined. However, intermittent fighting and exchanges of fire have continued some frontlines [...]

³⁹ [Yemeni government, southern separatists agree to government formation](#), Al-Monitor, 18 December 2020; Middle East Institute, [The Riyadh Agreement: Yemen’s new cabinet and what remains to be done](#), 1 February 2021; [Yemen government says southern separatists staged coup in Aden](#), Reuters, 10 August 2019

⁴⁰ [What Yemen’s first nationwide truce in 6 years means for the world’s worst humanitarian crisis](#), CNN, 6 April 2022

⁴¹ UN, [Yemen truce renewed for another two months](#), 2 August 2022

⁴² UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, [Statement from the UN envoy](#), 2 October 2022

⁴³ UN, [Diplomacy in Yemen reaches new pitch following year of relative calm, Security Council hears](#), 15 March 2023

⁴⁴ FCDO, [Truce in Yemen: Foreign Secretary’s statement](#), 1 October 2022

Against this backdrop, there have been public threats to return to war. [...]

The parties continue to resort to antagonistic economic measures to weaken the other side. But these tactics primarily hurt civilians, while increasing the atmosphere of mistrust.

Economic measures cited by the Special Envoy included the prevention on export of petroleum by the government, internal trade restrictions including “exorbitant fees and taxes”, limited air flights from Sana’a, and limited access to road transport in some regions. He argued “political and economic instability are fertile grounds for violent extremist groups”.⁴⁵

In 2022, the Houthis also launched attacks on important economic sites in the south, including oil export terminals, as a means of undermining the revenue of the PLC Government. The PLC responded by designating the Houthis as a terrorist group and seeking to reduce external financial support for them.⁴⁶

In the year to September 2023, 500 civilian deaths and 1,300 injuries were recorded.⁴⁷

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State activity

2023 analysis by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) states Al-Qaeda activity in Yemen peaked in 2017, but in 2022 the reported fatalities as a result of Al-Qaeda action (around 300) was the highest since 2019. The group continues to be active in southern Yemen and is primarily in conflict with the Southern Transitional Council.⁴⁸ Analysts warn that the lack of a strong state in Yemen provides a space for the group’s recovery.⁴⁹

Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) in Yemen first emerged in 2014 but been less active since 2021.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Office for the Special Envoy on Yemen, [Briefing by Special Envoy](#), 16 August 2023

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, [How Houthi-Saudi negotiations will make or break Yemen](#), 29 December 2022

⁴⁷ PQ 2133 [[Yemen: violence](#)], 4 November 2023

⁴⁸ ACLED, [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#), April 2023 and Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, [Al-Qaeda’s comeback in Yemen](#), 20 November 2023

⁴⁹ ACLED, [The wartime transformation of AQAP in Yemen](#), 14 December 2020; Elisabeth Kendall for Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, [Twenty years after 9/11: The Jihadi threat in the Arabian Peninsula](#), September 2021

⁵⁰ UN Security Council, [Letter dated 21 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council \[...\]](#), 3 February 2021, para B. 21

Houthi attacks on other states

Houthi attacks on sites in Saudi Arabia, 2015-2022

The Houthis have used missiles and drones to attack several sites in Saudi Arabia, including oil refineries and military installations. The US estimates there were [240 such attacks from January to August 2021](#).⁵¹

The last major drone and missile attack by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia took place in March 2022.⁵²

Attacks on UAE sites, 2022

In January and February 2022, the Houthis launched their first missile and drone attacks against sites in the UAE. Other actions included the seizure of an UAE-flagged ship.⁵³

In February 2022 the UAE was also subject to drone strikes, potentially from Iran-aligned militias in Iraq. Analysts interpreted these attacks as a potential message by Iran against the normalisation of diplomatic ties between Israel and the UAE (which took place under the [Abraham Accords](#) in 2020).⁵⁴

The US Al Dhafra airbase was believed to be one of the sites targeted by missile attacks in 2022. In response, the US deployed additional military forces to the UAE.⁵⁵ The Biden Administration also approved the sale of missile defences to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.⁵⁶

The attacks were condemned by the UN and powers including the US and UK.⁵⁷ The UK Government said it believed the weapons originated in Iran.⁵⁸

Attack on Bahraini troops, 2023

In September 2023, four members of the Bahraini armed forces were killed in a drone attack near the Saudi border. Saudi Arabia blamed “elements” of the

⁵¹ US Department of State, [Condemning the recent Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia](#), 31 August 2021

⁵² ACLED, [Beyond Riyadh: Houthi cross-border aerial warfare 2015-2022](#), 17 January 2023

⁵³ [Houthis seize “hostile” ship off Yemen that Saudis say carried medical equipment](#), Reuters, 3 January 2022; [UAE pledges to retaliate after three killed in Houthi attacks](#), Al-Jazeera, 17 January 2022

⁵⁴ [Iraqi militia attack on UAE a “message from Iran.”](#) Al-Jazeera, 4 February 2022

⁵⁵ [US to deploy fighter jets, Navy destroyers after missile attacks](#), Al-Monitor, 2 February 2022

⁵⁶ [US approves \\$4.2 billion F-16 sale to Jordan, air defence systems to the Gulf](#), Al-Monitor, 4 February 2022

⁵⁷ UN, [Guterres condemns attack on Abu Dhabi airport and oil facility](#), 17 January 2022; US State Department, [Attacks in Abu Dhabi](#), 17 January 2022; PQ 111592 [[Ansar Allah](#)], 28 January 2022

⁵⁸ PQ 117743 [[UAE: Ansar Allah](#)], 9 February 2022

Houthis for the attack. The leadership of the Saudi-led military coalition issued a statement of its “rejection of repeated provocations and reserves the right to respond at the appropriate time and place”.⁵⁹

To date, no further military actions have been taken between the Houthis and the Arab Gulf states.

Attacks against Israel and US navy, 2023

In the [Hamas-Israel conflict of 2023](#), the Houthis have endorsed Hamas.⁶⁰ From 7 October to 8 November, the Houthis launched drones and missiles on at least three occasions against Israel.⁶¹

The Houthis have also launched missile attacks near the US navy in the Red Sea,⁶² which parallel other attacks by Iran-aligned groups in the region.

In November, the Houthis also said they could target Israeli ships in the Red Sea and [Bab el-Mandeb Strait](#). On 20 November, the group claimed to have seized an Israeli cargo ship in the Red Sea. Israel’s government says the ship is British-owned and Japanese operated and blamed Iran for the incident (Iran denies involvement).⁶³

The UK Government condemned the Houthi action and said “Iran must actively restrain these groups to prevent the conflict [between Israel and Hamas] escalating across the region”.⁶⁴ A spokesperson for the US State Department said “we have begun a review of potential terrorist designations and we’ll be considering other options together with our allies”.⁶⁵

Other attacks on shipping include one in the Gulf of Aden on 26 November. No group claimed responsibility, but the US said the Houthis fired two missiles at a naval vessel aiding the ship.⁶⁶

Analysis for the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington argues that the primary significance of these attacks is political, rather than posing a military threat to Israel, and are an attempt to present a united Hamas-Hezbollah-Houthi front against Israel.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ [Bahrain says attack by Yemen rebels kills a Bahrain officer and a soldier on the Saudi border](#), AP, 26 September 2023; [Fourth soldier from Bahrain dies of wounds \[...\]](#) , AP, 30 September 2023

⁶⁰ For the conflict, see the Commons Library research briefing, [Hamas-Israel conflict 2023: UK and international response](#), sections 1 and 6

⁶¹ Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [The Houthi war on Israel](#), 8 November 2023

⁶² Middle East Institute, [The Houthis’ Red Sea missile and drone attack](#), 20 October 2023

⁶³ [Yemen’s Houthi leader says group to target Israeli ships in Red Sea](#), Alarabiya News, 15 November 2023, [Houthis seize ship in Red Sea with link to Israeli company](#), Reuters, 20 November 2023

⁶⁴ FCDO, [Seizure of MV Galaxy Leader by the Houthis—UK statement](#), 21 November 2023

⁶⁵ [US reviewing possible ‘terrorist’ designations for Houthis](#), Reuters, 21 November 2023

⁶⁶ [US navy seizes attackers who held Israeli-linked tanker \[...\]](#) , AP, 27 November 2023

⁶⁷ Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [The Houthi war on Israel](#), 8 November 2023

Analysis from the Middle East Institute argues the Houthis pose their primary threat in the Red Sea and their actions raise the question of how far Saudi Arabia, the United States and others can put pressure on Iran to limit Houthi activity.⁶⁸

Further resources on the conflict

- [Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen](#). Regular updates and statements from the UN Special Envoy.
- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Yemen: Situation report](#). Regularly updated report on the humanitarian situation.
- The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [Saudi Arabia's new strategy in Yemen: border and proxies](#), September 2023
- Sana'a Center, [The Yemen annual review 2022](#), February 2023. Overview of events in 2022. The research is funded by the Government of the Netherlands.
- The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [The UAE's three strategic interests in Yemen](#), February 2022

⁶⁸ Middle East Institute, [The perils of underestimating the Houthi threat](#), 16 November 2023

2 Peace negotiations in 2022 and 2023

2.1 Timeline of talks since 2015

This timeline is based on Arab Center DC's [A timeline of the Yemen crisis, from the 1990s to the present](#), February 2021, and University of Edinburgh Peace Agreements database, [Yemen timeline](#), which provide further information and instances of local ceasefires.

2015: Oman plan

Oman declined to participate in the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen and has sought to act as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In 2015, it suggested a seven-point plan to resolve the conflict. This included the withdrawal of the Houthis from Yemen's cities, the restoration of Hadi as president, the transformation of the Houthis into a political party, and Yemen's admission to the [Gulf Cooperation Council](#).⁶⁹

June and December 2015: Talks in Switzerland

Talks in Geneva launched by the UN Secretary General collapsed in June 2015. Both sides blamed each another: The Houthis called for an end to air strikes while the Hadi-led government called for the Houthis to withdraw from the territories they had captured.⁷⁰

Further talks were attempted by the UN in December, alongside a ceasefire which was not adhered to.⁷¹

April to August 2016: Talks in Kuwait

UN-sponsored talks in Kuwait were suspended due to fighting and a request for the Houthis to withdraw from several areas, including Sana'a.⁷² The talks included a prisoner swap between the Yemen Government and the Houthis.⁷³

⁶⁹ [Oman breaks from GCC on Yemen conflict](#), Al-Monitor, 7 May 2015

⁷⁰ [Yemen crisis: Geneva talks fail to produce ceasefire](#), BBC News, 19 June 2016

⁷¹ [Amid worsening humanitarian situation, latest peace talks provide 'solid' basis for renewed, stronger ceasefire in Yemen](#), 22 December 2015

⁷² [Houthi rebels reject UN draft peace plan](#), Al-Jazeera, 1 August 2016 and Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, [Yemen at the UN](#), August 2016

⁷³ [Yemen prisoner exchange begins amid peace talks](#), Reuters, 14 April 2023

September 2018: Geneva talks

Talks were abandoned after the Houthi delegation did not appear. The Houthis accused the Saudi-led coalition of preventing its delegation from travelling to Geneva.⁷⁴

December 2018: Stockholm agreement

Agreed in Sweden in 2018, the [Stockholm agreement](#) is an accord between the parties to the conflict in Yemen, which was endorsed by the UN. It was the first agreement between the Hadi Government and the Houthis. It had three elements:

1. An agreement on the city of Hodeidah and the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Issa. At its signing, an attack on the city of Hodeidah appeared imminent, while most of Yemen's food and medicine imports came via these ports. The agreement established a ceasefire surrounding the city and the ports.
2. An executive mechanism on activating the prisoner exchange agreement, via the UN and international Committee of the Red Cross.
3. A statement of understanding on Taiz, which was then besieged.

The agreement was not fully implemented, and Taiz was among the areas that experienced ongoing conflict. However, it is seen as a significant moment where those involved in the conflict were willing to enter into negotiations.⁷⁵

November 2019: Riyadh Agreement in southern Yemen

The Riyadh Agreement is a power-sharing agreement between parties in southern Yemen, brokered by the Saudis and UAE for respective partners in the Yemen Government and Southern Transitional Council.⁷⁶

April to May 2020: Covid-19 ceasefire

The Saudi-led coalition initiated a unilateral two-week ceasefire in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ [Yemen peace talks collapse in Geneva after Houthi no-show](#), Reuters, 8 September 2018

⁷⁵ Office of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Yemen, [A year after the Stockholm agreement: where are we now?](#), December 2019 and Middle East Institute, [Yemen's Stockholm agreement one year on](#), 22 January 2020.

⁷⁶ Arab Center Washington DC, [The Riyadh agreement on Yemen](#), 18 November 2019

⁷⁷ [Yemen war: Coalition ceasefire to help combat coronavirus begins](#), BBC News, 9 April 2020

October 2020: Prisoner swap

In October 2020, the Houthis and Yemen Government completed what was considered the largest prisoner swap to date.⁷⁸

March 2021: Saudi proposal for a ceasefire

Saudi Arabia proposed a ceasefire which would include the reopening of Hodeida seaport and Sana'a airport, both under Houthi control. The Houthis said the proposal did not go far enough to lift the blockade.⁷⁹

April 2022: Ceasefire agreement

In April 2022, the UN brokered a two-month truce. This was the first nationwide ceasefire since talks in 2016. President Hadi also transferred powers to a new Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) the same month.⁸⁰

The ceasefire was renewed and lasted until October 2022. As set out above, section 1, there has not been a return to high-level conflict despite the ceasefire not being renewed.

March 2023: Saudi Arabia and Iran restore diplomatic ties

Saudi Arabia and Iran broke off diplomatic ties in 2016. Both have provided support to the leading participants in the Yemen conflict. A Houthi spokesperson rejected suggestions that the agreement may impact on the Yemen conflict, stating the group is not “subordinate” to Iran.⁸¹

2023: Talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia

During 2023, Oman facilitated talks between Saudi Arabia, the Houthis and the PLC on a new ceasefire or political settlement.⁸²

In April 2023, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Yemen held talks with the Houthis in Sana'a.⁸³ A major prisoner swap, in which 900 prisoners were exchanged, also took place.⁸⁴

In September 2023, an official Houthi delegation travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet senior Saudi officials and ministers. This was the first official visit of the Houthis to the Kingdom since the conflict began. The UN Special Envoy for

⁷⁸ [Yemen's rival sides complete war's largest prisoner exchange](#), AP, 16 October 2020

⁷⁹ [Saudi Arabia proposes Yemen ceasefire plan to Houthi rebels](#), France 24, 23 March 2021

⁸⁰ See above, section 1

⁸¹ [Houthis: Saudi-Iran deal has no impact on Yemen war, we are not subordinate to Iran](#), Alarabiya News, 13 March 2023

⁸² Middle East Institute, [The war next door: Omani foreign policy toward Yemen](#), 21 September 2023

⁸³ [Saudi diplomat: Talks with Houthis aim to revive Yemen truce](#), AP, 10 April 2023

⁸⁴ [Yemen war: Major prisoner swap raises hopes](#), BBC News, 14 April 2023

Yemen, Hans Grundberg, said the talks represented “renewed momentum” that supported UN efforts to mediate an agreement.⁸⁵

However, the talks were potentially overshadowed by the Houthi attack on Bahraini troops in September 2023 and the suspension of the only commercial air route from Sana’a to Jordan because of a dispute over the funding of the airline: section 2.2 sets out the challenges any settlement faces.

2.2 Challenges to a peace agreement

The Houthis currently refuse to discuss a political settlement with the PLC or other Yemeni opponents as a group, arguing they instead are the legitimate government of Yemen. Talks are instead taking place between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, facilitated by Oman.⁸⁶

The International Crisis Group describes the main objectives of the parties to the conflict in any negotiations:

- **Houthis:** Strengthening their political and military position and to be seen as the legitimate government of Yemen, to secure economic aid, and to reduce the influence of Saudi Arabia and its other partners (including the withdrawal of coalition forces).
- **Saudi Arabia:** Seeking stability on its southern border, and to prevent other regional actors, including Iran, the UAE and Turkey, from gaining influence in Yemen.
- **UAE:** Sought the removal of Hadi, and now seeking to secure the south of Yemen against the Houthis.
- **Southern Transitional Council:** To develop a separate southern Yemen state, as existed from 1967 to 1990.
- **Government of Yemen (the Presidential Leadership Council):** This contains members of the STC as well as others closer to Saudi Arabia. International Crisis Group notes the PLC is divided on Yemen’s future:

PLC members themselves disagree about how to share power in areas under their control; whether Yemen should remain a unified state, split into two states or become a federation (and in the last case, with how many federal regions); and whether these knotty questions should be resolved before, as part of or after political talks with the Houthis.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ [Saudi Arabia praises “positive results” after Yemen’s Houthi rebels visit kingdom for peace talks](#), AP, 20 September 2023

⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, [Catching up on the back channel peace talks in Yemen](#), 10 October 2023

⁸⁷ As above and International Crisis Group, [Yemen’s troubled presidential leadership council](#), 4 May 2023 (the quote from the latter source).

International Crisis Group also sets out the main topics of discussion:

- The release of prisoners.
- Economic support, including the payment of public sector wages in Houthi controlled areas. Many public sector workers have not been paid since 2016. The Houthi group fears popular protests if no payments are made, while their opponents want to oversee disbursement.
- Reopening Sana'a airport and Hodeida port in Houthi-controlled areas. On 1 October 2023, flights were suspended to Sana'a to protest Houthi restrictions on the funds of the state-owned Yemen Airways. The Sana'a-Amman (Jordan) air route had been introduced as part of the UN-brokered ceasefire.⁸⁸
- Unblocking of roads in several regions.
- Managing or reducing the degree of foreign influence over respective opponents.⁸⁹

Amending of UN Security Council resolution 2216 (2015)

An additional stumbling block may be the need for the UN Security Council to revisit the 2015 resolution which provides the framework for negotiations. [Resolution 2216 \(2015\)](#) called for the restoration of the Hadi Government, withdrawal of Houthi forces from all areas seized, and for the relinquishing of arms by Government opponents.⁹⁰

Some analysts argue the UN Resolution needs to be revisited to increase incentives for the Houthis to enter negotiations, such as by removing the demand for their withdrawal to their pre-2014 positions, and to recognise the multiple actors, such as the STC, that the UN and a future Government of Yemen must now engage with.⁹¹

Further reading on negotiations in 2023

- Foreign Policy, [The UN is the only path to peace in Yemen](#), November 2023. Argues the UN's participation is the only path to a sustainable settlement. Foreign Policy can be accessed through [Nexis News](#).
- International Crisis Group, [Catching up on the back channel peace talks in Yemen](#), October 2023. Q&A on the talks.
- Foreign Policy, [The conflict in Yemen is more than a proxy war](#), July 2023

⁸⁸ [Yemen's state-run airline suspends the only route out of Sanaa over Houthi restrictions on its funds](#), AP, 1 October 2023

⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, [Catching up on the back channel peace talks in Yemen](#), 10 October 2023

⁹⁰ UN, [Security Council demands end to Yemen violence \[...\]](#), 14 April 2015

⁹¹ International Crisis Group, [The international approach to the Yemen war: Time for a change?](#), 23 October 2020; Brookings Institute, [Getting Yemen's Houthis to "yes" on a ceasefire](#), 1 March 2021; European Council on Foreign Relations, [Yemen's seven years of war: How the new UN envoy can lay foundations for peace](#), 6 September 2021

- International Crisis Group, [Houthi-Saudi negotiations will make or break Yemen](#), December 2022. On economic conflict and restoring a truce.
- European Council on Foreign Relations, [How Europeans can help end the conflict in Yemen](#), December 2022
- RAND, [Yemen's yearlong truce creates opportunities for durable peace](#), 10 July 2023. On the role of the United States.
- RUSI, [Reviving the truce: Prospects for stability and security in Yemen: conference report](#), January 2023. Summary of prospects for Yemen after the expiry of the 2022 truce.
- Sana'a Center, [Women's voices in Yemen's peace process](#), January 2023. On the participation of women in the peace process.

2.3

UK actions

Actions at the UN Security Council

The UK is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. At the Council, the UK acts as the penholder for Yemen, meaning it takes the lead on Council activities relating to the country and the drafting of related resolutions.

UK actions have included drafting resolutions to call for a ceasefire following the Stockholm talks in 2018.⁹²

In 2022, the UK Government said it was willing to facilitate further talks, to use its penholder role to push for a new UN resolution for a comprehensive peace plan when required, and to support more widely UN-led negotiations.⁹³

UK statements on peace and ceasefire negotiations

Speaking in January 2023, then Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, said the UK had been “instrumental in facilitating talks, which have brought temporary periods of peace”.⁹⁴

In April 2022, the Government:

- Welcomed the UN-brokered ceasefire and called for confidence-building measures to sustain it, and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

⁹² FCDO, [Foreign Secretary welcomes adoption of new UN Security Council Resolution on Yemen peace process](#), 21 December 2018

⁹³ HC Deb, [3 November 2022](#); c463WH

⁹⁴ HC Deb, [31 January 2023](#), c202

- Welcomed the formation of the Presidential Leadership Council and President Hadi for allowing the peaceful transfer of power.
- Called on the Leadership Council and Houthis to engage with the UN Special Envoy.⁹⁵

In April 2023, the UK Government:

- Said efforts to secure peace were “gaining momentum” following the Omani-led talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis
- Welcomed the release of prisoners as a “positive development” which all parties could build on.
- Called for inclusive Yemeni-Yemeni talks under the auspices of the UN Special Envoy.⁹⁶

The UK has also backed the continuing unity and territorial integrity of Yemen.⁹⁷

UK diplomatic activity

In July 2021, the then Minister for North Africa and the Middle East, James Cleverly, said the Government was engaging “constructively” with the Saudis and Government of Yemen, but that it had “difficulty engaging meaningfully” with the Houthis.⁹⁸

In 2023, the Minister for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, said he had engaged directly with the foreign ministers of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and UN officials on the peace talks.⁹⁹

The then Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, also participated in a joint meeting with the Gulf Cooperation Council in September 2023 (the Council is formed of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait). On Yemen, the joint statement read (spacing added to original):

The ministers underscored the importance of continued and unified support for UN-led peace efforts in Yemen following the April 2022 truce and ensuing period of de-escalation.

They expressed their high appreciation for the efforts of Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UN and US envoys to this end.

The ministers also emphasised their support for an inclusive, Yemeni-Yemeni political process under UN auspices that durably resolves the conflict.

⁹⁵ FCDO, [The truce in Yemen provides an opportunity that must be seized](#), 14 April 2022.

⁹⁶ British Embassy Sana'a, [UK statement on developments in Yemen](#), 18 April 2023

⁹⁷ FCDO, [Yemen: Quad joint statement](#), 24 September 2022

⁹⁸ HC Deb, [20 July 2021](#), c794

⁹⁹ HL Deb, [20 April 2023](#), c768

They welcomed the efforts that the Presidential Leadership Council has taken to promote peace and ease the suffering of Yemenis, stressing the need for the Houthis to seize this opportunity and engage positively with international efforts and peace initiatives aimed at bringing durable peace to Yemen and putting the country on the path to recovery.

The Ministers affirmed the importance of continuing to address Yemen’s humanitarian, economic, and development needs. [...] ¹⁰⁰

Reduction in UK aid to Yemen since 2019

As part of the wider reductions in UK aid spending since 2020, the amount of UK bilateral aid to Yemen has fallen from £216 million in 2019 to £77 million in 2022. For 2022/23 and 2023/24, the UK has pledged £88 million. This made it the fourth largest donor at the February 2023 UN pledging conference. ¹⁰¹

Lords committee report, 2019

In 2019, the House of Lords International Affairs Select Committee published a report, *Yemen: Giving peace a chance*. Among its conclusions were that the Government should:

- Give a “much higher priority” to resolving, rather than mitigating, the humanitarian situation in Yemen.
- “Do more” to support negotiations by the UN, including considering the appointment of a special representative to reinforce UN efforts. ¹⁰²

In response to the Committee in 2019, the Government said:

The UK has played an active role as penholder in the UN Security Council in support of the UN-led peace process and will continue to do so [...]

[However,] it is important to remember that the pen is not a ‘magic wand’. A nationwide ceasefire will only have an effect on the ground if it is underpinned by a political deal between the conflict parties. ¹⁰³

It also emphasised the role the UK played in the Stockholm Agreement in 2018 and its implementation:

The Foreign Secretary has also played a pivotal leadership role in support of peace efforts. Following the Foreign Secretary’s visit to the

¹⁰⁰ FCDO, [GCC-UK ministerial meeting: Joint statement](#), September 2023

¹⁰¹ Commons Library, [UK aid and Yemen’s humanitarian crisis](#)

¹⁰² Lords Select Committee on International Relations, [Yemen: Giving peace a chance](#), HL 290, 2019, paras 66-76

¹⁰³ [Government response to the Select Committee on International Relations. Yemen: Giving peace a chance](#) (PDF), April 2019, para 70

Gulf region in November 2018, the Saudi-led Coalition agreed to the evacuation of wounded Houthis from Yemen, one of the key stumbling blocks to the UN Geneva talks in September [2018]. In December 2018, the Foreign Secretary attended the peace talks in Stockholm to support the UN Special Envoy and UN Secretary General to encourage the parties to reach confidence-building agreements.¹⁰⁴

Further reading on the UK's role in Yemen

- [Government response to the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations, Yemen: Giving peace a chance](#) (PDF), April 2019
- RUSI, [Reviving the truce: Prospects for stability and security in Yemen conference report](#), January 2023
- FCDO, [UK-Yemen development partnership summary](#), July 2023
- Commons Library, [UK aid and Yemen's humanitarian crisis](#)

UK Parliament debates on Yemen since December 2019

- HC Deb, [Yemen: Humanitarian situation and children's rights](#), 9 May 2023, cc160-176WH
- HC Deb, [Yemen peace process](#), 3 November 2022, cc446-466WH
- HC Deb, [Yemen: Humanitarian situation](#), 20 October 2021, cc359-466WH
- HC Deb, [Arms trade: Yemen](#), 20 April 2021, cc240-58WH
- HL Deb, [Yemen: Aid funding](#), 3 March 2021, cc1152-4
- HC Deb, [Yemen: Aid funding](#), 2 March 2021, cc117-27
- HL Deb, [Yemen \[on the Marib offensive\]](#), 10 February 2021, cc345-8
- HC Deb, [Yemen \[on the Marib offensive\]](#), 8 February 2021, cc25-36
- HC Deb, [Yemen \[general debate\]](#), 24 September 2020, cc1185-1208
- HC Deb, [Sale of arms: War in Yemen](#), 13 July 2020, cc1255-67
- HL Deb, [Yemen: Humanitarian aid funding](#), 4 June 2020, cc1445-8

¹⁰⁴ [Government response to the Select Committee on International Relations, Yemen: Giving peace a chance](#) (PDF), April 2019, para 69

3 Other aspects of the international response

3.1 Human rights reporting by UN experts

Establishment of group of experts, 2017

In September 2017, the UN Human Rights Council requested that the High Commissioner establish a “group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen” to monitor and report on human rights in Yemen and examine alleged violations of international human rights law since 2014.¹⁰⁵

2021 report on human rights abuses

In September 2021, the UN Group of Experts published a report on the human rights abuses committed by the Governments of Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the STC, and the Houthi group.¹⁰⁶

The independent panel stressed that “all parties” were responsible for violations and stated that “many [...] may amount to international crimes.” It cited as examples Saudi-led airstrikes, “indiscriminate” shelling of civilians by the Houthis, internationally recognised Government and the Saudi-led coalition, restrictions on humanitarian access, arbitrary detention, and gender-based violence. It urged the end to the supply of arms by third parties.¹⁰⁷

In response to the committee’s report in September 2021, the UK Government [urged all the parties involved to investigate the allegations](#) and committed to work with the UN to pursue a political end to the conflict.¹⁰⁸

UN human rights body closed, 2021

In October 2021, the UN Human Rights Council [voted to shut down the body’s mandate to investigate war crimes in Yemen](#). Russia and Bahrain were among the countries who voted against the renewal of the mandate.¹⁰⁹ Rights

¹⁰⁵ UN Human Rights Council, [Group of eminent experts on Yemen](#)

¹⁰⁶ UN Human Rights Council’s Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, [Situation on human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since 2014 \(PDF\)](#), 10 September 2021

¹⁰⁷ As above, p18

¹⁰⁸ FCDO, [UN Human Rights Council 48 \[...\]](#), 14 September 2021

¹⁰⁹ [UN vote shuts down Yemen war crimes investigations](#), Al-Monitor, 8 October 2021

activists have accused Saudi Arabia of lobbying against the resolution. The Kingdom is not a member of the Human Rights Council.¹¹⁰

The UN Group of Experts on Yemen said it was a “major setback for all victims who have suffered serious violations” during the conflict.¹¹¹

In February 2022, the Norwegian Refugee Council [called for its reinstating](#), citing the rising number of civilian casualties reported since monitoring ended.¹¹² In May 2023, the UK Government said it was disappointed the mandate was not renewed and was discussing a follow-up mechanism:

We regret that the mandate of the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen was not renewed in October 2021, the UK voted in favour of the mandate renewal. We are discussing with international partners the potential for a follow-up mechanism to support human rights accountability in Yemen. Justice and accountability are key for inclusive and durable peace.¹¹³

UK Government concerns for human rights

Yemen is the one of the UK’s “priority countries” for human rights. In July 2023, the UK Government noted:

- The UN group of eminent experts had provided “crucial human rights reporting” and the national commission of the Yemen Government was “not as comprehensive nor impartial as the UN Group”.
- In 2022, there were continuing violations of international humanitarian law in “pockets” of the country and there had been “a significant increase in reports of gender-based violence” during the conflict.
- In 2022, there were also violations against children, including child soldier recruitment and forced displacement.
- Persecution of Christians, Jews, and Baha’is.¹¹⁴

The Government also said it regularly raises the importance of complying with international humanitarian law (IHL) with the Saudi military:

The UK also provided training courses, advice, and guidance to support the Saudi military’s compliance with IHL, including operational planning and strategic communications courses for the Saudi Ministry of Defence and senior visits to assess progress against IHL standards.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Reuters, [Saudi lobbying jeopardises UN Yemen war crimes probe, activists say](#), 6 October 2021

¹¹¹ UN OCHA, [Statement by Group of Experts on Yemen \[...\]](#), 8 October 2021

¹¹² Norwegian Refugee Council, [Yemen: Civilian casualties double since end of human rights monitoring](#), 10 February 2022

¹¹³ PQ 137963 [[Yemen: Human rights and war crimes](#)], 13 February 2023

¹¹⁴ FCDO, [Human rights and democracy report 2022](#), 13 July 2023 ‘Yemen’

¹¹⁵ As above

Further reading on human rights in Yemen

- UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, [News and reports](#). Links to reports and press releases by the UN Group.
- Human Rights Watch, [Yemen: Key human rights concerns for UN envoy](#), 12 September 2021
- FCDO, [Human rights and democracy reports, 2003-2022](#)
- US State Department, [2022 report on religious freedom: Yemen](#), May 2023
- US State Department, [2022 country reports on human rights practices: Yemen](#), March 2023
- Amnesty International, [Yemen country page](#), 2022/23

3.2

Arms sales to Saudi Arabia

From 2010 to 2019, around 19% of arms imports to Saudi Arabia came from the UK, and around 60% from the US.¹¹⁶ These have proved controversial because of Saudi Arabia's human rights record and the accusation that UK-built and licenced arms have been used in Yemen by Saudi forces.

According to the [Yemen Data Project](#), from 2015 to February 2022 the Saudi-led coalition has conducted nearly 24,700 air raids which have resulted in around 19,200 civilian casualties.¹¹⁷

Pause of US arms sales to Saudi Arabia under Biden

In January 2021, the Biden Administration announced a pause on arms sales to Saudi Arabia in order to conduct a review of such sales.¹¹⁸ Reuters has reported only those arms considered "defensive" may be sold.¹¹⁹ Arms sales to Saudi Arabia have now been resumed, primarily to strengthen its defences against Iran.¹²⁰

Under the Biden Administration, the US has sought to reset its relations with Saudi Arabia, releasing intelligence linking the country, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Commons Library, [UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia: Q&A](#)

¹¹⁷ Yemen Data Project, [Homepage](#), accessed 10 February 2022

¹¹⁸ [Biden Administration pauses arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE](#), CNN, 27 January 2021

¹¹⁹ [Biden team considering a halt to "offensive" arms sales for Saudis](#), Reuters, 26 February 2021

¹²⁰ [US approves massive arms sale to Saudi, UAE to counter Iran](#), AP, 2 August 2022

¹²¹ Commons Library, [Saudi Arabia: Introductory country profile](#)

UK Government position

In response to requests that the UK Government reconsiders its position on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the Government states that it assesses arms sales on a case-by-case basis against arms export criteria.¹²²

In July 2020 the then-International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss, said the Government had concluded there was “not a clear risk” that the export of arms and equipment to Saudi Arabia might be used to commit a serious violation of international humanitarian law.¹²³

In April 2021, the Campaign Against Arms Trade group was given permission to bring a judicial review of the Government’s decision to recommence arms sales to Saudi Arabia the previous July.¹²⁴ The judicial review was dismissed by the High Court in June 2023.¹²⁵

More information can be found in the Commons Library research briefing [UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia: Q&A](#), January 2021.

3.3

Sanctions against the Houthis

In 2014 and 2015, the UN Security Council passed [resolutions 2140 \(2014\)](#) and [2216 \(2015\)](#). These designate individuals and entities as subject to asset freezes, travel bans and targeted arms embargoes. Sanctions were renewed most recently in November 2023.¹²⁶

[UN Security Council Resolution 2624 \(2022\)](#), adopted in February 2022, listed the Houthis as an entity under the UN arms embargo for the first time (embargoes have been in place against individual members). The Council said the group had engaged in attacks on civilians, “implemented a policy of sexual violence and repression against active and professional women”, recruited child soldiers, obstructed the delivery of humanitarian aid, and conducted attacks against shipping and terrorist attacks across borders, including the UAE (among other reasons given for its listing).¹²⁷

Four non-permanent members of the Security Council abstained on the vote, expressing concern about “the resolution’s characterization of the Houthis as a terrorist group” (these were Mexico, Norway, Ireland, and Brazil). The UK

¹²² PQ 156485 [[Yemen: Arms sales](#)], 2 March 2021

¹²³ [HCWS339 Trade Update](#), 7 July 2020

¹²⁴ [High court to hear legal battle over UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia](#), The Guardian, 22 April 2021

¹²⁵ [Campaign group loses legal fight with Government over arms sales to Saudi Arabia](#), The Independent, 6 June 2023

¹²⁶ UN, [Unanimously adopting Resolution 2707 \(2023\) \[...\]](#), 14 November 2023

¹²⁷ [UN Security Council Resolution 2624 \(2022\)](#)

and all other members of the Security Council voted in favour of the resolution.¹²⁸

The UK also applies sanctions against Houthi political and military leaders.¹²⁹ US sanctions also target financing networks for the Houthis.¹³⁰

3.4 Proscribing the Houthis as a terrorist group

United Kingdom

While the UK applies sanctions against the Houthis, it is not officially proscribed a terrorist group in the UK.¹³¹

Proscribing a group would create several offenses in the UK, including being a member of the proscribed group or displaying articles in public which would arouse suspicion of membership or support for the group.¹³²

In 2022, the UK Government said it would keep proscription under review:

Any decision to proscribe a group is only ever made after careful consideration is given to whether the statutory test – whether the group is concerned in terrorism – is met, and whether the exercise of discretion to proscribe is proportionate.

The Government does not routinely comment on intelligence matters, including whether an organisation is under consideration for proscription. The Government keeps the list of proscribed organisations under review.¹³³

United States

The Trump Administration designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO) in January 2021. The Administration stated this was to “hold the Houthis accountable for their terrorist acts,” including attacks external to Yemen. The administration said it would take steps to ensure the designation did not disrupt the delivery of humanitarian aid.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ UN, [Security council renews arms embargo, travel ban, asset freeze imposed on those threatening peace in Yemen](#), 28 February 2022. The quote is from Mexico’s representative.

¹²⁹ HM Treasury, [Financial sanctions, Yemen](#), 5 October 2022

¹³⁰ US State Department, [US sanctions international network enriching Houthis in Yemen](#), 10 June 2021; US Department of the Treasury, [Treasury targets key Houthi finance network in coordination with regional Gulf partners](#)

¹³¹ Home Office, [Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations](#), September 2023

¹³² Commons Library, [Proscribed terrorist organisations](#)

¹³³ PQ 154095 [[Ansar Allah](#)], 27 April 2022

¹³⁴ US State Department, [Terrorist designation of Ansarallah in Yemen](#), 10 January 2021

Citing humanitarian concerns and a desire to support dialogue between the parties, the Biden Administration reversed the designation in February 2021.¹³⁵

The US Institute for Peace [US revokes Houthi terrorist designation](#), 12 February 2021, provides more on the Trump and Biden Administration decisions and commentary by aid and other organisations.

In April 2022, President Biden said the Administration was considering re-designating the group as an FTO.¹³⁶ This followed Houthi attacks against the UAE in January 2021, after which the UAE Government called for the Administration to consider its position.¹³⁷

Following the Houthi capture of a ship in November 2023, the Biden Administration said it was considering the status of the Houthi group.¹³⁸

To date, no change in designation has been announced.

¹³⁵ US State Department, [Revocation of the terrorist designations of Ansarallah](#), 12 February 2021

¹³⁶ [Biden says administration mulling re-designating Yemen's Houthis as a terrorist group](#), Reuters, 20 January 2022

¹³⁷ UAE Embassy in Washington DC, [The case for designating the Houthis a FTO](#), 22 March 2022

¹³⁸ [US reviewing possible 'terrorist' designations for Houthis](#), Reuters, 21 November 2023

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