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MES: Topic 2 – The Yemeni Civil War

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The Yemeni Civil War, which began in 2014, has since evolved into one of the world's most complex and devastating conflicts. A domestic political struggle between the Houthis movement and the Yemeni government transformed quickly into a regional proxy war with global, regional, domestic, and economic implications. The war has redrawn alliances, destabilized trade, and deepened humanitarian suffering, all while playing a key role in realigning the balance of power in the region.¹ The Yemeni Civil War, its aftermath, and its consequences are critical factors in shaping the region for years to come.

The Houthis emerged in northern Yemen and, in 2014, they seized the country's capital, Sana'a, prompting the collapse of the government. In 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, supported by several Western nations, intervened militarily to restore the former Yemeni government.² Saudi Arabia viewed the Houthis as an extension of Iranian influence, while Iran viewed the conflict as an opportunity to expand its regional authority. The complex Saudi-Iranian dynamic has turned Yemen into a key arena of competition, reflecting broader power rivalries across the Middle East.

The war has had far-reaching effects on international trade and tactics. The conflict threatens the security of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the world's most critical economic chokepoints connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.³ About 10% of global trade passes through this passage, meaning a disruption could have global repercussions. Several nations, including the United States, France, and China, have maintained naval forces nearby for years to secure their trade routes, illustrating the war's worldwide significance.⁴

However, this all pales in comparison to the humanitarian impact of the war, which has been nothing short of catastrophic. Roughly 20 million Yemeni citizens, which accounts for half

¹ BBC. "Yemen Crisis: Why Is There a War?" *BBC News*, April 14, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>.

² Center for Preventive Action. "Conflict in Yemen and the Red Sea." Global Conflict Tracker. Council on Foreign Relations, March 26, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen>.

³ Coface, "Bab El-Mandeb Strait: Tension at a Global Trade Route," Coface, May 14, 2025, <https://www.coface.ch/news-publications-insights/bab-el-mandeb-strait-tension-at-a-global-trade-route>.

⁴ Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. "A Fragile but Enduring Truce in Yemen." Arab Center Washington DC, August 27, 2024. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/a-fragile-but-enduring-truce-in-yemen/>.

of the country's population, require some form of aid, and the United Nations has described Yemen as one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.⁵ Despite reductions in fighting over the past five years, peace remains fragile because local militias and regional powers are still competing for control. Efforts to rebuild Yemen's government and institutions also face major challenges, including potential economic collapse, fierce internal fighting and indecisiveness, and the ever-present foreign agendas that hinder progress.⁶

In 2023, China brokered a rapprochement deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which, by proxy, lessened tensions in Yemen, allowing for optimism for total de-escalation and peace.⁷ However, several Gulf states have pursued separate strategies by supporting southern resistance factions and consolidating influence over important ports such as Aden and Socotra. Clearly, there are competing regional visions for Yemen's future. For global powers, the conflict serves as a test to see how well the international community can stabilize fragile states while maintaining diplomacy and helping humanitarian causes.⁸

The Middle East Summit committee must explore the effects of the Yemeni Civil War on regional alliances, while also debating how international powers can promote peace, protect trade, and help with reconstruction. Addressing Yemen's crisis is not only a regional challenge, it is a global responsibility.

Questions to Consider While Researching Your Country's Position:

- How has the Yemeni Civil War affected the regional balance of power, and what is your country's stake in this shift?
- What role should international organizations, countries, or factions play in facilitating peace and humanitarian aid access?
- How can the global community protect trade through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait amid ongoing instability, while also not being satisfied with the current stalemate and seeking peace?

⁵ Unocha.org. "Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 (January 2025) [EN/AR]," January 15, 2025.

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-january-2025-enar>.

⁶ Alasrar, Fatima. "The Houthis' War and Yemen's Future." Middle East Institute, September 23, 2022.

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/houthis-war-and-yemens-future>.

⁷ Kalin, Stephen. "Saudi Arabia, Iran Restore Relations in Deal Brokered by China." WSJ.com, March 10, 2023.

⁸ Writer, and Writer. "The Challenges of Peacebuilding in Yemen." The European Institute for International Relations, April 4, 2025.
<https://www.eiir.eu/strategic-affairs/conflicts-areas/the-challenges-of-peacebuilding-in-yemen/>.

- What steps can countries take to support Yemen's post-war reconstruction while maintaining neutrality?
- How might the renewed Saudi–Iranian diplomatic relationship influence the war's trajectory and long-term peace, and how will said trajectory affect your country?

While these are questions to guide your research and writing, they are not intended to limit your analysis, nor should they. Be sure that your position papers accurately reflect your country's stance and priorities. Remember that citations are necessary and AI usage is forbidden. I look forward to seeing how each delegate envisions a peaceful Yemeni future and a stable economic situation in the surrounding areas. For any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me at jberman5@mail.yu.edu.

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