



WrightMUN

High School Model UN Background Guide

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Security Council Background Guide

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Topic: Yemen and the Red Sea

Message from the Director of the Security Council

Delegates,

It is my honor to welcome you to this year's WrightMUN Conference. My name is Eliza Hendrix and I look forward to seeing the work you all will put forth as a part of the Security Council (SC). The SC is perhaps the most important organ of the United Nations (UN) system, being responsible for the maintenance of global peace and security. Each delegate will represent one of the 15 Member States that make up the SC and each hold one vote. Five of those members (the Permanent Five or "P5")- The United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, and France- have the additional benefit of the veto: a single negative vote from any of the P5 on a draft resolution ensures the defeat of its passage.

Under the Charter of the UN, all Member States are obligated to comply with the Council's decisions. The Council will call on the parties involved in any issue to settle any threat to international stability through peaceful means and will recommend methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. While the SC will try to solve crises through peaceful and diplomatic means, the SC is also imbued with the authority to take coercive measures, including sanctions or authorizing the use of force, to maintain or restore global peace and security.

This background guide is intended to offer delegates a starting point for their research on the ongoing crisis in the Red Sea and Yemen. Delegates are encouraged to broaden their research on the topic to the greater context of the situation and to their Member State's policies. The background guide will offer the necessary information to begin delving deeper into the topic and will provide delegates the necessary tools to cooperate with other delegates in the committee.

Remember to have fun during your time at WrightMUN and that the staff are here to support you to provide you with any guidance you may experience. While there will be awards, this is ultimately a learning experience. I highly encourage you to take advantage of the committee staff to ask any questions you may have and to help make the most of your time working alongside your fellow delegates.

Sincerely,

Eliza Hendrix
Director, Security Council

Topic: Yemen and the Red Sea

Introduction

The crisis in the Red Sea is both narrow and broad. In essence, a violent nonstate actor, Ansar Allah (called “the Houthi”) has been attacking ships transiting the Red Sea from its positions in northwest Yemen since the Fall of 2023.

The declared reasons for the Houthi’s actions relate to the broader conflict involving Israel and Hamas in Gaza begun October 7, 2023. Further complicating the situation, the Houthi’s are part of a broader regional competition between the US, Israel and Sunni Arab states in the Middle East and an Iran-led coalition calling themselves the “Axis of Resistance.” Iran’s partners include Lebanon’s Hizb’allah, Palestinian Hamas, various militias in Syria and Iraq, and the Houthi in Yemen.

How narrow or broad you wish to tackle the problem in committee is up to you, Delegates. Minimally, the shipping question in the Red Sea needs to be addressed. If there is time and interest, discussions can broaden to the political situation in Yemen, where an uneasy truce exists between the Houthi and the “Internationally Recognized Government”. An ambitious Security council could broaden deliberations further to the conflict in Gaza and broader Israel-Palestine conflict.

Background

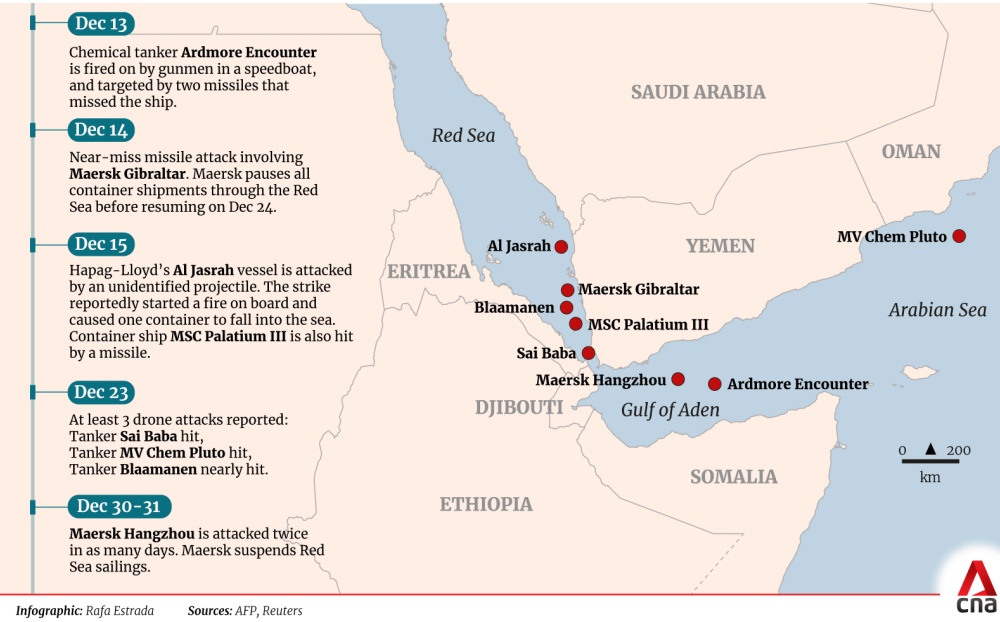
Yemen was one of several countries that succumbed to the turbulence of the Arab Spring. Long-standing authoritarian President Ali Saleh faced increasing protest to his rule in 2011. The Saudis brokered a UN-endorsed deal whereby Saleh stepped down and was replaced by his Vice President, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who would lead a UN-endorsed “National Dialogue” towards a more inclusive Yemen.

The imperfect process gave way to a civil war in 2014, when the Houthi rebellion launched from the north in alliance with the disgruntled former President Saleh. Iran armed and aided the Shi’a group’s efforts as they swept through the capitol, Sana’a, sending the Hadi government south to Aden. In 2015, a Saudi-led coalition intervened in the Yemeni civil war on behalf of the Hadi regime. A civil war and proxy war continued for several years until, in April 2022, a truce went into place among the warring factions.

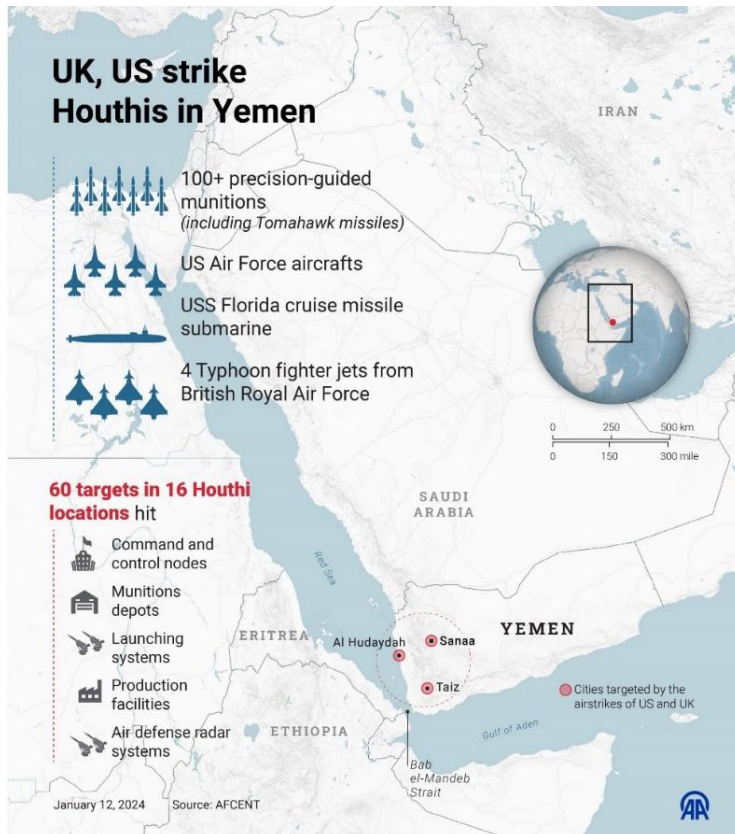
On October 7, 2023, in another part of the region, Hamas attacked Israel in a brazen raid that killed 1200 and captured over 200 hostages. Israel’s response was swift and fierce against the group based out of the territory known as Gaza Strip. In support of Hamas and the Palestinians, and in opposition to Israel’s aggressive advances in Gaza, the Houthi took it upon themselves to enter the fray, launching attacks against ships in the Red Sea it identified as on the side of Israel.

Attacks on ships in the Red Sea






Since Nov 19, there have been more than 20 attacks on merchant ships by Houthi militants in the Red Sea. Here are some of the major attacks:



The US and UK have led others in retaliatory strikes on the premise of deterring further attacks and securing international shipping. Such actions also risk a wider regional war.



The Houthi, among other things, are part of what Iran calls an “Axis of Resistance,”¹ a network of violent non-state actors in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq (see table below). Attacks on the Houthi could bring retaliation and escalation beyond Yemen to other areas of the Middle East, where Iranian proxies have already committed violence in Iraq, Jordan and Israel. Whether the Security Council takes on broader regional security issues, members should be mindful of the potentialities of a wider conflict in their deliberations.

FROM AXIS TO ALLIANCE		
The strengthening of individual resistance axes and their evolving ties to Iran suggest a patron-proxy model is insufficient to capture the dynamics between Iran and affiliated groups. Blending military interdependence, mutual commitment, and individual motivations, the axis is better conceptualized as an alliance. Though imperfect, an alliance model more effectively captures the axis's strategic concept, disposition, and roles and missions.		
CONCEPT		
Like most alliances, the axis serves to balance the threat of common adversaries: Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia. ¹²⁸ The axes are committed to collective security and mutual defense but also maintain unique security goals. Iran serves as security guarantor for the alliance, while allies provide Iran extended deterrence. ¹²⁹ The axis embodies several historical motivators of alliance formation, such as shared external threat perception and ideological solidarity. ¹²⁰		
	DISPOSITION	ROLES AND MISSIONS
	The axis bloc is centered on extended deterrence arrayed over multiple, non-contiguous fronts.	Axis warfighting doctrine centers on the projection of expeditionary power. Member roles are determined by military capabilities and proximity to adversaries.
IRAN 	Bloc bastion, holding the bulk of the alliance's conventional strength and its missile and defense architecture needed to deter major military action. ^{122,122}	Primary role is as expeditionary ally, to train, equip, advise, and enable other partners. ¹²²
HEZBOLLAH 	Iran's forward defense, primary front against Israel and, along with the Syrian regime, the alliance's base of power projection into the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean. ¹²⁴	Plays a similar paramilitary and advisory role to Iran while also being the main combat element against Israel. ^{125,126}
IRAQI PMF 	Provides strategic depth for Iran and potential thoroughfare to the Levant. ^{127,128}	Conduct expeditionary operations—particularly AAH, HHN, and KH—and pressure U.S. forces in Iraq. ^{129,130}
HOUTHIS 	Forward flank to contest Saudi Arabia and adversaries' sea lines of communication. ¹³¹	Apply pressure to Saudi Arabia, dislocate Saudi and Gulf combat strength, ¹³² and disrupt their and U.S. maritime activity as needed. ¹³³
PROXIES 	Ready-reserve militia forces in their host countries—e.g., Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan—or forward deployed with Iran. ^{134,135}	Comprise a “foreign legion” of additional manpower Iran can deploy across theaters for operations or protect Iranian interests in their home countries. ^{136,137,138}

¹ Brian Katz, “Axis Rising: Iran’s Evolving Regional Strategy and Non-State Partnerships in the Middle East.” CSIS, October 11, 2018 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/axis-rising-irans-evolving-regional-strategy-and-non-state-partnerships-middle-east>

Existing frameworks

The Narrow Question: International Waters and Violence in the Red Sea

Attacks on international shipping have long been forbidden. International waters, that is, those not belonging to any national government, are subject to freedom of navigation against piracy and harm by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.² As early as 2016, the matter of international shipping through the Red Sea has gained the attention of the Security Council. A 2016 Security Council Press Statement “strongly condemned an attack by Houthi forces on a UAE vessel operating near Bab al-Mandeb,” signaling that members of the Council “take threats to shipping around Bab al-Mandeb...seriously” and stressing “that the continued exercise of freedom of navigation in and around Bab al-Mandeb strait” must be upheld.³

After numerous attacks by the Houthi on shipping, Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024) demanded the group “cease its brazen” attacks, citing UNCLOS and freedom of the seas.⁴ Still, as of early February, attacks had continued, numbering at least 29 ships and including 13 struck by drone or missile.⁵

The Houthi attacks aren’t the only side of the crisis drawing international attention. In mid-February Russia and China called the retaliatory strikes by the US and UK “illegal” since the UN Security Council had not authorized military action.⁶ Others note that the shipping disruption has not only economic costs but humanitarian costs as well. The International Rescue Committee lamented that humanitarian shipments to Sudan (itself suffering from civil war) “now take months to reach us” due to the delays associated with avoiding the Red Sea.⁷

Should addressing the shipping attacks be tied back to the political stalemate in Yemen, it should be noted that the UN Office of the Special envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen brokered a truce in 2022 that included:

- A halt to military operations and a freeze in current military positions in Yemen
- Resumed fuel shipments to Yemen through the port at Hodeida
- Resumed commercial flights in and out of Sanaa Airport
- An agreement to engage in meetings on steps towards ending the war⁸

² https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

³ Security Council Press Statement on Yemen, October 4, 2016

<https://press.un.org/en/2016/sc12541.doc.htm>

⁴ <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15561.doc.htm> and

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/009/28/pdf/n2400928.pdf?token=kVFCTkDbD7xrxq0X4Ei&fe=true>

⁵ Simon Scarr et al. “Red Seat Attacks.” *Reuters*, February 2, 2024

<https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ISRAEL-PALESTINIANS/SHIPPING-ARMS/lgvdnngeyvo/>

⁶ Edith Lederer. “Russia and China clash with US and UK over Attacks on Yemen rebels.” *Associated Press*, February 14, 2024 <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/russia-china-clash-us-uk-attacks-yemen-rebels-107247927>

⁷ Fred Harter. “Houthi Attacks in Red Sea Having a ‘catastrophic’ effect on aid to Sudan.” *The Guardian*, February 16, 2024.

⁸ “UN Initiative for a Two-Month Truce.” OSEGGY <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/united-nations-initiative-two-month-truce-0>

The three main parties in conflict at the time were the Hadi government, known as the “Internationally Recognized Government,” the Houthi, and a secessionist in the south/southeast known as the Southern Transitional Council.⁹

Previous UN documents on the Yemen civil war included a December 2018 ceasefire for humanitarian reasons,¹⁰ and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ “Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2021” for addressing refugees and famine amidst the civil war.¹¹ The Security Council endorsed the Saudi-led Transition plan of 2011 (S/Res/2014), and deplored the Houthi’s actions to dissolve the Yemeni government in 2015 (S/Res/2201).¹² Subsequent resolutions demanded a Houthi withdrawal from seized areas combined with an arms embargo (S/Res/2216 of 2015), followed by sanctions for their non-compliance in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.¹³

In response to the crisis begun Fall 2023, the UN special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, announced efforts to recommit parties to the ceasefire and engage in a UN-led peace process, which was endorsed by the internationally recognized government.¹⁴

The Broader Question: Regional Security and the Israel-Hamas War

Should students wish to address the broader issue behind the Houthi’s declared motives, there is ample ground for the Security Council to address the Israel-Hamas war and broader Israel-Palestine conflict.

The UN proposed a two-state solution in Palestine as far back as 1947 (UN General Assembly resolution 181). It has been engaged in the Palestine problem since the 1948 war in which Israel gained independence, setting up the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees still in operation in Gaza and other adjacent territories to Israel.

UN General Assembly resolution 194 called for the refugees’ “Right of Return.” In the later Six Day War of 1967, Israel sieged and claimed the so-called “occupied territories” of Gaza, West Bank, East Jerusalem, Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula. UN resolution 242 (and later resolution 338) have called for the return of lands in exchange for recognition and peace in the area.¹⁵ Egypt and Israel exchanged land for peace in the

⁹ Mohammed Sameai. “After 9 Years of War, control of Yemen remains divided among 3 Sides.” *Anadolu Ajansi*, December 4, 2023 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/after-9-years-of-war-control-of-yemen-remains-divided-among-3-sides/2870283>

¹⁰ <https://yemen.un.org/en/about/about-the-un>

¹¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-2021-march-2021-enar>

¹² https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2201.pdf and <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/YEMEN%20S%20RES%202014.pdf>

¹³ Security Council resolutions on the issue of Yemen can be found here:

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/page/2?ctype=Yemen&cbtype=yemen#038;cbtype=yemen

¹⁴ “Yemen government welcomes UN Road Map to End War.” VOA, December 24, 2023

<https://www.voanews.com/a/yemen-government-welcomes-un-road-map-to-end-war-/7410569.html>

¹⁵ Security Council resolutions on the “Palestine Question” can be found here:

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document-category/resolution/>

1978 Camp David Accords, but a Palestinian land for peace deal has yet to be negotiated despite the many efforts of the “Oslo peace process” of the 1990s.

After the failure of Oslo and resumption of violence between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank, the UN endorsed the so-called “Quartet Road Map for Peace,”¹⁶ a vision for a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living “side by side in peace” (UN resolution 1515).¹⁷ The Annapolis conference of 2007 was the last multilateral attempt at negotiations.

Unilateral and bilateral attempts at solutions have been attempted by the US and others. Donald Trump relocated the US Embassy to Israel to Jerusalem, despite the lack of international recognition of that territory as Israeli.¹⁸ President Trump also offered an “ultimate deal” for Israel and Palestine that was rebuffed by the Palestinians.¹⁹ The 2020 Abraham Accords brought recognition of Israel by Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. The Saudis were seen as on the verge of normalization as well when the October 7 2023 attack occurred. With the region’s public opinion inflamed against Israel, the Saudis have backpedaled and indicated there will be no normalization with Israel without action on a Palestinian state.²⁰

Beyond the question of the military situation in Gaza and a broader political solution to the Question of Palestine, other UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have addressed human rights matters in the 2023 war and prior, related to matters of Israeli occupation and collective punishment.²¹ The International Court of Justice took up the question of the Gaza War and genocide, ruling among other things that Israel shall “take all measures within its power” to prevent (a) the expulsion and forced displacement of Gazans from their homes; (b) the deprivation of access to food, water, medical supplies and humanitarian assistance; and (c) the destruction of Palestinian life in Gaza.²²

¹⁶ <https://peacemaker.un.org/israel-palestine-roadmap2003>

¹⁷ <https://press.un.org/en/2003/sc7924.doc.htm>

¹⁸ See for example S/Res/446 (1979) on Jerusalem, occupied territories and settlements <https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/370/60/pdf/nr037060.pdf?token=62OCR90qfMz6OjRupW&fe=true>

¹⁹ Chris McGreal. “How Jared Kushner Crafted his Middle East ‘peace’ Plan.” *The Guardian*, January 28, 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/27/jared-kushner-israel-palestine-peace-plan>

²⁰ Aziz el Yaakoubi and Parisa Hafezi. “Saudi Arabia puts Israel deal on ice amid war, engages with Iran, sources say.” *Reuters*, October 13, 2023 <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-puts-israel-deal-ice-amid-war-engages-with-iran-sources-say-2023-10-13/>

²¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-israel/index> and <https://www.un.org/unispal/291591-2/>

²² ICJ. “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).” January 26, 2024 <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-sum-01-00-en.pdf>

Questions to consider

Below are suggestions for research and cooperation in committee. Consider what effective action the Security Council can accomplish on narrow or broader aspects of the Red Sea crisis.

- 1. What is your Member State's position on the law of the sea and international commerce? What have been the effects on international shipping and yours?**
- 2. What is your Member State's position on taking military actions against the Houthi in the name of international shipping rights?**
- 3. What is your Member State's position on Yemen, the civil war and humanitarian consequences, and the truce in place since 2022?**
- 4. What is your Member State's position on Israel, the Palestinians, and the 2023 Gaza War? Considerations of a broader peace for Israel-Palestine may be in order, so what is your country's views of the Quartet Road Map to Peace and the idea of a two-state solution?**