In January 2015, a Houthi rebellion in Yemen ousted President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi from power, and put him under house arrest. By March, as the Houthis captured the capital of Sana’a and advanced south toward the Gulf of Aden, the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) planned for airstrikes.1

On 25 March, a Saudi-led coalition of nine Arab states began its airstrikes in Yemen with the stated intent to reinstate Hadi’s internationally recognized government. This military intervention was codenamed “Operation Decisive Storm,” and started the same day Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia, where he denounced the Houthi takeover as an unconstitutional coup d’état.2

On 21 April, the Saudi Defence Ministry declared the end of the air campaign over Yemen and announced the start of a new phase codenamed “Operation Restoring Hope.” Airstrikes resumed almost immediately, however, and a series of UN-sponsored peace talks have taken place since, without any success.3 Here are some quick facts after two months of violence:

**What is the death toll and proportion of civilian casualties?**
As of May 20th, the UN estimates at least 1,850 people (including militants) have been killed and more than 7,390 injured in the Saudi-led military coalition’s air strikes, fighting on the ground and attacks by militants since 19 March.4 The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimates at least 1,037 civilians lost their lives in Yemen between 26 March and 20 May.5 According to the UN children’s agency UNICEF, at least 115 children were killed and 172 wounded in the first month of fighting and air strikes alone.6

**What has been the scale of human displacements?**
Massive. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), some 545,000 people have been displaced since fighting began in March. Most have lost their livelihoods and are entirely dependent on aid. The soaring prices for food, fuel and bottled or trucked water compound the difficulties.7

**What is the humanitarian situation?**
The United Nations warns that Yemen’s infrastructure is on the “brink of collapse.”8 Endangered infrastructure includes water supplies, sanitation systems, health services and telecommunications. Some experts fear that the arms embargo imposed by the UN Security Council—and hailed by the GCC—against Yemen’s Houthi militias could impact the delivery of humanitarian supplies into the country, aggravating the already precarious humanitarian situation.9 10 Fifty days after Saudi-led airstrikes began, half the population lacks enough food, clean water, fuel and medicine, according to the United Nations. Aid workers also claim the country is on the brink of famine due to the naval blockade.11 About 9 million Yemenis are believed to be in dire need of humanitarian assistance.12

**What do human rights experts have to say about the ongoing crisis?**
Johannes Van Der Klaauw, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, has accused the Saudi-led coalition of violating international law. “The indiscriminate bombing of populated areas, with or without prior warning, is in contravention of international humanitarian law,” stated Van Der Klaauw, referring to the airstrikes on Saada that left scores of casualties in the first days of Operation Decisive Storm.13 Eyewitness testimonies gathered by Amnesty International in the aftermath of recent airstrikes in Sana’a, Yemen’s capital, point to a repeated failure by the Saudi-led military intervention to take adequate precautions to prevent civilian deaths.14

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has found credible evidence indicating that the Saudi-led coalition used cluster munitions supplied by the United States in airstrikes against Houthi forces in Yemen.15 Cluster bombs are banned under the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, because they are so lethal to civilians for months after the attack.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), pro-Houthi forces have reportedly launched unguided rockets against populated areas in southern Saudi Arabia, damaging schools and a field hospital, and causing casualties in the process.16 The use of unguided rockets towards populated areas is illegal under international law, as such attacks may indiscriminately kill civilians. Another report by UNIFEC estimates that around 30 percent of
Iran

The President Abed Mansour Hadi

Who are the parties to this conflict?

- **President Abed Mansour Hadi**
  - Yemen’s internationally recognized president, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, and his government.
  - In January 2015, after a constitutional dispute between the Houthis and the government, the Houthis consolidated their control of Sana’a, Yemen’s capital, and placed Hadi and several members of the government under house arrest.
  - Hadi went into exile in Saudi Arabia, but remains Yemen’s internationally recognized executive.

The Houthis

- Are members of a rebel group known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), who adhere to a branch of Shia Islam known as Zaidism. The Zaydis are a minority in the majority-Sunni Muslim country, but make up one-third of the population in the northern highlands along the Saudi border.
- Take their name from Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, who led the group’s first uprising in 2004 in an effort to win greater autonomy and protect Zaidi religious and cultural traditions from perceived encroachment by Sunni Islamists. Houthi, however, was killed by the Yemeni military in late 2004. Following Houthis’s death, his family took charge and led a number of rebellions before a ceasefire was signed with the government in 2010.
- Joined the protests against then President Saleh in 2011 and took advantage of the power vacuum to expand their territorial control in Saada and neighbouring Amran province.
- Have been fierce opponents of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).
- Houthi leaders claim to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad—a claim they often use to mobilize followers and challenge the government.

Saudi Arabia

- Leads a coalition of nine Arab states (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, and the UAE), in an air campaign to defeat Houthi rebels and reinstate Hadi’s government.
- Perceives Houthi control of Yemen as a security threat to its southern border.
- Considers Yemen a front in its contest with Iran for regional dominance. Losing Sana’a to Iranian-backed Zaydi Shiite Houthis would only add to what Saudi Arabia perceives as an ascendant Iran. Tehran has allies in power in Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus, the so-called “Shia crescent.”
- Fears the United States, its long time ally, is stepping back from the region. These fears are compounded by the recent nuclear deal between the West and Iran.

Iran

- Is the Houthis’ primary international backer and has allegedly provided the Houthis with economic support. Regional analysts, however, have warned against overstating Tehran’s influence in the conflict.
• The Houthis and Iran share similar geopolitical interests: while Iran seeks to challenge Saudi and U.S. dominance of the region, the Houthis are the primary opposition to Hadi’s Saudi- and U.S.-backed government in Sana’a.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) 32 33 34

• Described by the U.S. government as the most dangerous al-Qaeda affiliate.
• Has benefitted from the current chaos.
• Has suffered some battlefield setbacks at the hands of Houthi forces. However, due to the Houthis’ rapid advances, some Sunni tribesmen have aligned themselves with al-Qaeda against a perceived common threat.
• Has been the target of countless U.S. drone strikes in the last several years.

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