



United Nations Security Council

Topic A: The Situation in the Middle East, including Yemen

Introduction

As with multiple other topics that the United Nations (UN) and its various bodies discuss, the Situation in the Middle East is one that is hard to discuss. The initial issue that comes around when discussing the Middle East is one of a lack of definitions. Unlike many of the regions and caucusing blocs within the UN, there isn't a true Middle Eastern bloc nor a definition of the region. This is due to the fact that the Middle East contains a multitude of ethnicities, development statuses, and styles of government, though there is one overarching commonality for many peoples and States in the region and that is their shared religious and cultural links to Islam. As such, when the Middle East is discussed or when regional meetings happen they are frequently headed by or ran in conjunction between the UN and the League of Arab States (Arab League) which is made of 22 Member States in the Middle East and Northern Africa to "draw closer the relations between Member States and coordinate collaboration between them".¹

Background

"Modern" Middle Eastern history begins with the defeat of the Central Powers and the occupation and partition of the Ottoman Empire after the end of World War I with Western Allied Powers attempting to exert and establish control over land previously held and controlled by the Ottoman Empire. This was outlined in the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the French Third Republic, along with multiple other secret agreements made by European powers. After the treaty was made public, there was uproar from the United States, other European Powers, and Arabs across the region which resulted in a series of wider ongoing negotiations known as the Paris Peace Conference, which included diplomats from 32 countries, which created the League of Nations and five separate peace treaties for the Middle Eastern region. In these treaties, land previously held by the German and Ottoman Empires was largely transitioned to be held by the United Kingdom and France as a series of mandates which forbade annexation of the controlled territory, contained minority rights clauses, with the territories "existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized... until such time that they are able to stand alone" which built-in the guarantee of future independence".²

As a result, France received the Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon and the United Kingdom received the Mandate for Mesopotamia (replaced by the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty) and the Mandate for Palestine (including the Emirate of Transjordan). Alongside these negotiations and agreements, the newly established Kingdom of Hejaz and the Sultanate of Nejd combined and formed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with approved annexation on the Saudi peninsula of former Ottoman territory. Further south, the

¹ League of Arab States. Pact of the League of Arab States. 1945.

² League of Nations. Covenant of the League of Nations. 1919.

Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen gained independence from the Ottoman Empire before losing territory to the newly formed Saudi Arabia in the Saudi-Yemeni War of 1934. These mandates lasted varying lengths of time with Syria and Lebanon receiving independence from France along with Jordan and Israeli gaining independence from the United Kingdom in the 1940s and then the United Kingdom approving independence for Cyprus, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates in a length of time spanning just over a decade between 1960 and 1971.

Contemporary Middle Eastern history post-independence era has seen an even greater amount of involvement by the United Nations, the Arab League, and foreign Member States with multiple conflicts (and many of those conflicts directly leading to more conflicts) rocking the region. This is demonstrated in the series of Arab-Israeli wars, the Cyprus dispute, and the Soviet-Afghan War, the Gulf War, along with the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War. These unstable times were directly followed by a major effort in the 1990s especially by US President Bill Clinton and other Western powers in pushing forward a Two-State Solution to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was all drastically altered once again with al-Qaeda's September 11th terror attacks which led to another 20 years of ground war though the parties of the war changed multiple times over the years with Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and various other nations becoming involved in the ongoing conflict.

As the War in Afghanistan continued, distrust in the region grew with Iran continuing to pursue nuclear development and with many Member States having sustained economic struggles after the 2008 recession while also seeing political corruption occur there was a series of anti-government protests and uprisings commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. This resulted in 4 Presidents being ousted or killed and civil wars that are still ongoing in Syria, Yemen, Libya. In these conflicts, the Islamic State (IS) gained power and prominence, especially in Syria, and at one point its "caliphate" had a population of 12 million people with a yearly budget of \$1 billion US dollars prior to being mostly dismantled with the help of a global coalition of forces from 2014 to 2019.³

Current Situation

The Palestinian Question

When the United Kingdom became the Mandatory Power of Palestine from the League of Nations in 1922, the UK had already declared itself in favor of "the establishment in Palestine fo a national home for the Jewish people [understanding] that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities".⁴ After roughly 20 years of hostilities and escalating violence in the region, the UK brought the Palestinian Question to a special session of the newly created General Assembly while five Arab countries tried to add "the termination of the Mandate over Palestine and the declaration of its independence" to the agenda for the session which illustrates how steadfast Arab support for Palestinian statehood has been

³ Gerges, Fawaz A. *ISIS: A History*. 2016

⁴ United Nations. *The Question of Palestine and the United Nations*. 2008.

over the last 75 years.⁵ This session ended with the establishment of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) which after 5 months of investigation and reporting provided two proposals to the UN. The majority proposal suggested that Palestine be partitioned into an Arab State and a Jewish State with special provisions given to Jerusalem which would be run administratively by the UN with all three linked in an economic union while the minority proposal called for a federated structure with Jerusalem serving as a capital of a federation an Arab State and Jewish State.⁶

During the first General Assembly of the UN, *A/RES/181 (II)* was passed which mostly followed the suggestions of the majority proposal from the UNSCOP with minor changes while also outlining the steps to be taken prior to independence. However this plan was not accepted by the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab League who claimed it violated provisions of the *Charter of the United Nations* regarding self-determination.⁷ Thus when the UK revoked its mandate over Palestine and the next day when the Jewish Agency proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel there was no guidance from any approved UN plans or proposals and the following day multiple neighboring Member States provided direct support for the Palestinian Arabs in the first Arab-Israeli War. During this war, the UN created the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization which is still operational in the Middle East providing support to Observer Group Lebanon (OGL), supporting UNIFIL in Southern Lebanon; Observer Group Golan (OGG), supporting UNDOF in the Golan Heights; and Observer Group Egypt (OGE) in the Sinai Peninsula.⁸ The UN also created the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) after the Arab-Israeli war as a means to provide direct relief and works programmes for all Palestinians and their descendants who fled or were expelled during the Arab-Israeli war and subsequent conflicts.⁹

Following the first Arab-Israeli War there has been both a continuation of conflict alongside long periods of peace and stability. Throughout the cycle of war and peace the UN has remained constant in its position of a Two-State solution as outlined in *S/RES/242* in 1967 in the aftermath of the Six-Day War and a series of resolutions, *S/RES/338*, *S/RES/339*, and *S/RES/340*, which were all aimed at ending the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Following the end of the Yom Kippur War and the First Intifada there was a series of treaties and agreements normalizing relations between Arab States and Israel with the goal of diplomatic relations helping maintain peace and stability in the region.¹⁰ Since this period of de-escalation there has been a steady amount of conversation regarding the Situation in the Middle East with 17 separate UN Security Council resolutions passed, 16 Security Council presidential statements, and 8 UN General Assembly resolutions since 2000 including *A/RES/59/124*, *A/RES/ES-10/19*, *S/PRST/2008/46*, *S/RES/1397*, and *S/RES/2334* helping conclude and create

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ United Nations. "Fifty-Five Years of UNTSO". 2003.

⁹ UNRWA. "What is the mandate of UNRWA?". 2024.

¹⁰ United Nations. *The Question of Palestine and the United Nations*. 2008.

peace and prosperity in the region following the Second Intifada. This recent relative period of calm in Palestinian-Israeli relations was broken by a Hamas terror attack and mass hostage capture scheme in October of 2023. The UN Security Council has since issued 4 separate resolutions, *S/RES/2712*, *S/RES/2720*, *S/RES/2728*, and *S/RES/2735* on humanitarian aid and the creation of an ongoing ceasefire.

The Houthi Movement

While the Kingdom of Yemen gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and North Yemen became the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962, when the United Kingdom withdrew from Southern Yemen, a bloodless coup resulted in the creation of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen from 1967-1990 until unrest and a brief civil war in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen led to the unification of the two States into the current Republic of Yemen in 1990. The Houthi movement arose out of this unification when Hussein al-Houthi became a popular opposition figure against the first President of the Republic of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh after being accused of corruption and following orders of Saudi Arabia and the United States.

Following leads from other regional groups such as Hezbollah, the Houthi's adopted their official slogan against the United States, Israel, and Jews becoming a more militant and organized opposition group. This led the government to attempt to arrest Hussein al-Houthi and placing a bounty on his head before government forces killed him sparking a decade long Houthi insurgency from 2004 to 2014. During this insurgency there were multiple periods of armistice that would inevitably end up falling apart into conflict. Thus when the Arab Spring protests were rocking the Middle East and North Africa, the Houthi rebels utilized popular campaigns to help coopt public support in their goal of removing President Saleh from office after he proposed modifications to the constitution to grant the presidency more powers and separate executive and legislative powers through the creation of a new referendum.¹¹

This Yemeni Revolution which lasted from 2011-2012 resulted in the overthrow of the Saleh government and a new election where Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, Saleh's vice president from 1994 to 2012, was elected with 99.8% of the vote which was boycotted by the Houthi's in the north and by southern secessionists pursuing an independent South Yemen. After extending his 2 year mandate to a 3 year mandate, the Houthi's advanced on Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, capturing it in 5 days and starting the Houthi takeover of Yemen. This led to an agreement between the Houthi's and the Yemeni government in a UN brokered deal to form a unity government though this agreement fell apart in January 2015 after Houthi fighters seized control of the presidential palace in a bid to gain more influence over government and the new constitution being drafted.¹² This led to the resignation of the entire Hedi government rather than comply with Houthi demands and the next month the Houthis declared themselves in control of the Yemeni government and dissolving Parliament.

¹¹ Al Jazeera. "New constitution promised for Yemen". 2011.

¹² Heinze, Marie-Christine. "The primacy of stability over real change". 2015.

Reactions to the Houthi takeover were negative with the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, and United Nations refusing to recognize the “constitutional declaration” of the Houthis. This led to the involvement of Saudi Arabia, the United States, and other Arab and Western powers working together in airstrikes and patrols of the region with massive blockades along with sanctions and the conflict spilling out into a national civil war between the Houthis, who have been supported and provided arms from Iran, and a coalition of forces fighting under the banner of the Republic of Yemen, who are being support and armed by Saudi Arabia and their coalition of States.

Being in the midst of a conflict that has been simmering and boiling over for the last 20 years, Yemen is in a state of political, humanitarian, and developmental crisis with 24.1 million people (or 80% of it's population) in need of humanitarian aid and protection.¹³ To this end, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General from Yemen is currently serving as a coordinator for 21 agencies, funds, and specialized programmes for the peoples of Yemen. This includes mediation and negotiations in line with *S/RES/2216* through the Special Envoy, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Hand-in-Hand initiative which is helping Yemeni farmers in sustainable agriculture development, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime working in collaboration with the Yemeni government to prevent the use of child in armed conflict as outlined in *S/2021/76*, and many other bodies working to implement *S/RES/2451*.

Future Outlook

The Situation in the Middle East, including Yemen is one that has remained on the agenda of the United Nations for over 75 years and will likely remain on the agenda for another 75 years. There are many conflicts in the Middle East and nearly all of them are connected to one another in one way shape or form. In order to address and work towards solving the various conflicts in the Middle East, Member State must begin working through the all the various existing conflicts and work to untangle the fuses of dozens of powder kegs. And while each Member State has their own goals and priorities, each of the gathered Member States in the UN Security Council have the privilege of drafting and writing what very well may become international law. By finding common ground and working towards relieving the suffering of the peoples of the Middle East, peace and prosperity are yet to be found for the region. Utilizing and building on existing regional relationships to create off-ramps to peace and finding novel and innovative ways forward in peace negotiations are vital if Member States and the United Nations are to solve the situation in the Middle East.

¹³ United Nations. “The United Nations in Yemen”. 2024.

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