

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 27th UGA Model United Nations Conference! It is my pleasure to be your Chair for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation committee. My name is Roshni Saleem Chagan and I am a fourth year student here at UGA, studying International Affairs with minors in Spanish and English. This is my second year on the Model United Nations team and I am extremely excited to be your Chair! When I am not doing school work, I enjoy reading, making art, listening to music, and drinking bubble tea! Outside of Model United Nations, I am the Vice President for Refugee Outreach at UGA.

I invite you, the delegate, to be well read and compete to the best of your ability at this conference. This background guide serves as a foundation for your research, not an all-encompassing guide for preparation for this conference. It is encouraged that you go beyond your background guide and research your country's positions and these topics further. That being said, I urge and expect you to be mindful of debating responsibly, professionally, and in a culturally sensitive manner, while also treating each delegate in the committee with respect. I ask that you act with integrity and approach the topics of this committee with consideration and respect. There is a zero tolerance policy for any offensive language at this conference. I expect you to act with utmost respect for others and the countries and issues being debated over the course of the weekend.

When writing your position papers, I ask that you focus your research and response within the scope of your country and maintain this scope throughout the conference. Your speeches and contributions to resolutions over the course of the weekend should align with your country's position on the issues being debated. The resolutions that you work to craft over the course of the weekend should reflect the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and relay its mission. I would like to remind you that each nation competing in this committee is equally important. Please remember that when working on resolutions, I am looking for and valuing cooperation among each nation in attendance. At the beginning of the conference, we will review parliamentary procedure, but I urge you to review UGAMUNC rules and procedures on our website: ugamunc.com. Should you have any questions prior to the conference, please feel free to reach out to me! My email is rsc78153@uga.edu. Please submit your completed position papers to me by February 1st. Once again, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me via email. I look forward to a weekend of stimulating debate!

Best,
Roshni Saleem Chagan

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1 Topic A: Sectarian Violence in the Islamic Community

1.1 Introduction to the Topic

Sectarian violence in the Islamic community started in the year 632 and has existed since then. More recently, there have been deliberate attempts by both Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslim to engage in behaviors that risk erasure of the other. These occurrences are not solely motivated by religion but also by political power and wealth, incidentally making them issues that inherently concern human rights and human rights abuses. This section highlights **some** of the main instances in contemporary society in which sectarian violence is the driving force of the conflict.

1.2 Pakistan's Anti-Shia Sentiment

The second week of September 2020 coincided with the end of Muharram, a month in the Islamic calendar in which Muslims observe the death of Muhammad's grandson and Ali's son, Hussain. Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims observe this month for the same reasons but have different practices. Sunni Muslims have expressed discomfort with the Shia practice of self-flagellation, a practice in which Shia Muslims hurt themselves as a way to mourn the death of Hussain. This has led to Shia Muslims in Pakistan being labeled as "heretics." The weekend of September 11, 2020, 30,000 demonstrators gathered in the streets of Pakistan chanting "heretics," anti-Shia slogans, and slurs at the Shia Muslims of Pakistan. These demonstrators were supported by a Pakistani political party, Sipah-e-Sahaba, which has deliberate ties to a terrorist organization. The entire platform of this political party revolves around expelling Shia Muslims in Pakistan.¹

Before the mass demonstrations and anti-Shia hysteria during the last weekend of Muharram, in 2015, Sunni gunmen boarded a bus in Karachi, Pakistan and attacked the passengers. 40 Shia Muslims were killed and 13 were injured. However, this was not the biggest terror attack against Shia Muslims that year, as earlier in 2015, a Sunni suicide bomber left 61 Shia Muslims dead. The Middle East institute, a Non-Governmental Organization dedicated to studying affairs in the Middle East, has noted that a total of 2,000 people have been killed and 3,500 people have been injured in sectarian attacks in Pakistan over the span of five years.² A large majority of those who were victims of these attacks were members of the Shia sect of Islam. The South Asia Terrorism Portal demonstrated that the number of people killed and injured in sectarian attacks from 1989 through 2020 has an upward trend. They also noted that sectarian attacks have become increasingly deadly in Pakistan and in each instance they become more violent and deadly.³

1.3 Sectarian Violence in Iraq

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq threatened stability and the extremely delicate democracy that was left. Stability was further threatened when violence and tensions grew between Sunnis and shias, further threatening the democracy of Iraq. People who held political office failed to develop inclusive efforts to increase representation and peace among the Sunnis and Shias.⁴

Because of the role that the US played in encouraging and inciting violence in Iraq, Sunni and Shia Muslims both found the need to turn to radical armed groups to seek protection from the opposing group. In Iraq, Sunni Muslims consider themselves and see themselves as a "threatened minority" but the Shia Muslims consider themselves the "oppressed majority." The US occupation in 2003 gave rise to active insurgency in areas that had a larger Sunni population. Sunni insurgents overtime focused their efforts on attacking Shia individuals in hopes to create chaos so that they could seize political control of Iraq. In turn, Shia-driven attacks amounted and radical Shia leaders organized violent responses, creating more violence between the two groups. By 2005, Iraqi people, both Sunni and Shia, were victims of regular execution-style killings and bodies were routinely discovered around the country. Shia mosques were attacked in Baghdad and at this

¹https://www.mei.edu/publications/sectarian-violence-and-intolerance-pakistan#_ftn3

²https://www.mei.edu/publications/sectarian-violence-and-intolerance-pakistan#_ftn3

³<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/sect-killing.htm>

⁴https://carnegieendowment.org/files/iraq_sectarian_crisis.pdf

point, al-Qaeda called for increased attacks and more violent attacks against the Shia population, urging war against the entire sect.⁵

1.4 Sectarian Conflicts and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian Refugee Crisis is one of the world's largest refugee crises. 5.6 million Syrians are refugees, 6.2 million people are displaced within Syria, and 12 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance. It is important to note that half of the people affected by this refugee crisis are children.⁶

While the Syrian Refugee Crisis is a human rights crisis and a refugee crisis, it began as a sectarian conflict that resulted in civil war. The Shia and Sunni groups oppose each other religiously and politically, causing uprisings and tensions between the two groups. Bashar al-Assad is a member of the Alawite community, which is a smaller sect of Shia Islam. When a group of demonstrators protested in 2011 against al-Assad's regime, the security detail of al-Assad began using violence against these demonstrators and for anyone who did not support the regime. The demonstrators were protesting for democracy because the rule of Syria has been under the al-Assad family for generations.

The violence grew larger and a battle of democratic representation turned into a civil war. The crisis has sectarian overtones because the majority of Syrians are Sunni but al-Assad is Shia and has only ever enacted policy that benefits Shia Muslims. The Sunni population and Shia population saw this not as a battle between citizens and the government, rather a battle between themselves, resulting in radicalized efforts between both groups. The sectarian overtone of this conflict is what contributed to the rise of the Islamic State (IS/ISIS).⁷

1.5 History of the Topic

The sectarian conflicts within the Islamic community started after the death of the Islamic Prophet, Muhammad, and still persist today. While there definitely are countries in which Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims have positive relations, conversely, there are countries in which Shia and Sunni Muslims are at points of contention with one another. Conflict between the two sects has never really been solved and exists at different points of time.

In 632, after the death of the prophet, Muhammad, the original split between Shia and Sunni Muslims occurred. Most of the Prophet's followers wanted the community of Muslims to decide amongst themselves to determine who would succeed him.⁸ However, there was a small group of Muslims who believed that someone from Muhammad's family should succeed him. This small group was the Shia Muslims who believed that Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, should succeed him.

Ultimately, the Sunni Muslims prevailed and were able to choose a successor to be the first caliph.⁹ The Shia community was upset that the Sunnis outnumbered them and were able to choose the caliph and the Sunnis were upset at the fact that the Shias were upset. Eventually, violence and conflict broke out and two of the earliest caliphs were murdered. When Ali, the man who the Shia Muslims originally wanted to succeed the Prophet, was chosen as the fourth caliph, war erupted among the two sects of Muslims and he was killed in 661 near the town of Kufa, present-day Iraq. The amount of violence and war divided the Muslim community into two divisions that would never reunite.

Conflict between the two groups continued well after Ali's death, when Ali's son, Hussein, was chosen to lead the Shias. Hussein rejected the rule of the present caliph and encouraged 72 members of his family and

⁵<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1018iraq-al-khalidi.pdf>

⁶<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>

⁷<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

⁸<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2007/02/12/7332087/the-origins-of-the-shiite-sunni-split#:~:text=The%20original%20spl>

⁹A caliph is the head Islamic political, civil, and religious ruler.

friends to unite with him and fight against the Arab army of the present Sunni caliph. This conflict is more prominently known as the Battle of Karbala, a fight which ultimately led to the massacre of Hussein and his 72 supporters. Hussein was violently killed by decapitation and his head was carried in tribute to the caliphate in Damascus, Syria.

Despite their differences, Sunni and Shia Muslims have lived in relative peace for the most part of history, but starting in the 20th century, the schism between the two deepened severely. Many scholars attribute this to the fact that people were becoming more politically aware in these spaces. This resulted in many Sunnis and Shias in the Middle East using their politically-charged views of religion for religious and political supremacy over one another. It was no longer about who would lead the religious community, but which member of which sect would possess political power.

The rise of the Safavid dynasty forcefully transformed the religious salience of Iran from being a Sunni-centric country to being a Shia-centric country. The Safavid Sufi Order essentially used religious poetry and literature to transform the country. This poetry and literature would later be used as religious and political propaganda.¹⁰ The Safavid rule played an integral role in inciting hatred among the two groups because of the force they used to expel Sunnism. Another historical event that contributed to a deeper schism between the two groups was the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1979. The Islamic Revolution of Iran brought together people of Iran to oppose Mohammad Reza Shah's role in the White Revolution, which essentially was a modernization program that empowered only the rich people of Iran, causing concerns of human rights violations and disruptions in rural economies of Iran. Eventually, the youth of Iran came together and protested the regime.¹¹ The protests were violent until martial law was imposed. The Prime Minister, Shapur Bakhtiar went into hiding and found exile in France, prompting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to establish Iran as an Islamic Republic, destroying the monarch's rule.

The Safavid Empire's rule and the Islamic Revolution of Iran played immense roles in radicalizing a brand of Shia Islam that clashed heavily with conservative Sunni Muslims in Saudi Arabia and eventually in other countries following.¹² The Sunni-Shia schism fueled civil war in Syria, fighting in Lebanon, and tensions in Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. Both sides, Sunni and Shia, were guilty of using threats of terrorism against one another. Conversely, there are many more Muslim-majority countries that have populations of Sunni and Shia Muslims that coexist in peace, proving that these tensions and struggles are not fueled by religion, but wealth and power.

1.6 Vocabulary

- **Ali:** Muhammad's son-in-law and also the man nominated by Shia Muslims to succeed Muhammad
- **Cleric:** A religious leader
- **Hussain:** Ali's son who succeeded Ali and was killed in the Battle of Karbala
- **Muhammad:** last prophet of Islam
- **Safavid Dynasty:** a ruling dynasty in Iran most known for establishing Shia Islam as the official religion of Iran, operated in the 16th-18th centuries
- **Schism:** divisions between two opposing parties
- **Sectarian:** concerning different sects of one thing
- **Shia Muslims:** Muslims who believed that someone related to Muhammad should become successor
- **Sunni Muslims:** Muslims who believed that someone within the community should succeed Muhammad as leader of the religion

¹⁰<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/atd-tcc-worldciv2/chapter/safavid-empire/>

¹¹<https://www.britannica.com/event/Iranian-Revolution>

¹²<https://www.history.com/news/sunni-shia-divide-islam-muslim>

1.7 Sectarian Violence and its Relevance to the International Community

The current efforts to address sectarian violence have been limited. The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has issued a plan of action to address sectarian violence in communities. The United Nations has also proposed something called the “Fez Process” in which religious leaders, members of the United Nations, clerics, and government officials united to discuss problems within religious communities and find ways to solve them before they lead to human rights abuses.

The OIC specifically has curated its membership terms and its charter to ensure that member states are inclusive of different sects of Islam and have terms of treating members of the organization and the communities they represent with fairness. The OIC charter has also set up penalties and consequences that member states will face if they are unable to control sectarian violence within their own communities.¹³ Though this may be what is written in the charter, the OIC has traditionally remained extremely neutral and complacent in issues. The OIC also remained silent in 2016 when a prominent Shia cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr was executed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.¹⁴

1.8 How has the OIC handled this issue or issues similar?

The OIC has handled a similar issue. They met to deliberate over the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran is a Shia majority state and Saudi Arabia is a Sunni majority state. Saudi Arabia also considers itself as the leading Muslim power, causing inherent tensions among itself and other Islamic nations. The two nations are neighbors, causing there to be border tensions and regional struggles, both of which Iran ends up winning.¹⁵ Though the issue was brought to the attention of OIC member states, when Saudi Arabia isolated Iran, it just proved to deepen the sectarian rifts within the OIC. The OIC did not hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its actions of violence against Iran, causing there to be a bigger rift and also causing distrust among the Shia community and the OIC. Shia Muslims now question the OIC’s independence and ability to stand in solidarity with all Muslims, not just Sunni Muslims. This has also been identified as a gap of credibility between practices and ideals of the OIC.¹⁶

1.9 Driving Questions

- How would social welfare and community empowerment play a role in Pakistan’s sectarian conflict?
- How does the political system of a state play a role in the existence of sectarian violence?
- How can the OIC remain objective and bridge the communication gap between Shia and Sunni majority countries respectively?
- What concrete efforts can the United Nations take to combat sectarian violence?
- Think about how political elitism plays a role in religious elitism. More specifically, consider how clerics may retain religious and political influence within their communities.

1.10 Suggested Readings

- https://www.mei.edu/publications/sectarian-violence-and-intolerance-pakistan#_ftn3
- <https://www.history.com/news/sunni-shia-divide-islam-muslim>
- https://carnegieendowment.org/files/iraq_sectarian_crisis.pdf
- https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1018iraq_al-khalidi.pdf

¹³https://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/library/doclib/20140815_OICMemo5.pdf

¹⁴<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-iran-saudi-arabia-conflict-and-its-impact-the-organization-islamic-cooperation>

¹⁵<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42008809>

¹⁶<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-iran-saudi-arabia-conflict-and-its-impact-the-organization-islamic-cooperation>

2 Topic B: Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

2.1 Introduction to the Topic

Armenia announced a declaration of Martial Law on September 27, 2020. The enactment of martial law mobilized the Armenian army and ordered civilians to seek shelter. Armenia announced martial law because they had reason to believe that their neighboring country, Azerbaijan, launched a military operation into Nagorno-Karabakh. This region is internationally recognized as territory belonging to Azerbaijan, but most of its population is Armenian who have lived under the rule of Azeris for more than a century. Nagorno-Karabakh has been a point of contention for both Azeris and Armenians but in the past two years, there have been possible and progressive peace talks. Though relative peace existed for some time, conflict erupted again on September 27, 2020, causing Armenian military, Azerbaijani troops and the Nagorno-Karabakh forces to fight with one another. This fighting has resulted in the death of 400 civilians and hundreds were left injured. Azerbaijan claims to have seized the Nagorno-Karabakh territory while Armenians believe this could not be further from the truth.¹⁷

In 2018, the Armenian Revolution ushered new leadership efforts in the country in hopes that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would move towards some sort of resolution. Armenia's prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, took a firm stance on the issue instead of discussing and debating with Azerbaijan. The pandemic took a toll on Azerbaijan's oil and gas economy, they sought territorial gains as a way to absolve themselves of that. Azerbaijan entered the territory under the claims that it is responding to Armenian aggression in areas that are legally the territories of Azerbaijan. These territories have been historically occupied by enemy troops and separatists.¹⁸

On September 27, Armenia claimed that Azerbaijan's military was instructed to bomb civilian settlements in the Nagorno-Karabakh territory. In response to their actions, Armenia's defense ministry claimed to have downed two Azerbaijani military helicopters and three drones in response to the civilian bombings. In response to Armenia's claims, Azerbaijan's defense ministry announced that it had launched a "counteroffensive" attack with tanks, war planes, missiles, and drones into the Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

2.2 History of the Topic

Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked region inside the official borders of Azerbaijan. However, regardless of its location inside Azeri territory, the population is mostly made up of Armenians. The territory is both populated and controlled by ethnic Armenians and is considered to be extremely militarized. This has been a source of contention since before the Soviet Union was created. Tensions were at bay when Armenia and Azerbaijan were Soviet states but as soon as Communism fell, tensions re-emerged.

In 1994, a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended in a ceasefire and resulted in Armenia retaining control of the Nagorno-Karabakh territory along with certain enclaves of territory located within Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a Muslim-majority country and Armenia is a Christian-majority country, adding an angle of religion into this conflict but this also becomes convoluted when discussing Azerbaijan's relationship and support of Israel.¹⁹ While Azerbaijan maintains strong defense ties to Israel, Armenia is backed by the Russian army. Russia and Turkey are on opposing sides of this issue. Turkey has maintained support for its ally, Azerbaijan. Erdogan, the Turkish President, believes that Azerbaijan should retain control over the area and has pledged to support the country in whichever way it needs to be supported during this conflict. Russia is a consistent supporter of Armenia in both weapons and diplomacy. Tensions between Russia and Turkey are escalating as well because of the way Turkey has been imposing its will under the former Soviet-controlled area. Conversely, Putin has a strong relationship with the Azerbaijani president,

¹⁷<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/why-are-armenia-and-azerbaijan-fighting-what-are-implications>

¹⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/why-are-armenia-and-azerbaijan-fighting-what-are-implications>

¹⁹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/why-are-armenia-and-azerbaijan-fighting-what-are-implications>

Ilham Aliyev.²⁰

2.3 Relevance to the International Community

Turkey, according to multiple international actors and sources, has worsened matters by arming Azerbaijan and expressing that they will back the country regardless of its stances. Turkey has actively been seeking more influence in the region by fully backing its ally, Azerbaijan. Turkey and Azerbaijan share ties because of the Turkic ethnic minority that exists in Azerbaijan. Turkey has fully backed Azerbaijan and has explained that it will back Azerbaijan in whatever capacity is necessary.²¹ Weapons and training, specifically 1,000 Syrian fighters to aid Azerbaijan in case a war erupts.²²

Russia possesses a formal military alliance with Armenia but also maintains close relations with Azerbaijan, as both of the countries existed under Soviet influence before Communism fell. Russia, France, and the United States delegated the diplomatic processes between the two sides, encouraging both to come to an agreement about the issue.²³ France, the United States, and Russia have all said that both Armenia and Azerbaijan should exercise restraint.²⁴

The United States State Department has urged both sides to cease hostilities and use direct communication links to avoid further escalation of conflict. Iran has called for an immediate end to the conflict and has also decided that it is ready to help establish a ceasefire. Turkey, as mentioned before, has decided to fully support Azerbaijan in any capacity.²⁵ While the United Nations has not taken official action to mitigate conflict, the Secretary General has voiced extreme concerns and has called on both sides to immediately stop fighting.²⁶

2.4 Vocabulary:

- **Communism:** political ideology in which property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs
- **Enclaves:** a portion of territory that is surrounded by a larger territory whose inhabitants are ethnically distinct
- **Nagorno-Karabakh:** a landlocked region in Azerbaijan that has an ethnic-Armenian population

2.5 How has the OIC handled this issue or issues similar?

The OIC has actively condemned Armenia's attack on Azerbaijan and has called for a politically-driven solution to the conflict at hand.²⁷ They have however actively involved themselves in territorial disputes, namely in the Philippines after the 1964 insurrection.²⁸ The OIC also played a role in the Yemen Conflict, but has received severe backlash for the role it played. Many started questioning the credibility of the OIC because of its eagerness to take a side.²⁹

2.6 Driving Questions

- How can the OIC assist the ethnic-Armenians in Azerbaijani territory preserve their culture?

²⁰<https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/28/europe/azerbaijan-armenia-clashes-explainer-intl/index.html>

²¹<https://www.vox.com/21507583/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-explained>

²²<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/02/syrian-recruit-describes-role-of-foreign-fighters-in-nagorno-karabakh>

²³<https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-calling-for-a-ceasefire-in-nagorno-karabakh/>

²⁴<https://www.vox.com/21507583/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-explained>

²⁵<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/27/armenia-azerbaijan-clashes-world-reactions>

²⁶https://twitter.com/UN_Spokesperson/status/1310292951256518658?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1310292951256518658

²⁷<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/oic-condemns-armenias-attacks-on-azerbaijan/1988811>

²⁸<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Sharqieh-November-2012-OIC.pdf>

²⁹<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/09/13/yemen-conflict-and-oic-the-role-of-the-powerful-states/>

- What role does the OIC play in potential erasure of an entire ethnic group?
- What can the OIC do to preserve Islamic values of Azerbaijan while also reaching a solution that is reflective of the wants and needs of Armenia?
- Consider how the outcome of this committee can impact aspects such as education, food security, and healthcare access for ethnic-Armenians.

2.7 Suggested Readings

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/why-are-armenia-and-azerbaijan-fighting-what-are-impl>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/28/europe/azerbaijan-armenia-clashes-explainer-intl/index.html>
- <https://www.vox.com/21507583/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-explained>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/27/armenia-azerbaijan-clashes-world-reactions>

3 Topic C: The Yemen War

3.1 Introduction to the Topic:

The United Nations has deemed the events that are taking place in Yemen as, “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.”³⁰

The crisis has multiple parties involved. The Houthi movement championed cultural and religious revivalism among the Zaidi Shia Muslims in northern Yemen. The Sunni Muslims are the majority in Yemen, leaving the Zaidis as an extreme minority within the population. However, the Zaidi Muslims are concentrated predominantly in the northern highlands along the border of Saudi Arabia.

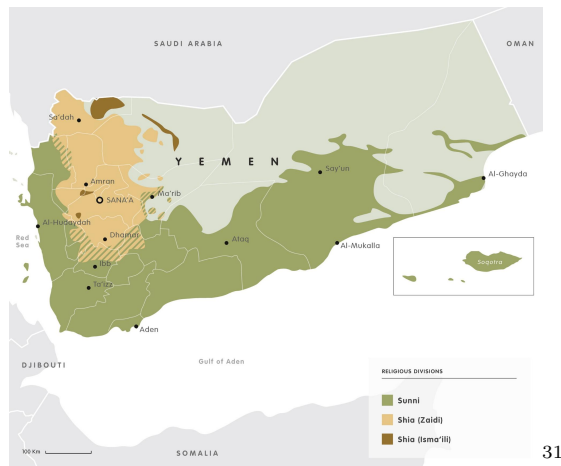


Figure 1: Zaidi Shia Muslims Concentration

the country and seek asylum, forcing them to face and live with these problems. Essentially, this fight is not between Yemen and another actor. Saudi Arabia and Iran are fighting with one another over who they support to be in control over Yemen. However, it is the Yemeni people who are being affected the most by the actions of Saudi Arabia and Iran.³³

The situation in Yemen has been dubbed a “proxy war” among many actors on the international stage. A civil war has broken out and claimed more than 17,500 lives in Yemen, has left 13 million people to the brink of starvation and has left 20 million people to experience food insecurity. Yemen is not only facing a civil war but also a famine as a result of it. People in Yemen do not have access to food, water, and shelter as a result of two groups fighting on behalf of Saudi Arabia and Iran.³² The access to essential resources has been blocked because deliveries of these resources have been restricted as a result of roads and buildings being destroyed in the civil war.

More than 3.5 million people have been forced to flee from their homes but because of closed airports, blocked borders, and the ongoing pandemic, many are unable to leave

3.2 History of the Topic:

The Yemen conflict is rooted in the failure of a political transition. An Arab Spring uprising forced the longtime authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in early 2011. This political transition was supposed to bring stability to Yemen. Once assuming the role of president, Hadi struggled to address and solve a variety of problems such as terrorist attacks, corruption, unemployment, and food insecurity.

Before forced to concede his power, Saleh was confronted by Yemen’s Zaidi Shia Muslim minority. This group fought a series of rebellions against Saleh and as soon as the transition between presidencies took place, they capitalized off of the new president, Hadi’s, weakness by taking control of a province named Saada and neighboring areas. The Zaidi Shia Muslim minority believes that the Saada province is their northern heartland. Opposing groups, such as Sunnis and Houthis, decided to gradually take over the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, in response to the Zaidis establishing themselves in the Saada province. The Houthis and Sunnis remain partial

³⁰<https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/peace-human-rights-and-humanitarian-response/yemen-a-brief-background/>

³²<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/38317367>

³³<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/38317367>

to Saleh whereas the Zaidis extremely disliked him. Because of the Houthis' loyalty to Saleh, they decided to take control of the entire country, prompting the current president, Hadi, to flee the country in March 2015.³⁴

Hadi's decision to flee the country left the Houthis in practical and legal control of the institutional legacies of Yemen. The Houthis' leadership and control over Yemen did not go over well. A Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen began, and one of their biggest goals was to oust the Houthi military and reverse their military conquest of Yemen. They ultimately wanted to restore the Hadi government and secure Saudi Arabia's southern border to make it free from raids, air-strikes, and interference. Though all of these factors played a role in the escalation of the Yemen crisis today, there are several other factors that also contributed to this humanitarian crisis.

Under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund, the IMF, Yemen was extended a \$550 million loan on the promise that the country would engage in economic reforms. The Hadi government had lifted fuel subsidies in July of 2014, causing the Houthis to organize mass protests in demand for lowering fuel prices and a new government. Hadi's supporters countered the Houthis demands and efforts, resulting in subsidy backlash to be a factor that contributed heavily to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Another factor was the Houthi takeover. The Houthis captured the capital, Sanaa, leading the Hadi government to resign and flee the country. Military division also plays an immense role in this conflict because the military units that remain loyal to Saleh, indirectly loyal to the Houthis, aligned themselves with military efforts of Houthis, which contributed to much of their success on the battlefield. Those who were in support of the Hadi government ramped up their calls for secession in the south of Yemen. Saudi intervention was just another factor that escalated this conflict because of their intervention after Hadi fled the country. Riyadh, a city in Saudi Arabia and consequently the capital, launched a military campaign using primarily airstrikes to push out the Houthis and restore the control of Sanaa to the Hadi administration.³⁵

3.3 Relevance to the International Community

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2216 in April 2015. This resolution endorsed the political goals of the Saudi military in that they wanted the Houthi military to surrender and return to the United Nations for facilitated and moderated discussions.³⁶ The World Food Programme, the WFP, has reached 9.5 million people in Yemen with food assistance and will expand operations to reach 12 million people a month, including the 10 million who remain at the most risk of a famine. The WFP has also vowed to reach the 2 million people who are "acutely vulnerable internally displaced peoples."³⁷ Along with the efforts of the WFP, the United Nations Security Council has authorized the immediate deployment of its Advance Team to monitor force withdrawals, ceasefire in Yemen, and adopting Resolution 2451.³⁸

Saudi Arabia has played an immense role in this conflict because their military involvement has escalated this conflict further. The UAE has also played a significant military role in this conflict when it supplied about 10,000 ground troops in the south of Yemen to help coalition fighters that were supplied by Eritrea, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.³⁹ The United States Congress has been divided on this matter, as the US has backed the Saudi-led military coalition along with countries such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The US has particular interest in this conflict because it wants stability in Yemen, secure borders along Saudi Arabia, free passage in the Bab Al-Mandeb strait, and Yemen's support (specifically from Sanaa) in US counterterrorism programs.⁴⁰

Overall, involvement in this crisis has been substantial but not enough to mitigate or lessen the impact of this proxy war. The crisis in Yemen is becoming known and unfolding as the world's worst humanitarian crisis and international action within the right capacity is what will help aid Yemeni people and the country

³⁴<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>

³⁵<https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>

³⁶<https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/peace-human-rights-and-humanitarian-response/yemen-a-brief-background/>

³⁷<https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-13>

³⁸<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13643.doc.htm>

³⁹<https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>

⁴⁰<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R45046.pdf>

itself.

3.4 Vocabulary:

- **Zaidi Shia Muslims:** Zaidi Shias are the oldest sect of Shia Islam. They are a small minority focused in Yemen.
- **Houthis:** group focused on empowering and centering governance around Zaidi Shia Islam.
- **Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi:** Yemeni politician who fled the country when the capital and northern region of Yemen were captured.
- **Ali Abdullah Saleh:** Yemeni politician who was ousted for authoritarian control over the country

3.5 How has the OIC handled this issue or issues similar?

The OIC supports the end of this conflict. Even though the OIC has expressed interest in moderating between actors and reaching an end to this conflict, the credibility of the OIC to be able to handle this issue has come under fire. The entire reason the OIC was created was to mitigate conflict between Islamic countries, yet conflicts exist so prominently among Islamic countries. The OIC vowed to be objective when it came to issues between Sunni and Shia Muslims but now it is taking sides in this instance, which is contributing to its failure to solve the Yemen conflict.

The OIC also has to give more attention to Saudi Arabia because it is a leading state of the Arab League and the Arab League states have a strong bloc in the OIC. Saudi Arabia consistently abuses its religious position in Islam to construe the actions of the OIC and other governing bodies in a particular way. The OIC must act in accordance with the alliances it is a part of but also do something as the second largest intergovernmental organization in the world after the United Nations.⁴¹

3.6 Driving Questions

- How can the OIC maintain its position within the alliances it is a part of but also effectively aid Yemen?
- Consider the role Saudi Arabia plays in governance in Yemen.
- Consider how your assigned role will take into account religious boundaries and expectations when working to solve this conflict.
- How can the OIC influence the Arab League to take concrete actions against Saudi Arabia and Iran for this humanitarian conflict.

3.7 Suggested Readings

- <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/09/13/yemen-conflict-and-oic-the-role-of-the-powerful-states/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/38317367>
- <https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>
- <https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/peace-human-rights-and-humanitarian-response/yemen-a-br>

⁴¹<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/09/13/yemen-conflict-and-oic-the-role-of-the-powerful-states/>