

PATHWAYS FOR PEACE & STABILITY IN YEMEN

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Search for Common Ground

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Search for Common Ground in Yemen

Search has worked in Yemen since 2010, with an all-Yemeni team based in Sana'a working throughout the country to build sustainable peace, facilitate constructive dialogue, and increase local capacity for non-violent solutions. We primarily work with civil society organizations, youth, teachers, and media professionals, empowering them to bridge divides within their own communities and promote social cohesion at the local level. Search-Yemen's project *Unifying Yemen to Stand Up Against Violence* has received international praise and was a finalist for the Classy Award for the top 100 most innovative non-profits and enterprises of 2016. Since the outbreak of war in 2015, Search has continued its support and programs to local organizations committed to peace. As one of the few international peace and conflict organizations still working on the ground in Yemen, Search connects local-level initiatives and expertise with national and international policymakers and experts to ensure that local voices and local solutions are at the forefront of decision-making. Search-Yemen promotes recognition of opportunities for positive action to reduce divisions and promote peace despite the ongoing conflict, and creates pockets of stability through its programs that sow the seeds for peace.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2015, Yemen has experienced an escalating armed conflict and complex humanitarian emergency, killing more than 10,000 Yemenis and displacing over 3.1 million people of a total population of 27 million. An untold number of Yemenis have died from second-order effects, including the collapse of the health system and shortages of food, water, and medicine. The United Nations estimates that an average of 75 people have been killed or injured every day since the start of the conflict.¹ As of May 2017, over 17 million people are facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity as a result of the conflict, a 10 percent increase in just five months,² and more than 40,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported, with estimates that the total number could escalate to more than 300,000 cases by the end of 2017.³ The war in Yemen is defined by four major conflicts over political control between the national, regional, and international forces: 1) the national conflict between the Houthis and the Hadi government; 2) the regional fight between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners and Iran; 3) the violent extremist organizations that are taking advantage of the conflict to entrench themselves in local communities across Yemen; and 4) the sectarian and tribal divides that are affecting local power dynamics.

Yemen's national conflict is straining relationships within communities, entrenching divisions along pre-existing lines while also creating new ones. Prior to the current war, tensions existed between different tribal groups, political parties, and between north and south Yemen. While these divisions are not new, the violence has reinforced suspicion and mistrust from conflicting groups. Local gangs and militarized groups have restricted movement on roads between north and south Yemen to those born outside the region. In Aden, frustration with the lack of stability and continued feelings of marginalization from the central government have renewed calls for southern separatism. Other new divisions are emerging as well. Divisions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects in Sana'a, for instance, have grown increasingly prominent and divided Muslim communities. Community gatherings in mosques had previously united individuals from differing social and religious affiliations, but political associations with sects (e.g. Zaidi Shi'a Muslims with the Houthi movement) have made worship exclusive affairs held in separate locations for different sects. In Taiz governorate in the south, conflicts over humanitarian assistance and access to local services between IDP and host communities have resulted in violence and reinforced regionalist or tribal affiliations as a source for conflict.⁴ Region of birth, religious belief, and tribal affiliation are core beliefs and affiliations tied to an individual. When these perceptions and divisions turn violent, they entrench ingrained identity disputes at the heart of the conflict,

1 United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview." *Reliefweb*. United Nations, Jan. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/YEMEN%202017%20HNO_Final.pdf>.

2 United Nations. "Briefing by the Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs." 10 Mar. 2017. Web. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_7897.pdf>; USAID. "Yemen Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #10 | May 25, 2017 | U.S. Agency for International Development." *USAID*. N.p., 25 May 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/05.25.17%20-%20USG%20Yemen%20Complex%20Emergency%20Fact%20Sheet%20%2310.pdf>>

3 USAID, 2017., Miles, Tom. "Yemen Cholera Cases Could Hit 300,000 within Six Months: WHO." 19 May 2017. *Reuters*. Web. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-cholera-idUSKCN18F0Z3>>.

4 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Shamayatein District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Ma'afer District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016.

further undermining peace and stability.

Despite growing divides, there remain possibilities for peace. All four major conflict dimensions must be addressed to bring peace to Yemen, but right now, **the most promising avenue for change is to address the deepening sectarian and tribal divides at the local level.** Attempts at politically negotiated peace have not reached agreement and militarized groups benefit from instability. Yemenis cite frustration with enduring the incessant conflict and violence and express their exhaustion as a motivator for peace.⁵ Even in situations of tension between IDPs and host communities in Taiz, Amran, and Ibb, host communities express sympathy for the plight of the displaced.⁶ New actors are also emerging that can bridge divides. Women maintain connections across tribal, religious, and political divides given their shared status as women and are key influencers in the formal and informal education of youth. As the conflict grows in intensity and money becomes more scarce, women are growing in their household status as they bring in much needed incomes.⁷ State functions, such as managing resources and liaising with humanitarian organizations, have largely been undertaken by cities, Local Councils, and civil society organizations in the absence of central control. Local civil society organizations and traditional leaders can help bridge operational difficulties as they are already present in society and hold authority within their communities. The international community has the opportunity right now to build inclusive platforms for peace. Even as the national and international conflict dynamics persist, communities can choose to reject violence and protect themselves from descending into a perpetual cycle of conflict.

Any successful attempt at peace and stability in Yemen must then depend on the status of three factors: 1) the degree of popular acceptance for peace and coexistence; 2) the degree to which representative mediators and interlocutors work to implement the deal within their community and provide services; and 3) the degree to which the public accepts the validity of a peace deal. Despite ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis, this type of work cannot wait until after a political agreement is settled. If local conflicts and communal divisions continue to escalate, then there will be no constituency for an end to the conflict. A high-level peace arrangement that achieves political agreement will not resonate with divided communities, leaving a peace process but limited prospects for peace. Previous attempts at peace in Yemen have failed to prepare and include communities and were ultimately unsuccessful. Local mediators and interlocutors can both respond to local needs and grievances, but also bridge the divide between national and local to reflect interests at a higher scale. Addressing the growing divides within communities now and working to reconcile differences on the local level will engage conflicting groups to peacefully coexist, identify mechanisms and leaders for handling disputes, and create the channels to feed local interests and concerns into national processes.

5 Search for Common Ground. Focus Group Discussions in Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb Governorates. April 2017.

6 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Shamayatein District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016.

7 CARE, 2016. "No Future for Yemen Without Women and Girls - Policy Brief: October 2016." 2 Dec. 2016. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/no-future-yemen-without-women-and-girls-policy-brief-october-2016>>

Recommendations:

To promote popular acceptance for peace and coexistence:

- **Empower local leaders to work across dividing lines to manage disputes.** Yemen has strong formal and informal leaders across society engaged in a variety of social issues. Tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, local governance actors, and local civil society organizations (CSOs) hold considerable authority and more resonance with peers than actors perceived to be representing an outside entity. The international community should provide financial and political support to these civilian leaders to listen to complaints and grievances and develop mechanisms for inclusive and transparent responses. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can play critical bridging, convening, and technical capacity-building roles. Local leaders can leverage the capacity of INGOs as international civil society institutions to enhance skills, provide unique opportunities to influence change, and connect networks of like-minded practitioners across the country.
- **Support local level peacebuilding as a tool to address local drivers for violence and prevent escalation of violence.** As the international community responds to the crisis in Yemen, there must be multi-faceted support to address the drivers and consequences of the war. The impacts of the current war have resulted in the absence and/or weakening of the central government and the ability of government structures to manage conflict and violence. Current strategies prioritize response via humanitarian assistance but do not adequately assist in stopping the crisis in the first place and ensuring that further divides are not entrenched, paving the way for more conflict in the future. The United States, United Nations, World Bank, and other donors should support a holistic assistance strategy that includes funding for conflict transformation, community dialogue and mediation, and cultural exchange for local leaders within the country to engage communities across dividing lines to resolve disputes and preserve amiable societal relationships.
- **Support to media to promote neutral reporting and non-militarized norms for governance and security.** There needs to be greater commitment to supporting those neutral reporting agencies that exist, enhancing their skills and reach, and promoting new sources of unbiased reporting. Social media can provide space for exchange, particularly among youth, to create connections across divides and geographical distance. It also enables people to access reliable information about conflict and possibilities for engagement with government and humanitarian actors. In addition, programming such as media programming, participatory theater, and cultural exchanges which promote cross-cultural understanding can help to dismantle growing sectarian, tribal, political, and regional divides at the community level.
- **Preserve the education space for learning and development of the new generation.** International donors can support the Ministry of Education to continue the provision of education services and to adopt a curriculum based on non-violent conflict resolution. The Ministry of Education remains one of the better functioning ministries and continues to support schools throughout the country. Many schools have been coopted by IDPs for housing, commandeered by fighting groups, or destroyed by the conflict and thus no longer function as education facilities. Moreover, schools that were previously

neutral community gathering places are being infiltrated by violence as the greater communal divides are being replicated within classrooms. The generation of youth will be the leaders of peace in Yemen, but are being absorbed into a culture of violence and denied a chance to continue learning.

To promote local mediators and interlocutors within communities:

- **Distribute humanitarian assistance with transparency and accompany with peacebuilding and dialogue forums.** The distribution of aid continues to be a source of conflict that further entrenches societal divisions. As the humanitarian crisis endures, humanitarian responders must ensure that the provision of aid is conflict-sensitive and does not exacerbate local conflict dynamics across geographic, sectarian, or political divides. Humanitarian actors should look to not only prevent the escalation of violence, but also use humanitarian assistance as an entry point for peacebuilding. The provision of aid can be a major opportunity to bring communities together when done correctly.
- **Support inclusive and responsive local governance structures.** In the absence of centralized governmental control, many institutions, such as Executive Units, Local Councils, and civil society, have come forth to fill the void to deliver services and manage disputes at the local level. As local governance structures struggle to fulfill basic duties and are challenged by varying perceptions of legitimacy from local communities, systems must be developed to continue the provision of services while also strengthening inclusive decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms in cooperation with local communities. International actors, such as the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union can help create referral and reporting systems between civil society, local governance authorities, and national and international NGOs to manage coordination of service delivery.

To promote public acceptance of negotiated peace arrangements:

- **Ensure that peace processes are inclusive, participatory, and representative.** As the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, among others, host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they should ensure that a peace process is participatory and representative across society. Human rights organizations and other international institutions should support impartial social and traditional media to report on the status of negotiations to the community-level.
- **Feed grassroots reconciliation and peacebuilding into national peace dialogues.** An international, negotiated ceasefire and/or peace process will not guarantee peace and stability across the country. Previous peace attempts in Yemen, most recently the National Dialogue Conference in 2011, did not adequately incorporate local groups into the process and ultimately were unsuccessful in establishing peace. As international donors host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they must be paired with simultaneous community dialogues, town hall meetings, and other civic education and engagement platforms to sensitize and engage communities if they hope to be successful at ending the war and building a stable Yemen. Bottom-up approaches to peace that build trust and stability at the local level can meet top-down political negotiations led by national and international actors to form a sustainable approach that Yemenis believe in.

INTRODUCTION

Yemen has experienced two years of civil war. Violence and the humanitarian crisis now reach all Yemenis, diplomatic attempts at peace negotiations and ceasefires in 2016 were unsuccessful, and social cohesion⁸ at the local-level continues to disintegrate. Yet the current situation in Yemen is not ripe for a military or high-level diplomatic solution to take hold because it will be undermined by the existing and deepening conflicts at the local level. Societal divides – tribal, sectarian, regional, and political – are deepening and remain the critical lever for peace and stability. No national or international process can be successful and sustainable without targeted support to local level efforts to address these divides.

Context

Yemen is a mountainous country on the Arabian Peninsula that borders Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the Red Sea. As one of the longest continuously inhabited countries in the world, Yemen has evolved into a diverse population of 27 million people with layers of shared history. From antiquity through the modern age, Yemen has been parceled and ruled by succeeding empires, caliphates, and tribes. The modern regional and social divisions between North and South, however, are rooted in the early twentieth century when the Ottoman and British empires divided Yemen into separate spheres of influence under each of their control, effectively creating an Ottoman North and a British South. From this point, the two regions moved along very different political and economic trajectories through the twentieth century, solidifying this division through the development of different social structures. Briefly, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Northern Yemen transitioned to a Zaidi Kingdom,⁹ which ruled until the establishment of an Arab Republic in 1962. In South Yemen, the British maintained control until 1967. Following British withdrawal, the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen formed with Soviet support. The divergent path – between a Kingdom turn republic, and a colony turn socialist state – set the template for the regional divisions seen today.

Control of Yemen remained split along this geographic division until 1990 when the North and South adopted a constitution, which unified the two states under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former leader of North Yemen. The two states came together to explore natural resources and to demilitarize the border; however, this unity was short-lived. Disputes over power sharing in the new government prompted southern leaders to declare the south a separate state once again and civil war erupted in Yemen in 1994 over southern secession.

8 Social cohesion is the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other towards common goals to survive and prosper.

9 The Zaidi Shi'a sect of Islam emerged in the eighth century. Shi'a Islam is divided into three main groupings: Twelvers, Ismailis, and Zaidis. Zaidi Shi'a Muslims believe that there are five Imams who are the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, opposed to the seven believed by Ismailis, and the twelve believed by Twelvers. Modern Zaidism is considered close to Shafi'i Islam in its current practice. Salmoni, Barak A., Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells. "Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon." *RAND National Defense Research Institute*. RAND Corporation, 2010. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG962.pdf>

Over the centuries, the influence of the tribes on its members has fluctuated in response to the various incursions of outside actors and from internal political movements. The rise of conflict in the 1990s reinforced the regional division between north and south, but also revived the role of tribal authorities and structures in relation to or in absence of the central state. In the north, the central state had limited influence outside of the major population centers, so most tribal areas maintained many of their own governance structures. In southern governorates, where the implementation of socialist ideology repressed and dismantled many tribal allegiances prior to unification, regional identity became the coalescing factor. However, since the end of the 1994 civil war, tribal repression has subsided allowing new Sheikhs (i.e. tribal leaders) and past tribal histories to emerge, as well as reigniting old grievances. Tribal identity is recapturing its foothold, often fulfilling state functions, such as social order, dispute resolution, and economic support, in the absence of state control.

Despite the resurgence of tribal identity in the south, there is a marked difference between the tribal structures in Yemen's governorates today. Governorates with stronger tribal affiliations, such as Sa'adah, Amran, Al Jawf, Ma'arib, Al Bayda', and Ad Dali', correspond with historical North Yemen. In other governorates, especially those in the south such as Al Hodeidah, Ibb, Taiz, Hadramawt, and Al Mahrah, tribal structures are still recapturing their traditional position and while tribal leaders hold authoritative roles in society, Yemenis in these governorates are more likely to align with a regional identity rather than their tribal affiliation.



FIGURE 1: Map of Yemen, April 10, 2017

Religious identity often correlates with regional and tribal identity in Yemen. Approximately thirty percent of the Yemeni population are Zaidi Shi'a Muslims, who are mostly grouped in the northern part of the country. Zaidi Shi'a Muslims, who subscribe to a type of Shi'a Islam that more closely resembles Sunnism than Shi'ism, have controlled Yemen for most of the past thousand years and make up much of the northern elite. For example, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and his family are Zaidi Muslims.¹⁰ The other 70 percent of the country are Shafi'i Sunni Muslims, who predominantly inhabit south Yemen and the areas along the coast of the Red Sea.¹¹ The theological and practical distinction between Zaidis and Shafi'is is not always evident and the division between the two is often described as an issue of lineage more than religion.¹² This power dynamic between Zaidi and Shafi'i Muslims highlights the way regional, tribal, and religious identities are interwoven in Yemeni society.

Yemen is currently in a violent conflict that escalated in the early 2000s. What began as a movement to address endemic corruption and perceived marginalization, has evolved into a multilayered conflict increasingly defined by identity. Beginning in the 1990s, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a cleric of the Zaidi sect in Sa'adah governorate, launched a religious-political movement against the Yemeni Government. Al-Houthi preached about Zaidi Islamic practice and doctrine to his followers, but also discussed the inadequacies of the Yemeni Government's reach in their northern communities. As he led the Houthi movement to challenge the Government, he asserted that they were defending their communities against discrimination and economic marginalization from the central government and pushed for greater regional autonomy. However, the Saleh Government alleged the Houthis were attempting to overthrow the government and impose Shi'a religious law across the country.¹³ As the movement grew in intensity, the Government of Yemen targeted al-Houthi as a threat after his supporters led a series of protests in Sana'a. In 2004, al-Houthi was killed by Yemeni Government forces and was succeeded by his brother Abd al-Malik. In the aftermath of his death, the Houthi movement weaponized and launched a militant strike against the Government of Yemen. A series of attacks and counter-attacks between the Houthis and the Yemeni Government persisted over the next six years.¹⁴ Houthi militias utilized guerilla attacks against Government posts, including the use of land mines, and launched some attacks across the national border into Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia responded with aerial bombardment of Houthi strongholds and the Yemeni Government sent military forces into tribal lands, upsetting cultural norms whereby mediation and dialogue had served to preempt violent action.¹⁵ While the conflict still revolved around autonomy claims and perceived marginalization, the conflict took on tribal and religious undertones and pulled in regional actors. These wars ended temporarily with a ceasefire agreement in February 2010, which laid out six conditions for the Houthis: clearing mines, non-interference with elected local officials, release of civilians and military personnel, adherence to Yemeni

10 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa, and Michael Bronner. "Proxies Aside; A Closer Look at the War in Yemen." *Warscapes*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2015. Web. 16 June 2017. <<http://www.warscapes.com/conversations/proxies-aside-closer-look-war-yemen>>.

11 The Shafi'i Sunni sect of Islam emerged in the early 9th century. Sunni Islam is divided into four schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'i. The Shafi'i school predominantly relies on the Quran and the Hadiths as the preeminent sources of Islamic law.

12 Salmoni et al., 2010.

13 "Deadly Blast Strikes Yemen Mosque." *BBC News Middle East*. N.p., 2 May 2008. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7379929.stm>

14 Salmoni et al., 2010.

15 Ibid.

law, return of looted items, and cessation of hostilities with Saudi Arabia. In turn, the Yemeni Government agreed to cease military operations in the northern governorates.¹⁶ However, this arrangement deteriorated later that year with the rise of popular revolutions across the region.

In 2011, the Arab Spring sent a wave of popular uprisings and revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa, upending dictatorships that had lasted decades. Yemen was no exception. Yemenis gathered by the thousands to protest the high unemployment, poor economic conditions, and widespread corruption that affected much of the country. These protests quickly escalated into calls for the removal of President Saleh, who ruled for more than 30 years, first in the North Yemen and then over the entire country after unification in 1990. 2011 was characterized by brutal attacks on anti-government protesters, defections and in-fighting within the military, and loss of government control over many areas of the recently unified country. The Houthis, for instance, took advantage of the political instability to reassert their control of Sa'adah and the neighboring areas.¹⁷

President Saleh agreed to a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-brokered transition agreement in November 2011, in which he agreed to transfer power to his Vice President, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in exchange for immunity from prosecution on charges of corruption and human rights violations. The orchestration of the repressive response to the widespread protests was seen to be centralized under Saleh, and Hadi managed to distance himself from the political fallout. He was named as the Interim President and officially elected to a two-year transitional period in February 2012. The transition agreement also established the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which was intended to address the grievances of the revolution period and bring together the diverse political, religious, and tribal groups to work together to rebuild the governmental structures. Part of this process involved delineating the 22 governorates into six regions based on geographical proximity.¹⁸ Allotments at the NDC for women, youth, and civil society were designed to make the political process more inclusive. However, these were mainly elites from urban areas and many groups felt excluded or even unaware of the process.

In the time following the NDC, political infighting continued and most Yemenis did not feel that the Hadi had greatly improved their situation.¹⁹ The Hadi Government failed to provide security and basic goods, such as electricity and fuel, and was generally seen to govern ineffectively.²⁰ The Houthis, the Southern secessionist movement, and some youth groups officially rejected the GCC-brokered peace deal and felt their interests were not represented.²¹ As popular political dissatisfaction grew in Sana'a, former President Saleh re-entered

16 "Yemen Announces Cease-fire with Rebels." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 11 Feb. 2010. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/02/11/yemen.cease.fire/>>.

17 "Yemen Crisis: Who Is Fighting Whom?" *BBC News*. BBC, 28 Mar. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>>.

18 The six regions are Azal, Saba, Janad, and Tahama in the north, and Aden and Hadramawt in the south.

19 Schmitz, Charles. "Building a Better Yemen." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 Apr. 2012. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/03/building-better-yemen-pub-47708>>.

20 Schmitz, Charles. "In Cahoots With the Houthis." *Foreign Affairs*. N.p., 19 Apr. 2015. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/yemen/2015-04-19/cahoots-houthis>>.

21 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. "Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. The Carnegie Papers, 2012. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribal_governance.pdf>.

the political arena and instituted a pragmatic alliance with the Houthis in the hope of consolidating power to regain political control. When President Hadi proposed a new draft constitution in 2014, Houthi militias rallied weeks of anti-government protests and mounted a military takeover of Sana'a backed by Saleh's strategic logistical support, vast patronage networks, and additional fighting forces. Houthi militias took control of the presidential palace in January 2015, installed themselves as an interim government, and placed Hadi under house arrest, where he issued his resignation. About one month later, Hadi escaped and fled to Aden where he rescinded his resignation and denounced the Houthi takeover.

As the Houthi movement pushed increasingly southward towards Aden, President Hadi fled to neighboring Saudi Arabia. From Saudi Arabia, he coalesced an anti-Houthi coalition with support from Western and GCC allies to counter the Houthi advance. Backed by nine other, mostly Arab states, Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign after the Houthi capture of a strategic military base north of Aden on March 25, 2015.²² This is generally considered the starting point of the current Yemen war. The Saudi-led assault has largely consisted of aerial strikes on indiscriminate or disproportionately civilian targets, naval blockades, and deployment of ground forces to areas of strategic importance, such as airports and seaports.²³ The Houthis, in turn, have engaged in heavy ground fighting, laid extensive land mines, and launched indiscriminate rockets into populated areas as they push to establish de facto control of Yemen's main population centers.²⁴ Both groups are responsible for extensive human rights violations.²⁵

The war has led to intense human suffering. Over 10,000 people have been killed, and 3.1 million Yemenis have been displaced since the start of the war in 2015. However, the collapse of the healthcare system and inconsistent reporting from remote areas throughout Yemen likely conceal even higher numbers. Today, Yemen is the largest food security emergency worldwide with over 17 million people facing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity.²⁶ As of May 2017, more than 40,000 suspected cholera cases have been reported with predictions that it could escalate to more than 300,000 cases in less than six months.²⁷

Beyond prevalent death and disease, the relocation of the central bank from Sana'a to Aden has deeply affected the flow of currency and the reliability of funds. The war has eroded the ability of the government to operate in a centralized manner, placing the onus of basic service delivery and dispute resolution on local communities. However, many civil servants have not been paid in months and the cost of food, water, cooking gas, and other basic essential goods has skyrocketed. The aerial and naval blockade imposed on Yemen by coalition forces has restricted the flow of commercial and humanitarian goods. This situation, already precarious, stands to drastically deteriorate if coalition-proposed plans to take over the port of al-Hodeidah

22 The coalition consists of the following states: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Sudan. International Crisis Group, 2015.

23 "Yemen." *Human Rights Watch*. N.p., 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/yemen>>.

24 Ibid

25 Ibid, "Yemen 2016/2017." *Amnesty International Annual Report*. Amnesty International, 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/report-yemen/>>.

26 USAID, 2017., United Nations News Service. "UN Envoy in Yemen Meeting with President, Senior Officials to Push for Greater Aid Access." *UN News Service*. N.p., 16 Jan. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55980#.WS2CgWjyvIV>

27 USAID, 2017., Miles, Tom. "Yemen Cholera Cases Could Hit 300,000 within Six Months: WHO." 19 May 2017. *Reuters*. Web. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-cholera-idUSKCN18F0Z3>>.

come to fruition. Al-Hodeidah, currently controlled by the Houthis, is a port on the Red Sea that takes in 70 percent of Yemen's food imports.²⁸

Violent Conflict in Yemen Today

The conflict in Yemen is ultimately defined by the struggle for political control that is playing out between the national, regional, and international forces that are involved in the war. The violence itself, however, is driven by four sets of conflicts: the conflict between the Houthis and the Hadi government; the regional fight between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners and Iran; the violent extremist organizations that are taking advantage of the conflict to entrench themselves in Yemen; and the sectarian and tribal divides that affect local power dynamics.

Political Conflict between the Houthis and the Hadi Government

The Houthis currently control an estimated 40 percent of the country, with a stronghold in the north, in Sa'adah and control of major economic centers Sana'a, Ibb, and Al-Hodeidah. As their campaign continues, the Houthis have secured the most densely populated areas in Yemen, in effect governing an estimated 65 percent of the total Yemeni population.²⁹ These areas under the de facto authority of the Houthis are at lower risk of ground fighting because of the strong Houthi foothold, but they are subject to heavy airstrikes from GCC forces. There are areas where there are clashes between Houthi and resistance fighters inside the primarily Houthi-controlled economic centers in the south, but they are somewhat limited in scope. Active groundfighting between government troops and Houthi militias is predominantly taking place in the outskirts of the Houthi enclaves, where the groups fight to gain control. These areas oscillate between Houthi and Hadi-Government control and breed highly volatile social environments, characterized by the frequent dissolution of public services. Front-line governorates like Taiz, Al Dhall', Al Bayda, or Sada'a are still accessible to non-residents and humanitarian organizations, but face mobility challenges and serious safety concerns on the roads.

28 Rutherford, Lisa. "Oxfam Warns Possible Attack on Yemen's Hodeidah Port Will Push Country into near Certain Famine." *Oxfam Great Britain*. N.p., 31 Mar. 2017. Web. 19 June 2017. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/blogs/2017/03/oxfam-warns-possible-attack-on-yemen-hodeidah-port-will-push-country-into-near-certain-famine>

29 This is an estimate based on current population distributions and major population centers under Houthi control. Baron, Adam. "Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)." *Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)*, European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d. Web. 20 June 2017. <http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen_mapping_2015>.

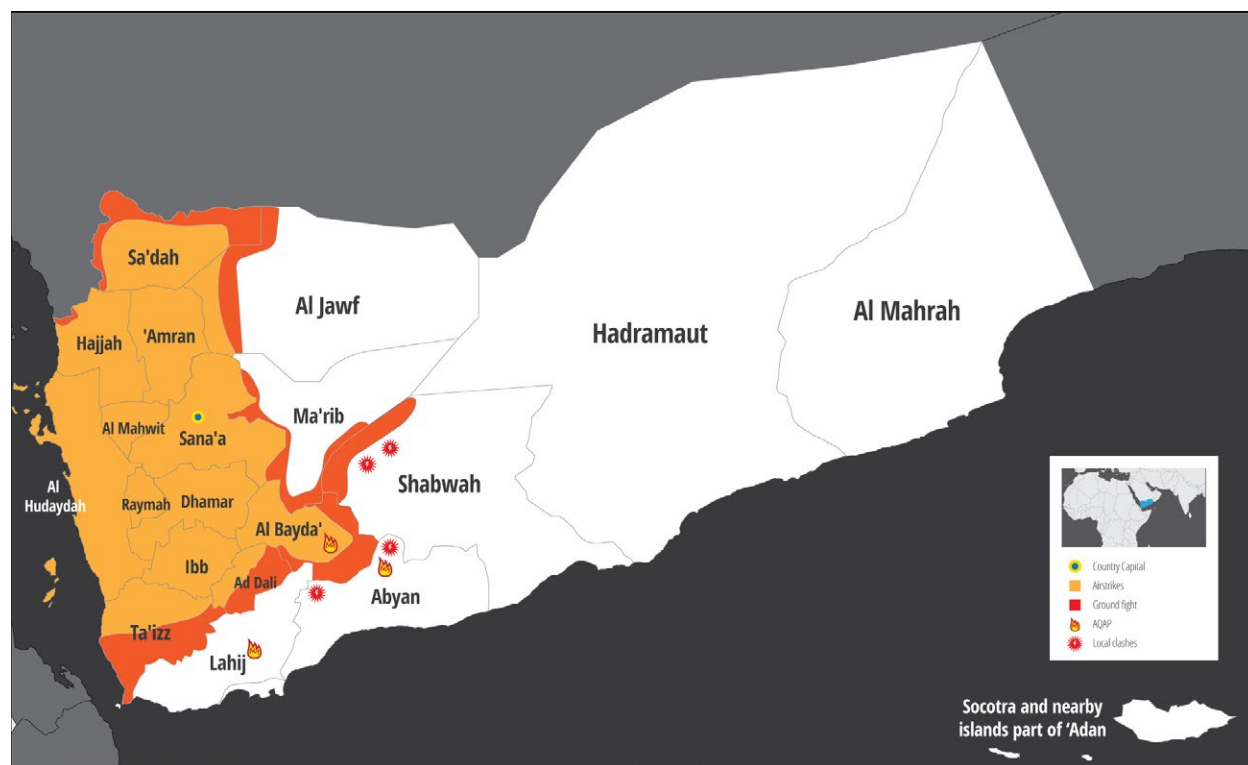


FIGURE 2: Conflict Map, April 10, 2017

Over the past two years of war, Yemen has remained divided between the Houthi movement expanding from the north and the anti-Houthi coalition, led by ousted President Hadi and his Western and GCC allied support.³⁰ The Houthis were driven by their perceived marginalization as a minority group from the central government and dissatisfaction with the GCC-brokered transition arrangements, and seized power as a political maneuver for greater autonomy and protection from political and economic discrimination. While former President Saleh had previously opposed the advance of the Houthis, he acted on growing political dissatisfaction in Yemen and instituted a pragmatic alliance with the Houthis with hopes of regaining political control. He has lent fighting forces allegiant to the pro-Saleh political cause, as well as a vast patronage network of loyal supporters, to the Houthis. The allegiance is one of political expediency. The Houthis rely on Saleh-allegiant forces to maintain their northern stronghold, and Saleh utilized the Houthis momentum to topple the Hadi government.

Hadi's political base is also fracturing. Southern leaders had initially exchanged their support against the Houthis for patronage in Hadi's government. Many of these southern militias have also been trained and funded by the United Arab Emirates to counter violent extremist organizations and hope to enjoy continued Emirati support.³¹ They are growing weary of the instability and have renewed calls for southern secession. Massive demonstrations in Aden and renewed calls for southern secession challenge the Houthis *and* the

30 The forces of President Hadi, led by Saudi Arabia, are often called "coalition forces" or the "Saudi-led coalition"

31 Farrukh, Maher, Tyler Nocita, and Emily Estelle. "Warning Update: Iran's Hybrid Warfare in Yemen." *Critical Threats*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/warning-update-irans-hybrid-warfare-in-yemen>>

Hadi government in the wake of continued instability, perceived economic and political marginalization.³² The southern separatist movement has critical influence on the conflict dynamics in the south. As more influential parties promulgate in Yemen, it complicates the ability of any political solution to entice all parties and permeate to local communities.

Regional fight between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies and Iran

Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies have encountered several ideological and territorial disputes with Iran that have shaped relationships throughout the region. While both Saudi Arabia and Iran are predominantly Muslim countries governed through the scriptures of Islam, Saudi Arabia is governed by a Sunni Muslim kingdom and Iran is governed by a Shia Muslim republic. Saudi Arabia and Iran have no diplomatic relations, and their differing interpretations of Islam have influenced their political agendas and allies within the region and the world. Saudi Arabia has developed close political, diplomatic, and economic ties to the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, whereas Iran has maintained close ties to Russia and China.

After the Houthi takeover of Sana'a and as the Houthi militias pushed increasingly southward towards Aden in 2015, Saudi Arabia, with support from Western and GCC allies, launched a military campaign to counter the Houthi advance. The Houthis are a Shia sect, and Saudi Arabia considers the Houthis to be Iranian proxies and the recipient of Iranian support. As different groups act on this belief, it reinforces Houthi-Iran ties and steers the Houthis towards Iran for support.³³ It also intensifies sectarian divides within communities, as religious sects are becoming increasingly aligned with the broader war dynamics. While the Saudis believe Iran has taken advantage of an opportunity to counter the interests of its adversaries, there is little or unconfirmed evidence that supports the case that Iran or its allies are supporting or responsible for the armament of Houthi groups, aside from bestowing political legitimacy and positive media attention.

The perceived involvement of Iran in the conflict has also stimulated support for the Saudi-led campaign. As the involvement of international actors becomes more prevalent, the effects are felt by Yemeni civilians who suffer from international war tactics including air raids and blockades. Over one third of all Saudi-led aerial raids have hit civilian sites, such as schools, hospitals, markets, and mosques.³⁴ The ramifications of these 'proxy-war dynamics' influence the political atmosphere at the local level, entrenching sectarian and political divisions.

Rise of Criminality and Violent Extremist Organizations

Many districts lack rule of law and effective state enforcement bodies due to the ongoing conflict and lack of financial resources. In areas controlled by militant groups, there are competing law structures and weak acceptance of traditional governance tools. Police forces lack central government mandates and resources and damaged infrastructure prevents their effective operation. In southern Yemen, local governance has weakened

32 Ibid.

33 International Crisis Group, 2015.

34 Yemen Data Project. "Data – Yemen Data Project." N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.yemendataproject.org/data/>>

considerably due to calls for southern separation and the perception that local governance structures are tools of the central government in Sana'a. In addition, local militant groups have emerged amid the instability and gained territory, further weakening government control. These are often local groups who have formed to fight against the Houthis. Sometimes they are ex-military personnel or leaders from the community, but they are often aligned by tribe, geographic region, or social group. In the security vacuums left by evaporated central control, conflict parties are using threat of arms to advance their respective positions. Violent crimes and crimes such as shutting down schools and blocking roads by criminals and militias have gone unstopped by any formal authorities. Even in communities such as Bait Al-Faqeeh in Al-Hodeidah that retain somewhat effective local police and security forces, the local authorities struggle to fully exercise their power due to lack of financial resources.³⁵

Al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), as well as nascent Yemeni Islamic State factions, have strengthened their foothold in Yemen in these political and security vacuums. AQAP previously established local governance structures in historically marginalized areas of Yemen, and these footholds have been primarily strengthened in the south, in areas outside of Houthi and government control. In areas they control, AQAP enforce regulations and prohibitions in line with fundamentalist teachings.³⁶ AQAP showcased its operations outside government control in March 2017 through a series of photos of preaching events and rallies in Hadramawt and Abyan.³⁷ As ground fighting and aerial bombardments increasingly take civilian casualties, AQAP and other extremist organizations have positioned themselves as alternative outlets for anti-Houthi or anti-Hadi support and an opportunity to influence change. As long as the security, humanitarian, and economic conditions remain bleak, the violent extremist groups will have plentiful sources of exasperated and marginalized groups ripe for recruitment.

Sectarian, Tribal, and Identity-Based Conflict within Communities

The breakdowns of the state apparatus and evaporation of central control have resulted in widespread shortages of basic services and the rise of new social divides. Search for Common Ground's conflict scans have shown that as disputes develop over access and equity to resources, they have been increasingly distorted by tribal, religious, and political affiliation. Some pre-existing divisions are based on tribal differences or on the previous political separation between North and South Yemen. From a national perspective, the war has entrenched regional divisions at various levels: within and among the 22 governorates; between the northern and southern governorate; and between the six regions delineated by the NDC, comprised of different governorates clustered by geographical proximity and similar social structures. While these divisions are not new, they have been swept up in the violence and entrenched themselves in the distribution of resources and local level politics.

35 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Bait Al-Faqeeh District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate, February 2017.

36 Baron, Adam. "Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)." *Mapping the Yemen Conflict (2015)*. European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d. Web. 20 June 2017. <http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen_mapping_2015>.

37 Towey, James. "Yemen Situation Report." *Critical Threats*. N.p., 8 Mar. 2016. Web. 19 June 2017. <<https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-situation-report/2016-yemen-crisis-situation-report-march-8>>.



The conflict is entrenching regional divisions along pre-existing rifts as well as creating new ones, which had previously never been salient.

Other divisions are new and have never previously been salient. Divisions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects, for instance, have grown increasingly prominent and have divided previously peaceful Muslim communities. Conflicts between IDP and host communities have also resulted in violence and reinforced regionalist or tribal affiliations as a source for conflict. For instance, in Taiz and Ibb, the large influx of displaced persons has strained relationships between the host and displaced communities, creating feelings of mistrust and contempt. Host communities often feel suspicious towards incoming displaced groups from other regions within Yemen, and these IDPs often find refuge in medical centers, schools, and other public areas, which disrupts the already limited provision of basic services. In addition, host communities believe they are unduly disregarded from the distribution of humanitarian services and assistance. As everyday conflicts and the ramifications of the war are increasingly tied to identity-based affiliations, they catalyze ordinary disputes into violence and foster instability ripe for the rise of militarized groups. When these political, ideological, tribal, and regional divisions turn violent, they entrench irresolvable identity disputes at the heart of the conflict, further undermining peace and stability.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PURSUE PEACE & STABILITY

Identity-Based Conflicts Affect and Are Affected by the War

There are many levels of the conflict in Yemen, but the most promising avenue for change is to address local conflict issues. Prospects for international and national level peace arrangements are bleak, as U.N.-facilitated peace negotiations have stagnated and national political groups are splintering. AQAP and other militarized groups have fortified their strongholds and boast their authority in several governorates in Yemen. All of these factors need to be addressed to bring peace and stability to Yemen. Local conflict dynamics have not solidified in the conflict and can be directed away from violence. The conflict in Yemen has fractured community relationships and increased divisions along family, clan, tribal, and ideological lines, yet there is an opportunity to halt these fractures and redirect communities towards peace and stability.

Conflict is Driving Identity-Based Conflict, which in Turn Exacerbates National and Regional Tensions:

The war is entrenching regional divisions along pre-existing rifts as well as creating new ones, which had previously never been salient. Real or perceived relationships to the Houthis or the Hadi government have solidified into entrenched identity-based positions. For instance, mosques in Yemen had previously been places for any Muslim to worship. Now, Sunni Shafi'is have designated certain mosques as Zaidi mosques, and therefore avoid them due to the association with the Houthis. Community gatherings in mosques had previously united individuals from differing social and religious affiliations, but are now exclusive affairs held in separate locations for different religious sects. This becomes increasingly problematic as fear or blame are appropriated onto individuals and groups based on qualities inherent to their being – religion, tribe, or culture. The lack of interaction between conflicting parties during different phases of conflict escalation has widened gaps between them and prevents dialogue.



Fear or blame is appropriated onto individuals and groups based on qualities inherent to their being – religion, tribe, or culture. The lack of interaction between conflicting parties deepens divides and prevents dialogue.

The extent of social division differs from district to district. The continuation of political tensions at the national level influences the political atmosphere at the local level, entrenching sectarian, tribal, political, and regional divisions. In communities like Lawder in Abyan, disagreements between groups sharing the same water resources have escalated into reprisal attacks and killing. In Lawder, there is unequal access to the communal water well for those who live in various parts of the town. Those that cannot access the well are primarily from a different tribe and felt they had been unjustly excluded. They then sabotaged the tools

and equipment maintaining the well, creating increased scarcity of water and exacerbating societal tensions.³⁸ As these cycles of attacks become more prevalent and the sectarian face of the conflict grows, they become increasingly tied to an individual's inherent affiliations.

The suspension of schools in some locations, growing unemployment, and lack of financial flows have served as 'push' factors for youth and others to join militarized groups, including violent extremist organizations, where they find both income and purpose. Over 1,600 schools have been closed, destroyed, or misappropriated due to the ongoing violence.³⁹ The dire economic situation has forced many families to enlist their children as combatants to generate income. According to UNICEF, children are playing a more active role in combat by manning checkpoints and child recruitment increased five-times between 2014 and 2016.⁴⁰ In certain tribal areas, such as Dahmar, Amran, Sana'a, and Hajah, families are routinely encouraged to enlist their children in a show of solidarity with their tribes' affiliation to conflict parties.

Despite these deepening rifts, responses from the international community have primarily been through military assistance and humanitarian aid. The United States' humanitarian response to Yemen has contributed over \$400 million to addressing humanitarian needs, second only to the United Arab Emirates as a single entity. The amount international actors have provided for non-humanitarian response, such as governance, livelihoods, and peacebuilding support to address these deepening societal fractures, has been much lower, if not completely suspended.⁴¹ An approach that lacks these critical components will only deal with the symptoms of the problem rather than the causes. The need for humanitarian assistance is vast, but so too is the need for attention and support to address the deepening divides.

Local Conflicts are Influenceable.

Identity-based conflicts can be influenced before they become woven into the social fabric. Dialogue, positive conflict resolution, and continued inter-group relationship building and exchange can help mitigate tensions and preserve communication across dividing lines. Customary conflict resolution in tribal areas provides for this. Grievance handling proceedings are highly structured and incorporate negotiation, dialogue, and transparency at an early stage of conflict to prevent the escalation of violence and ensure participation and buy-in from conflicting parties.⁴² The incursion of violence has disrupted some of these traditional response mechanisms, but some communities have preserved ways to shelter themselves from entrenched identity conflict.

In some communities, continued respect for customary and functioning local governance proceedings provides a forum to address intensifying societal divides. In others, community members worked together to col-

38 Yemenis were hesitant to discuss conflicts of a political nature or name the parties involved in certain conflicts, for fear of reprisals. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Lawder District, Abyan Governorate, June 2016.

39 World Bank. "Yemen Overview." *The World Bank*. N.d. Web. 19 June 2017. <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview>>

40 Zerrougui, Leila, and Peter Salama. "Yemen Children Bearing the Brunt of Brutal Conflict – UN." *UNICEF*. N.p., 10 Apr. 2016. Web. 19 June 2017. <https://www.unicef.org/media/media_90828.html>.

41 The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund suspended or closed most of its operations in April 2015 after the resumption of fighting and USAID has frozen its disbursement of non-humanitarian funding. "Yemen Overview." *United Nations Peacebuilding Fund*. N.p., 2016. Web. 20 June 2017. <<http://www.unpbf.org/countries/yemen/>>.

42 Al-Dawsari, 2012.

laboratively address grievances. In the Al-Ssennah sub-district of Taiz, they have dictated dispute resolution responsibilities within the Articles of Association of their sub-district cooperative council. Together through cooperation between the local community and the sub-district cooperative council, they quickly mobilize to mediate social disputes and stop conflict escalation over development-based disputes by using tribal and/or religious statutes.⁴³ In Zabeed town in Al-Hodeidah, government authorities worked to rebuild trust with residents after tensions emerged over the spread of cholera in neighboring towns and the perceived incompetence of the state agency to handle a potential outbreak. The Ministry of Health district office assuaged resident fears through the implementation of a health awareness campaign, which educated residents in identification of risk factors and quarantine areas within the community.⁴⁴ In Abyan, most of the population relies on income from animal herding and agriculture, so many of the conflicts revolve around access to water. In Al Wadi village and the surrounding towns, there is inadequate distribution of water, which does not reach the homes in elevated communities. The villagers pooled resources and worked together to reorganize and fix the pipeline to service the various communities.⁴⁵ These examples certainly exist, but they are under stress and require support to withstand the pressures of war. When communities are equipped with the mechanisms to resolve disputes, they are better able to mitigate the push and pull factors of war.

Target Key Local Actors:

Yemen has strong local leaders from across society, and over 8,000 registered civil society organizations engaged in a variety of social issues.⁴⁶ These local actors have become even more critical, as regional tensions and divisions preclude the government from operating in a centralized and effective manner. State functions, such as managing resources, resolving local disputes, and liaising with humanitarian organizations, have largely been undertaken by cities, local councils, and civil society organizations.



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The upheaval of war has eroded trust between civilians and local governance authority structures, disrupting pre-existing mediation structures within communities. This has prompted the emergence of many new authoritative bodies who have replaced the role once played by central, governorate, or district-level governance institutions. In many Houthi-controlled areas, Executive Units, initially created by the UNHCR to coordinate activities related to IDPs and refugees, have become the de facto decision-making bodies. Houthis have re-established these Executive Units and expanded their structure to encompass entire governorates, with local offices in each district. Through these governing bodies, Houthis have consolidated power and

43 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Ma'afar District, Taiz Governorate. July 2016.

44 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Zabeed District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate. February 2017.

45 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Lawder District, Abyan Governorate. June 2016.

46 World Bank. "Supporting Constructive Engagement between the Government of Yemen and CSOs." 4 Mar. 2014. Web. <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/525371468336576776/pdf/887750WP0P14630May2020140Box385258B.pdf>>

weakened the prominence of existing local governance mechanisms, such as Local Councils, along with other non-Houthi, governorate-level management. In some communities in southern government-controlled areas, Local Councils remain the most effective and active providers of services. In other southern government-controlled areas, new leadership is emerging from the ranks of armed groups and within the ranks of former-Hadi support. Hadi supporters are growing frustrated with the inability to bring stability to Yemen, and Hadi's support base is fracturing. Some new leaders are emerging to carry forth the idea of southern independence or greater southern representation in a unified Yemeni government.

Table of Governance Actors⁴⁷

	WHO	WHERE	WHAT
Executive Units	Executive Units were initially created by the UNCHR to coordinate activities related to IDPs and refugees in governorates such as Amran and Al-Hodeidah. The Houthis effectively took control of the Executive Units and utilize their existing structures to govern at a governorate and district level.	Houthi-controlled governorates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Sada'a ❖ Hajja ❖ Amran ❖ Al-Mahwit ❖ Sana'a ❖ Al-Hodeidah ❖ Raymah ❖ Ibb ❖ Dhamar 	Executive Units exist in each governorate, with local offices in each district. Their presence in certain areas often usurps other forms of local governance, such as Local Councils. Where effective, Executive Units will coordinate security services, public services – such as water distribution and garbage collection – and activities related to local and international NGOs.
Local Councils	Local Councils are tied to the central government and had previously coordinated the provision of public services throughout Yemen prior to 2014.	Local Councils remain active in many areas depending on the structure and affiliation of their members. In areas where members are aligned with the ex-president, Local Councils continue to have some influence. In southern Yemen, the legitimacy of Local Councils is questioned due to their connection with a united Yemen. However, they remain functional. Local Council members belonging to strong local tribes or the Islah party ⁴⁸ are generally not effective, such as in Ibb.	In areas where Local Councils are still effective, they will coordinate the provision of basic public services such as water distribution and garbage collection.

⁴⁷ This table is based on the reflections of Search Country Staff, focus group discussions and conflict scans in six governorates. It should not be seen as exhaustive, but as an indicative example of the various opportunities to engage with these actors in particular areas. A full table of actors can be found in Appendix 1.

⁴⁸ The Islah party is Yemen's principle Islamic political party

Government Ministries	Government Ministries, such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), are national-level entities part of the central government.	Ministries and their sub-offices remain functional in southern governorates.	The functionality of many Ministries is extremely low due to lack of funds and over six months of salary freezes. A few units within ministries remain functional, e.g. the Education in Emergencies department of the Ministry of Education (MoE), who work closely with INGOs implementing initiatives.
Tribal Sheikhs	In tribal areas, Sheikhs maintain an important role in community relations, high-level community decision-making, and can provide a bridge between Executive Units and/or Local Councils where all three operate collectively or in parallel.	Tribal areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Amran ❖ Hajja ❖ Sana'a ❖ Ma'rib ❖ Al Bayda ❖ Lahij ❖ Abyan ❖ Shabwah ❖ Ad Dali' ❖ Al Mahwit ❖ Dhamar 	In tribal areas, Sheikhs occupy a more significant role in local governance. Their roles are mainly designated to leading decision-making processes within their local communities. Where Executive Units and Local Councils also operate collectively or in parallel, Sheikhs are often able to bridge divides and offer an opportunity for cooperation between differing local governance actors.

Authoritative bodies are dependent upon their constituents, and any approach to local governance requires consideration and inclusion of all conflicting parties, including women, youth, tribal leaders, religious leaders, and local authorities. Some groups that have traditionally been perceived as unable to influence conflict and peace can be key entry points into previously marginalized areas. Youth, who are often seen as the source of violence, hold enormous potential to bring about peace in the communities. Equipping youth with peacebuilding skills and fostering a mediator mindset enables positive peer influence. Providing youth with a platform to constructively engage with their communities empowers them as leaders for the future. Their participation in peacebuilding processes also promotes a positive perception of youth, which further serves to empower them as peace actors.

Women also play an important peacebuilding role and provide a key entry point into family units. Even in areas where women are not perceived to be engaged in peacebuilding, such as in AQAP-dominant areas, women hold influential positions within family structures, are key in educating children, and often inhabit spaces spanning across sectarian divides. Despite the challenges of incorporating women in peacebuilding roles in Yemen's male-dominated society, the role of women in society is also changing due to the conflict as they are increasingly engaged in the management of family affairs and contributing to household incomes.⁴⁹

Their participation in peacebuilding efforts can lead to the emergence of increased female leadership at the local level, which could help affect the secondary effect of enhanced representation in governance structures.

Identify Access Points and Operational Feasibility:

The lack of a strong or even minimally functioning central government restricts the provision of goods and services and access of humanitarian organizations to provide assistance. Conflict intensity, political control, and access to resources vary from governorate to governorate, and even within districts. In recent months, freedom of movement has been limited within Yemen. Many living and working within Yemen have reported badly damaged infrastructure, treacherous roads, and restrictions on mobility based on region of birth. Local civil society organizations and traditional leaders can help bridge these operational difficulties as they are already present in society and hold authority within their communities. In cases where mobility is challenging or dangerous, platforms exist which enable the exchange of ideas and the building of relationships across these many divides. Social media and platforms such as WhatsApp can be highly effective tools to connect local peacebuilders across different governorates or between areas with difficult or no road access.

Many Yemenis trust local media channels and their friends and relatives to receive information regarding the war. The use of television, however, is very limited, and many international or regional media outlets are not considered to be neutral or independent. Radio networks have been able to fill some of the void; however, they are also becoming increasingly politically polarized. Social media has helped to convey information across regional boundaries and connect people with trusted sources. Indeed, most Yemenis will turn to social media to receive updates on current events and activities not only in their local communities, but across Yemen. Some local civil society organizations have used platforms like WhatsApp to continue sharing knowledge on conflict drivers, humanitarian need, and opportunities for peace and dialogue. Of course, these channels of communication are largely dependent on reliable electricity and sufficient funds to purchase phone credit or pay internet bills, but they do have the potential to help to break down real or perceived boundaries between groups.

PATHWAYS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY

The competing conflict dynamics in Yemen are mutually reinforcing. The ramifications of the sectarian, tribal, regional, and political divisions have exacerbated the social, economic, and humanitarian effects of the war and threaten the prospects of long-term peace deals and stability. However, there remains an opportunity for the international community to influence the solidification of identity-based conflict in society. Improved societal relationships at the local level may affect the course of the other conflict dynamics, but they also will preserve a foundation for peace. Any successful national peace arrangement must then depend on the status of three factors: 1) the degree of popular acceptance for peace and coexistence; 2) the degree to which representative mediators and interlocutors work to implement the deal within their community and provide services; and 3) the degree to which the public accepts the validity of the deal and a unified Yemen.

The Degree of Popular Acceptance for Peace and Coexistence:

Despite emerging local conflicts over competition for resources, inability of government authorities to provide services, and insecurity, participants in Search for Common Ground focus group discussions cited frustration with enduring the incessant conflict and violence and expressed their exhaustion as a motivator for peace.⁵⁰ If they aren't addressed, the current fractured relationships will evolve and grow worse over time, risking new violence and cycles of conflict. However, if they are addressed, new positive relationships and mechanisms to manage disputes can emerge. By creating inclusive forums for dialogue and mutually agreed upon solutions to conflict, communities can help shrink the political vacuum where militarized groups thrive and provide alternative pathways to air grievances.

In Taiz, most conflicts surrounded competition for resources between IDP and host communities. Many IDPs had moved from Al-Waz'eiyah District to occupy local schools and health centers in Bani Mohammed, Bani Shaibah Al-Sharq, and Thubhaan. Host communities resented the disruption of basic services, such as the closures of schools and health centers, but IDPs were reluctant to leave the public spaces for fear of losing access to humanitarian assistance. While host communities perceived IDPs to pose a dangerous threat and occasionally these disputes turned violent, host communities still expressed sympathy for the plight of the displaced.⁵¹ Village councils and local informal leaders have attempted to manage these disputes non-violently and procure mutually agreed upon solutions as disputes emerge. Support for collaborative and inclusive solutions like this provide a foundation for the peaceful evolution of these relationships.

Across the country, dialogue and reconciliation are cited as necessary actions to end the war.⁵² In communities like Bait Al-Faqeeh in Al-Hodeidah, conflicts over access to water, education, and health services have

50 Search for Common Ground. Focus Group Discussions in Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb Governorates. April 2017.

51 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Al-Shamayatein District, Taiz Governorate, July 2016.

52 The Yemen Polling Center conducted interviews with 4,000 respondents in all governorates except Sa'adah and Socotra from February 23 to March 30, 2017. Yemen Polling Center, 2017.

not turned violent and the social bonds and relationships between conflicting parties help to resolve disputes amicably, thanks to ongoing inter-group dialogue.⁵³ Direct communication and enhanced conflict resolution can help preserve these linkages and build the community's ability to nonviolently manage conflict. Peace at the national level is predicated on peace at the local level and vice versa. Community readiness to accept peaceful coexistence will be the foundation upon which any national deal succeeds.

Pathways to Peace and Stability:

- **Empower local leaders to work across dividing lines to manage disputes.** Yemen has strong formal and informal leaders across society engaged in a variety of social issues. Tribal sheikhs, religious leaders, local governance actors, and local civil society organizations (CSOs) hold considerably more authority and resonate more with peers than actors perceived to be representing an outside entity. The international community should provide financial and political support to these civilian leaders to listen to complaints and grievances and develop mechanisms for inclusive and transparent responses. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can play critical bridging, convening, and technical capacity-building roles. Local leaders can leverage the capacity of INGOs and international civil society institutions to enhance skills, provide unique opportunities to influence change, and connect networks of like-minded practitioners across the country.
- **Support local level peacebuilding as a tool to address local drivers for violence and prevent escalation of violence.** As the international community responds to the crisis in Yemen, there must be multi-faceted support to address the drivers and consequences of the war. The impacts of the current war have resulted in the absence and/or weakening of the central government and the ability of government structures to manage conflict and violence. Current strategies prioritize response via humanitarian assistance but do not provide enough support to stopping the crisis in the first place and ensuring that further divides are not entrenched, paving the way for more conflict in the future. The United States, United Nations, World Bank, and other donors should support a holistic assistance strategy that includes funding for conflict transformation, community dialogue and mediation, and cultural exchange for local leaders within the country to engage communities across dividing lines to resolve disputes and preserve amiable societal relationships.
- **Support media to promote neutral reporting and to promote non-militarized norms for governance and security.** There needs to be greater emphasis on supporting those neutral reporting agencies that exist, enhancing their skills and reach, and promoting new sources of unbiased reporting. Social media can provide space for exchange, particularly among youth, to create connections across divides and geographical distance. It also enables people to access reliable information about conflict and possibilities for engagement with government and humanitarian actors. In addition, programming such as media programming, participatory theater, and cultural exchanges, which promote cross-cultural understanding, can help to dismantle growing sectarian, tribal, political, and regional divides at the community level.

- **Preserve the education space for learning and development of the new generation.** International donors can support the Ministry of Education to continue the provision of education services and to adopt a curriculum based on non-violent conflict resolution. The Ministry of Education remains one of the better functioning ministries and continues to support schools throughout the country. Schools that were previously neutral gathering places have been coopted by IDPs and infiltrated by violence. This generation of youth will be the leaders of peace in Yemen, but are being absorbed into a culture of violence and denied a chance to continue learning.

The Role of Representative Mediators and Interlocutors in Supporting Peace and Providing Services:

Buy-in at the local level provides the foundation for any larger national process. Local individuals embedded within their communities carry more resonance and authority with peers and neighbors than those perceived to be representing an outside entity. At the sub-district and village level, local councils, tribal sheikhs, and influential social/economic leaders like businessmen are perceived as best able to facilitate these types of conflict resolution processes.⁵⁴ Locally-rooted mediators have been essential ambassadors of conflict resolution and help to develop tangible resolutions to local conflicts. Tribal leaders are often perceived to be active in their community in a positive way, especially in places like al-Jawf, Hajja, and Amran.⁵⁵ In Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb, some Yemenis believe that neutral leaders and influential figures can come together to build on common interests in the community, such as distribution of resources, to develop locally-rooted solutions.⁵⁶ Internal mediators and interlocutors are crucial to creating local level buy-in to peace in the communities and greater peace in Yemen.

Efforts to reduce conflict should enable local governance actors to effectively manage basic services while working collaboratively with community members to reflect their priorities. This strengthens social cohesion, service delivery, and the normalization of dialogue in communities. Local governance initiatives that address concrete conflict drivers, such as lack of access to potable water, can provide immediate responses to specific grievances of the community that span divides. Strengthened local-level initiatives, however, must be accompanied by leadership at the national level. Dynamics at the regional and governorate-level remain intertwined, and national leadership will be instrumental in weaving together these localized structures. Collaboration and the provision of services help rectify the trust deficit between civilians and local authorities, creating pockets of stability to withstand the effects of the war and prepare for peace.

54 Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Lawder District, Abyan Governorate, June 2016. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Bait Al-Faqeeh District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate, February 2017. Search for Common Ground. Conflict Scan of Zabeed District, Al-Hodeidah Governorate, February 2017. Yemen Polling Center. "Perceptions of the Yemeni public on living conditions and security-related issues." Survey Findings. Sana'a/Aden. 2017. <http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_YPC-Data---Perceptions-of-the-Yemeni-public-on-living-conditions-and-security-related-issues---May-2017.pdf>

55 Yemen Polling Center, 2017.

56 Search for Common Ground. Focus Group Discussions in Sana'a, Aden, and Ibb Governorates. April 2017.

Pathways to Peace and Stability:

- **Distribute humanitarian assistance with transparency and accompany with peacebuilding and dialogue forums.** The distribution of aid continues to be a source of conflict that further entrenches societal divisions. As the humanitarian crisis endures, humanitarian responders must ensure that the provision of aid is conflict-sensitive and does not exacerbate local conflict dynamics across geographic, sectarian, or political divides. Humanitarian actors should look to not only prevent the escalation of violence, but also use humanitarian assistance as an entry point for peacebuilding. The provision of aid can be a major opportunity to bring communities together when done correctly.
- **Support inclusive and responsive local governance structures.** In the absence of centralized governmental control, many institutions, such as Executive Units, Local Councils, and civil society, have come forth to fill the void to deliver services and manage disputes at the local level. As local governance structures struggle to fulfill basic duties and are challenged by varying perceptions of legitimacy from local communities, systems must be developed to continue the provision of services while also strengthening inclusive decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms in cooperation with local communities. International actors, such as the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union can help create referral and reporting systems between civil society, local governance authorities, and national and international NGOs to manage coordination of service delivery.

The Need for Public Acceptance and Support of a Ceasefire and Peace Process:

The international community has the opportunity to build and maintain social platforms to support any negotiated national peace arrangement. Despite the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis, this type of work cannot wait until after a political agreement is settled. Addressing the growing divides within communities now and working to reconcile differences on the local level will foster a more durable foundation for the possibility of peace.



Prospects and partners for peace endure even in complex situations of tension.

Yemenis need not look too far to learn from the oversights of the past. The NDC failed to adequately involve members from across society (women, youth, civil society), and from across Yemen (many at the local level were unaware that the process was going on.) Any new approach towards peace must then require inclusion of all conflicting parties, including women, youth, tribal leaders, religious leaders, and local authorities, who are committed to the notion of a unified and peaceful Yemen. Prospects and partners for peace endure even in complex situations of tension. Yemenis have grown frustrated with enduring the incessant conflict and violence and express their exhaustion as a motivator for positive steps towards peace.⁵⁷

Pathways to Peace and Stability:

- Ensure that peace processes are inclusive, participatory, and representative. As the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, among others, host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they should ensure that a peace process is participatory and representative across society. Human rights organizations and other international institutions should support impartial social and traditional media to report on the status of negotiations to the community-level.
- Feed grassroots reconciliation and peacebuilding into national peace dialogues. An international, negotiated ceasefire and/or peace process will not guarantee peace and stability across the country. Previous peace attempts in Yemen, most recently the National Dialogue Conference in 2011, did not adequately incorporate local groups into the process and ultimately was unsuccessful in establishing peace. As international donors host and support dialogues and negotiations at the national and international level, they must be paired with simultaneous community dialogues, town hall meetings, and other civic education and engagement platforms to sensitize and engage communities, if they hope to be successful at ending the war and building a stable Yemen. Bottom-up approaches to peace that build trust and stability at the local level can meet top-down political negotiations led by national and international actors to form a sustainable approach that Yemenis believe in.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTNERS FOR PEACE

The following table discusses the opportunities to engage with various partners to promote local level peace. This information is based on Search’s programming, conflict scans, and focus groups discussions in six Yemen governorates - Sana’a, Aden, Taiz, Al-Hodeidah, Ibb, and Abyan.

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
Women	<p><i>Despite facing discrimination and inequality regarding marriage rights, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, women in Yemen have historically been influential within family structures, key in educating children, and often provide open lines of communication across societal dividing lines (e.g. IDP/host communities) based on their shared experience as women.⁵⁸ Within Yemen’s tribal culture, the extent of women’s influence varies in each governorate and district, as well as in rural versus urban areas. For example, women in specific geographical areas under Al-Qaeda militant control (small pockets in Abyan, Labij, and Al-Bayda governorates) are subject to grave discrimination and face strict gendered barriers to societal involvement. In another instance, women in urban centers such as Sana’a or Al-Hodeidah are afforded greater flexibility within social spaces, such as more varied employment opportunities or affiliation to women’s rights groups, despite discriminatory laws and practices.</i></p>	<p><i>Women are often key in educating new generations and thus enable the normalization of peaceful approaches to conflict resolution. Their recognized participation in peacebuilding efforts leads to the emergence of increased female leadership at the local level, and potentially in governance structures at all levels. Women also greatly influence how gendered roles lead to conflict escalation or peace initiatives. For example, if violent hyper-masculinity is openly rejected by women, this in turn influences male counterparts and young boys, and promotes an environment in which men are commended for peacebuilding efforts and resorting to dialogue rather than violence.</i></p>
Youth	<p><i>Historically, young people in Yemen have not been perceived positively by the wider community. Labelled either as a nuisance or trouble-makers, children’s rights are not inculcated into school curriculums or adopted by most families, resulting in a normalization of violence towards youth, who then emulate this behavior. This has become aggravated by the ongoing conflict, adding famine, increased exposure to disease, lack of education, and recruitment to armed groups to the list of push factors towards violence.⁵⁹</i></p>	<p><i>Peer pressure often affects decision-making amongst young people, who in turn have an influence on younger children. Equipping teenagers and older youth under 30 with peacebuilding skills and inculcating a mediator mindset enables positive peer influence. Additionally, peacebuilding work within Yemeni schools to prevent violence has proven fruitful in equipping youth with the tools to effect positive change in their communities and enhancing resilience. Youth-focused initiatives aid in the normalization of peaceful conflict resolution in among new generations, providing more robust avenues for peace. Being active in peacebuilding processes also promotes a positive perception of youth which further serves to empower them as peace actors in Yemen.</i></p>

58 “Yemen: Events of 2016.” *Human Rights Watch World Report 2017*. Human Rights Watch, 12 Jan. 2017. Web. 20 June 2017. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/yemen#1de7c4>>.

59 Falling through the Cracks: The Children of Yemen.” UNICEF, Mar. 2017. Web. 20 June 2017. <https://www.unicef.org/videoaudio/PDFs/Yemen_2_Years_-_children_falling_through_the_cracks_FINAL.pdf>. idUKKBN17J0UH>.

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
Sheikhs	<p><i>Traditional leaders, such as Sheikhs, have historically been highly respected and influential among Yemeni communities. As such, they have been able to act as effective conflict mediators and are keen to foster social cohesion. Due to shifting power dynamics inherent in such a volatile and shifting conflict, some sheikhs have become relegated to second-tier leaders, with de-facto governing bodies, Executive Units and Local Councils usurping Sheikhs' previous power within some communities. However, whether in a high or relatively low position of power depending on the local environment, Sheikhs are still often able to garner support for peacebuilding opportunities and approaches, and promote the institutionalization and normalization of mediation and peaceful conflict resolution.</i></p>	<p><i>Specifically, the younger generation of local Sheikhs are increasingly open-minded to innovative conflict resolutions techniques. This can provide a strong foothold for the implementation of locally-rooted peacebuilding initiatives and an environment in which local community leaders encourage dialogue rather than divisive confrontation. In addition, depending on their level of local power vis-à-vis local governing bodies, Sheikhs are key in encouraging the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and girls, and youth, into peacebuilding initiatives. Empowering Sheikhs to develop their role as powerful community leaders and mediators will enable the strengthening of non-violent governance, presenting a viable alternative voice to militias, army units, and armed groups.</i></p>
Religious Leaders	<p><i>Historically, religious leaders have been highly respected community members. This has been used both to dispel but also foster violence and divisions within Yemen. Within the current conflict, religious leaders' influence within communities and positions on peacebuilding vary greatly between governorates and districts. It is thus imperative to scan the local environment prior to engagement with religious leaders through initiatives. In addition, the shifting balance of power and tense social environments in certain Houthi-controlled governorates have exacerbated religious divides between Sunni and Shiite sects. Although not a primary conflict driver in most areas, these sectarian divides can be successfully addressed by key religious leaders who hold influence over public opinion can garner support for peacebuilding opportunities and approaches, especially by legitimizing these through religious teachings.</i></p>	<p><i>Due to their high influence, engaging religious leaders is important but must be approached with caution due to sensitivities regarding sectarian tensions and radical religious teachings in certain areas. As such, engagement of religious leaders should be highly localized, assessing affiliation and espoused teachings. Nevertheless, religious leaders are important in many local communities in condemning violence and supporting conflict resolution processes. These leaders are especially important in calling for peaceful coexistence beyond differing religious beliefs or affiliations, which is essential for the development and maintenance of peace throughout Yemen. In addition, more progressive religious leaders can be key in encouraging the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and girls, and youth, into peacebuilding initiatives.</i></p>

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
Local Governance Actors	<p><i>Local governance actors hold the positions and resources to be able to influence and resolve local conflict drivers. Who these local governance actors are, however, is now highly complex due to the shifting conflict. In certain post-conflict areas and areas under Houthis control, local governance is solidified either through local militias, tribal leaders, Local Councils, or Executive Units originally established by the UN and now re-established by Houthis: expanded to encompass governorate-level management, with localized district representation. It is thus key to identify the local governance actors prior to any local engagement. Key relationships with these actors can influence the legitimacy and implementation of a project, especially in communities where strong governing structures still exist. In localities where structures are less robust, these actors remain key in navigating access to communities both physically, administratively, and socially, but require more trust-building and communication as shifting power dynamics influences perceptions of outsiders as well as affects the turn-around rate for acting governing officials.</i></p>	<p><i>Local governance actors can unlock and identify solutions to conflict drivers. They are also often able to provide the resources to start concrete peacebuilding efforts linked to projects such as the building of a new water well, or the paving of dirt roads, alongside dialogue processes involved in project realization. Additionally, in more stable areas of governance, local governance actors are able to be trained as facilitators and thus become key local peacebuilders. This aids in normalizing an environment of non-violence and dialogue, as well as forwarding local governance structures as positive societal influencers.</i></p>
Businesspersons and Entrepreneurs	<p><i>Local entrepreneurs and businesspersons are often highly respected and influential actors within communities. Businessmen, and at times women, influence the local economy and are the gatekeepers for job opportunities, as such they contribute to local monetary wealth. These actors are able to influence peacebuilding through garnering buy-in from a community due to their stature, or provide financial incentives to instigate a project.</i></p>	<p><i>Very often, in a desire to contribute to peace and community stability, key business people can provide the financial resources necessary to support initiatives, such as youth training or buying of a water pump for a new water project. These financial contributions as well as their societal influence as successful individuals can contribute to the normalization of peaceful conflict resolution.</i></p>
Teachers	<p><i>Teachers, especially in rural areas, have historically been highly respected community members. Despite this, violence against children and youth is not uncommon in many Yemeni schools. Often, parents also encourage teachers to use violence in disciplining their students. This has led to the perpetuation and normalization of violence in schools and among the youth. The recent lack of available salaries for working teachers has further exacerbated tensions within schools and seriously affected the ability of school structures and teachers to act as hubs and mentors for peace amidst the ongoing conflict.⁶⁰</i></p>	<p><i>Despite sometimes unquestioned violence against youth and difficulties in earning a living within the current education system, teachers play a key role shifting local norms and the acceptance of non-violent dialogue processes to address conflicts. Teachers enable the fostering of new generations who believe in peaceful approaches to address conflict and are equipped with the skills needed to promote peace. In addition, teachers play a powerful role in not only institutionalizing peaceful conflict resolution, but also in ensuring parents and other community members are invested in promoting peace, for themselves and for their children. Finally, teachers are often able to secure the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and girls, and youth, into peacebuilding initiatives.</i></p>

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Fahmy, Tarek, and Noah Browning. "Wartime Economic Crisis Threatens Education of Millions of Yemeni Children - U.N." Reuters. Ed. Toby Chopra. Thomson Reuters, 17 Apr. 2017. Web. 20 June 2017. <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-war-education-idUKKBN17J0UH>>.

Actors	Contextual Analysis	Effects on Peacebuilding
CSOs	<p><i>The ongoing conflict has changed the landscape of CSOs in Yemen. Yemen was the Gulf state most friendly to the creation and presence of CSOs: a task which was relatively easy until 2014. Currently, many have been forced to dismantle projects due to lack of funding or personnel, and others have dissolved completely. In addition, an international focus on funding humanitarian projects has resulted in lack of funding for many CSOs, or forced them to shift activities towards providing humanitarian aid instead of social cohesion or peacebuilding. Nevertheless, CSOs remain key actors in local peacebuilding as many have already garnered the respect of local communities.</i></p>	<p><i>CSOs play a key role in connecting INGOs and international actors with community-level peacebuilding initiatives, not only by providing an entry point to these communities through local buy-in and trust already garnered, but also by being able to continue peacebuilding work after the lifespan of a specific project. CSOs are also best positioned to use INGO resources and knowledge to further tailor peacebuilding expertise to local contexts and thus ensure peacebuilding work remains relevant to the Yemeni context. CSOs also greatly influence INGOs throughout different phases of a project, providing local knowledge, and instructing INGOs on nuanced ways to engage a particular community or group.</i></p>
INGOs	<p><i>INGOs have been increasingly active in Yemen following the escalation of the conflict in 2014, primarily by providing humanitarian aid. However, many INGOs have removed staff from Yemen offices and relocated outside Yemen. In addition, many organizations working on peacebuilding and human rights have been sidelined by the logic that the conflict to date does not permit such work. This means that funding for initiatives besides humanitarian aid is sparse. Despite these realities, many organizations have been able to successfully implement peacebuilding initiatives by merging peacebuilding with humanitarian activities, and using remote management. INGOs can help to further the case for peacebuilding efforts in Yemen through donor consultations and advocacy efforts. This greatly influences the allocation and amount of funds available.</i></p>	<p><i>Conducting locally-oriented programs and implementing projects which take into consideration the recommendations of this Peace Analysis will enable successful peacebuilding work throughout Yemen. Providing feedback to other INGOs and CSOs on best practices, ensuring peacebuilding is a priority amongst donors and the international community, and developing long-term projects ensuring that Yemenis are equipped with the skills necessary for peacebuilding will expedite the reality of local and national peace. Moreover, if INGOs can bridge local and national-level peacebuilding initiatives and networks, this strengthens the coordination and presence of peacebuilding actors throughout Yemen.</i></p>