

## Modal Dialog

This is a modal window. You can do the following things with it:

- **Read:** modal windows will probably tell you something important so don't forget to read what they say.
- **Look:** a modal window enjoys a certain kind of attention; just look at it and appreciate its presence.
- **Close:** click on the button below to close the modal.

Close

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## Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda in Yemen has a long history as one of the organization's most dangerous branches. Yemen-based Al-Qaeda members are believed to have provided support for the 1998 bombings on the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. (1) In 2000, al-Qaeda bombed the USS Cole while it was in Aden, killing 17 and injuring 39. In 2006, 23 al-Qaeda members escaped from prison in Sana'a. (2) In 2009, the Yemeni and Saudi Arabian branches of al-Qaeda merged. Also in 2009, the Yemen-based infamous "underwear bomber" attempted to blow up a flight to Detroit. In 2010, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula took credit for the UPS cargo plane crash in Dubai and for the explosive devices on cargo planes bound for the United States. (3)

Taking advantage of the instability caused by the 2011 revolution, al-Qaeda transformed from a small terrorist group to an insurgent threat and took over significant portions of territory in southern Yemen, which the Yemeni military recaptured in 2012 with support from the American government. More recently, in December 2013, the group penetrated the Ministry of Defense's complex in Sana'a, killing more than 50 people. Al-Qaeda claimed the attack was aimed at operation rooms for the drone program located in the compound. (4)

One of the U.S. government's main methods for fighting al-Qaeda has been drone strikes. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, from 2002 to present, there have been 63-75 confirmed drone strikes and 93-112 possible extra drone strikes in Yemen. (5) These strikes have killed 315-505 people, at least some of whom were civilians and several of whom were children. (6) The drone strikes, such as the December 2013 strike on a wedding party that killed 15, have caused intense anger in Yemen and led to protests and retaliatory attacks on Yemeni and American targets. In December 2013, Yemen's parliament voted to prohibit drone strikes, which had little actual effect as votes from parliament can be struck down by the president and are non-binding, but which nevertheless provided symbolic ammunition to those who argue that drone strikes violate Yemen's sovereignty. (7)

\*Since the Yemeni and Saudi Arabian branches of al-Qaeda merged in 2009, Western organizations have generally referred to the organization as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP. However, this is not the name Yemenis or the Yemeni Press use; they almost universally call it simply al-Qaeda. Moreover, AQAP has pledged its loyalty to al-Qaeda's central leadership, first to Osama bin Laden and then to Ayman al-Zawahiri, although the group in reality is largely independent from the central organization. (8) This website generally follows the Yemeni convention and refers to the organization as al-Qaeda rather than AQAP.

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## Houthis

The Houthis accuse the government of discrimination and say they suffer from social, economic and religious marginalization. From 2004 to 2010, six rounds of fighting broke out between the Yemeni military and the Houthis, including a particularly brutal campaign launched by the government against the Houthis in 2009 that displaced tens of thousands. In 2011, the Houthis ejected the government-assigned governor of Sa'ada and replaced him with one of their own. Over the course of the fighting in the past few months, the Houthis have expanded their control from Sa'ada governorate to parts of 'Amran, al-Jawf, and Hajja governorates, with fighting even coming to within 20 miles of Sana'a in February.

The Houthi conflict has also led to the intervention of foreign countries, especially Saudi Arabia. Because the Houthi's stronghold borders Saudi Arabia, the Houthi conflict has intermittently spilled over into the country. For example, the Houthis took over minor parts of Saudi territory in 2009, causing the Saudi government to retaliate with air strikes on Houthi targets within Yemeni territory. This spillover has continued into the present, with Saudi Arabia periodically accusing the Houthis of being involved on attacks on its border guards and incursions into its territory. In January of this year, the Saudi government dispatched additional troops to the border in order to combat the Houthis. (1) There are also signs that Iran is interfering in the Houthi issue. The Yemeni and American governments have accused the Iranian government of supporting the Houthis with funding, training, and material aid. (2) However, these charges have not been proven, and the Iranian government denies it supports the Houthis in any way other than rhetorically.

Because of the current government's weakness, the most recent round of fighting in the North has not been between the Houthis and the government, but between the Houthis

and Sunni hardliners, as well as between Houthis and pro-government (or at least anti-Houthi) tribal groups. In terms of the fighting with hardline Sunnis, the Houthis have clashed primarily with Salafis who have built religious schools funded by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in the North against Houthi wishes. The fighting primarily is concentrated on a Salafi school in Dammaj that promotes a radical brand of Sunni Islam. (3) Following periodic clashes after the Houthi Siege of Dammaj in 2011, thousands of Salafi fighters migrated into the area to defend the school, causing Houthi-Salafi battles to erupt again in 2013. (4)

It is important to note however that although there is absolutely a sectarian aspect to the Houthi-Salafi, it is a mistake to view this conflict as simply another Shia'-Sunni conflict. Houthis follow a branch of Shia' Islam called Zaydism, which while once widespread is now only found in any strength in Yemen, which was ruled for centuries by a Zaydi Imamate. However, the doctrinal differences between Zaydi and Sunni Islam are much smaller than those between Sunni and more mainstream Shia' Islam, resulting in the saying that the Zaydi are "the Sunnis of the Shia, and the Shia of the Sunnis." (5) Traditionally, relations between Yemen's Zaydi and Sunni Muslims have been friendly, and it is not uncommon for followers of the two sects to pray at the same mosque together.

The conflict between the Houthis and Salafis has also spread to the tribes in the region who are wary of the increasing power of the Houthis. These tribesmen are primarily opposed to the Houthis because of their attempts to expand into their territory rather than because of any ideological reasons. Thus, the Houthi-tribesmen conflicts are essentially conflicts over control of territory, not religion. (6) Fighting between Houthis and tribal groups dates back to the June 2013 killing of a Houthi family, for which the Houthis blamed the al-Ahmar family. (7) There has also been conflict because anti-Houthi tribes in Arhab blocked the road leading to the Houthi stronghold of Sa'ada.

The Houthi clashes with tribal groups is largely Zaydi on Zaydi violence. Just as the Houthis are Zaydi, so too is the al-Ahmar tribe. However, there is a slight religious tint to the conflict in that many Houthi supporters are more hardline Zaydi than those their opponents, who they accuse of not following Zaydi beliefs and practices sufficiently. In turn, the Zaydis on the other side, such as the al-Ahmar family and the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, accuse the Houthis of having turned to Twelver Shi'ism (the main sect in Iran). (8) However, the fighting is essentially related to control of territory, with sectarian concerns playing only a secondary role.

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## Hadhramaut Tribal Federeation

Locals in Hadhramaut have long complained of ill-treatment by security forces and marginalization from the economy, pointing out that while the governorate produces over half of Yemen's oil, it remains poor, few locals are employed by the oil companies in the area, and the production of oil is having increasingly negative environmental impacts for very little benefit to the region's inhabitants. (1) They also complain that the troops at the government checkpoints in the region are overly aggressive and provocative in their interactions with even unarmed citizens. (2)

In December 2013, tensions in the governorate came to a head when a prominent tribal leader was killed at a security checkpoint. Following the killing, the Federation threatened retaliation unless the government put those responsible for his death on trial, ensured that locals were employed at the oil companies in the region, removed military camps from Hadhramaut, and replaced military forces with local security forces. (3) The government has pledged to meet these demands gradually, but clashes between government forces and locals have occurred intermittently in the four months since the conflict began. The tribes have since taken over the major checkpoints in the governorate, which has forced the government and the oil companies to fly in supplies by helicopter to the local oil facilities. (4) As part of arbitration efforts, the government gave 202 guns, 20 cars, and \$4.6 million to the tribesmen, but did not stop sending military reinforcements to and arresting people in Hadhramaut, and so tensions have remained high. (5)

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## Energy-Related Conflicts

The government's reliance on oil revenues has negatively affected its ability to function as a modern state. Oil makes up the majority, 63 percent, of the government's revenue, which allows the government to rely on that oil income rather than building up a modern bureaucracy capable of taxing and regulating the economy. (1, 2)

Moreover, the oil and gas sector helped create an environment in which corruption has flourished. Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was overthrown in 2011 after over three decades of rule, used oil revenues to stay in power and to line his pockets and those of his supporters. While it is impossible to determine precisely how much revenue the former government stole from its people, there are clear signs of corruption in the oil and gas industry. For example, artificially low liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices have caused Yemen to lose an estimated \$5.6 billion in revenues over the less than five years since LNG exports began, a major amount for a country whose GDP is only \$35 billion. (3) While there is no similar estimate available as to how much revenue was lost due to corrupt oil deals, there have been several allegations of foreign oil companies bribing state officials in order to secure overly favorable oil deals with the government. Moreover, there are charges, albeit less reputable ones, that foreign governments are also inappropriately involved in the country's oil industry. Yemeni media is increasingly reporting that there are huge, previously undiscovered oil reserves in al-Jawf governorate, and that Saudi Arabia is pressuring the Yemeni government and local leaders to prevent oil exploration in the area. (4, 5)

Partially due to this corruption, the communities in which Yemen's oil and gas resources are located have received very few benefits from the exploitation of these resources, and this in turn has led to intense anger against the government and foreign companies. This anger in turn has led to violent conflict between groups in these areas and the government. In 2013 alone, there were 41 successful and 23 attempted attacks on oil infrastructure. (6) These attacks appear to be increasing over time as well: in 2012, there were 37 attacks, and in 2011, there were 21. (7) Yemen's natural gas is also subject to attacks, and LNG production was shut down for over six months in 2012 as a result of sabotage to a gas pipeline. (8)

In addition to those attacks directly aimed at oil and gas resources, other conflicts with non-energy resource related immediate causes have nevertheless increasingly revolved around control of energy resources. For example, the fighting between the Yemeni government and the Hadhramaut Tribal Federation that started because of the killing of a prominent tribal leader at a checkpoint quickly transformed into a conflict over control of oil resources. Following the killing, the Federation took over the region's roads, damaged oil pipelines, and refused to permit oil companies access to their facilities, forcing them to airlift supplies in by helicopter. (9) Thus, even violence caused by separate issues often devolves into conflict over energy resources.

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## Popular Resistance Committees

Popular Resistance Committees, also known as Popular Committees and Popular Defense Committees, are not a new phenomenon in Yemen, but they became particularly widespread following the Yemeni military's 2012 offensive to regain control over territory in the south that Al-Qaeda

had taken over. (1) Members of the committees are civilians, generally recruited from local tribes, and function as local militias, setting up and operating checkpoints in addition to supporting military forces against al-Qaeda. (2) However, tensions are growing between the Committees and the government as the government has so far failed to provide the weapons or salaries demanded by committee members, which has caused them to threaten to withdraw from checkpoints and from the streets. (Ibid)

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## **YEMEN: A COUNTRY ON THE BRINK**

An Overview of the Issues Facing Yemen & Why They Matter

## **AN INTRODUCTION**

### **to Yemen's pressing issues**

Yemen is a country that not many people think about: it is small, and does not have as much oil as its Middle Eastern neighbors. It is the poorest country in the Middle East, and if it continues on its current trajectory, its economy and infrastructure will continue to decline. If you don't know why you should care about the current situation, this website should serve as a primer.

**There are many factors contributing to Yemen's current situation.**

Learn more about why we should be paying attention to these issues below.

### **HISTORY**

View a timeline of the history that makes Yemen what it is today.

### **CURRENT CONFLICTS**

View a map of Yemeni conflicts and learn about the groups involved.

### **ECONOMY**

See how Yemen's economy contributes to turmoil.

## FOOD & WATER

See how agricultural issues and water accessibility affect Yemen.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PRESSURES

Yemen's population statistics present additional difficulties.

## ENERGY ISSUES

Learn how some of Yemen's main industries may be in trouble.

## **HISTORY: road to conflict**

**Timeline of key events leading to Yemen's current situation**



## **CURRENT CONFLICTS**

**what's going on in Yemen today & who are the instigators?**

### **Yemeni Conflicts: a Map**

This map includes an extensive list of violent conflicts and events in Yemen from January until March of 2014. To learn more about some of the main groups involved in these incidents, click the links below. (See



Al-Qaeda Houthis Hadhramaut Tribal Federation Popular Resistance Committees Energy Conflict



## Compared to 2013

according to the newspaper, *National Yemen*

200

Explosions

260

Killed by sectarian violence

400

Assassinations

700

Killed in drone strikes

## The ECONOMY

### Yemen by the numbers



Yemen's extreme poverty severely affects its security situation. In addition, it suffers from a number of environmental and demographic pressures that will further burden its economy in the coming years, making growth difficult. Yemen's population is very young and growing at a rapid rate, which places an increased burden on its natural resources, particularly water and oil. These pressures will also likely lead to increased conflict as the growing population fights for control of increasingly limited resources, especially as the lack of oil income will destabilize the government.



## HOW POOR IS YEMEN?

Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab World. The 2011 Revolution was catastrophic for economic growth, causing GDP to decrease dramatically. Here, we compare Yemen's GDP with those of Saudi Arabia (a well-off neighboring country), and the United States (a familiar benchmark.)



## POVERTY

54.4 percent of the Yemeni population is living under poverty line. As of this year, 58 percent of Yemen's population, or 14.7 million people, is in need of some form of humanitarian assistance in order to meet their basic needs. 5.9 million, or 40 percent, of those in need are children under the age of 18. Only 39.9 percent of Yemen's population has access to electricity, and health care is not available for 8.6 million Yemenis. ([source](#))



## UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is pervasive in Yemen and poverty rates have reached devastating proportions. 40 percent of the population is unemployed, including a youth unemployment rate of 60 percent. ([Al-Monitor](#))



## INEQUALITY

Wealth is concentrated in a very small percentage of the Yemeni population. Just ten families control 80 percent of Yemen's imports, industrial activity, oil distribution, communications, and the banking sector. ([source](#))



## CORRUPTION

In 2013, Yemen dropped to 167th place out 177 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. [Transparency International](#) defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" and ranks based on "informed views of analysts, businesspeople and experts in countries around the world".([Al-Monitor](#))

## Food and WATER

### Agriculture, qat, and the impending water crisis



Because of poor water management, rapid urbanization, population growth and climate change, Yemen's water is [running out](#). The country's freshwater reserves, largely underground aquifers, are consumed much more quickly than they are replaced. Once these reserves are consumed, the economy will be decimated. Those who rely on agriculture for income will be particularly hard hit, and food prices across the country will rise while poverty worsens. Moreover, as the Arab world's poorest country, Yemen does not have the resources to easily meet the gap between water supply and water demand.



## NO EASY SOLUTION

The country only has a few options to deal with this shortage-it faces either a mass migration of people from water scarce areas, essentially relocating the entire capital, or adding additional water from outside sources into the Sana'a basin through desalinated water pumped in from the coast or transferring water from other basins, which would cost billions in money the government doesn't have. ([source](#))



## WATER SCARCITY

[Yemen](#) is one of the top five most water scarce countries in the world. In some major Yemeni cities, such as Sana'a, the aquifers will be completely depleted within the next 20 years, and currently water is only available for a few hours each day. Water will run out in the highlands (which are densely populated) within the next 10 to 20 years, and Sana'a [has to drill](#) around six new deep wells a year to replace drying water sources.



## WATER POVERTY

Per capita availability of water is 115 cubic meters per year, compared to 1,250 cubic meters on average in the Middle East and North Africa, and 7,500 cubic meters on average for the world as a whole. Barring change, Yemen's already low water availability will fall to an unsustainable 65 cubic meters per year by 2031. The water poverty line is when per capita availability of water falls below 1000 cubic per year. ([source](#))



## WATER & VIOLENCE

Yemen's extreme water scarcity is already leading directly and indirectly to violent conflict, and the trend is will likely grow in the future as water becomes even scarcer. Moreover, Yemen is especially prone to conflict over scarce resources because it is one of the most heavily-armed countries in the world. There is roughly one weapon for every two civilians in Yemen, and 61% of households own weapons as of 2010. These numbers are now likely higher due to the political instability in 2011. ([source](#))



## WATER CONFLICTS

[Violence](#) from land and water disputes kills approximately 4,000 people annually (many more than either the Houthi or the Al-Qaeda conflicts). 70 to 80 percent of all rural conflicts in Yemen are related to water. ([source](#))



## AGRICULTURE

Agriculture [accounts for](#) approximately 15 percent of Yemen's GDP, and 70 percent of people in the rural areas make their living from agriculture. Water scarcity will cause decreases in agricultural output that will be devastating to the economy, making poor people even poorer while simultaneously raising food prices. Crop irrigation accounts for 90 percent of all water use in Yemen, and unregulated wells dug by Yemeni farmers are using up Yemen's water supply at a rapid rate. ([source](#))





## ECONOMICS OF QAT

Qat is a mild, not seriously addictive drug chewed by 90 percent of Yemeni adult men and up to 50 percent of adult women. Its production takes up massive amounts of water and other resources that the poor country could otherwise use to meet basic needs, worsening Yemen's already precarious food and water situation. However, Qat also provides desperately needed employment and income, particularly in rural areas, and replacing it will be difficult, both economically and politically. ([source](#))



## QAT & RESOURCES

Qat production consumes up to 70 percent of Yemen's groundwater resources, and makes up 20 percent of its total agricultural production (which is bad in a country suffering massive food insecurity). Approximately 25 percent of irrigated land is [devoted to Qat production](#), and it takes up 26% of household income. Many poor families buy it at the expense of food and other basic needs.([source](#))

## DEMOGRAPHIC Pressures

### Yemen's societal challenges



As previously noted, Yemen's natural resources are running out, and Yemen's demographic patterns will exacerbate these shortages. Yemen's population is growing incredibly quickly, and as its population grows, so too does pressure on its environment.



## POPULATION

Yemen's current population is 25.2 million with a growth rate of 2.72 percent, the 20th highest in the world. With a median age of 18.6 years, 62.8% of Yemen's population is under the age of 25. (sources: [1](#) / [2](#) / [3](#))



## MIGRATION

In addition to its high fertility rate (4.09 children born/woman), Yemen's population growth is also heavily affected by displacement and migration. Much of this population movement has to do with the conflicts in the country forcing people to leave their homes and move away. In turn, this high level of population movement drives conflict.



## URBANIZATION

Yemen's rate of urbanization is 4.78% according to the CIA World Factbook. There are approximately 943,000 total displaced people in Yemen, concentrated in the Sa'ada, Hajjah, Amran, Aden and Abyan governorates.



## DISPLACEMENT

Yemen's population of displaced people includes:

- 306,964 internally displaced people
  - 228,000 returnees in 2013 (with 400,000 more expected to return in 2014, mainly from Saudi Arabia)
  - 242,944 Refugees (majority are from Somalia)
  - 62,194 vulnerable and stranded migrants
- ([source](#))

## ENERGY Issues

### An industry in danger



The majority of Yemen's exports and government revenues come from oil, which is expected to run out within the next ten years. The country's oil production peaked in 2001, and is now in decline due to both depletion of fields and attacks on energy infrastructure. Once its oil is depleted, Yemen will have to import its energy supply. Moreover, the government will have to find new sources of revenue, and the country will have to find new products to export. Much like water however, the economic transition from oil-exporter to importer will likely be very painful, particularly for the government.



## OIL SHORTAGE

Yemen has 3 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Oil production in Yemen has declined steadily since it peaked in 2001. Barring significant new discoveries (which are not impossible as the government said in 2013 that oil reserves are higher than previously thought and exploration for new reserves is ongoing), at current extraction rates crude oil reserves will be exhausted in the next 10 years.) (sources: [1](#) / [2](#))



## OIL EXPENDITURES

Yemen earned \$750 million less from oil revenues in 2013 than it did in 2012 and for the first time, oil import expenditures surpassed oil revenue in the country. Oil production in Yemen is [expected](#) to drop below 250,000 barrels per day by 2014. (sources: [1](#) / [2](#))



## ECONOMIC IMPACT

Petroleum [accounts for](#) approximately 25 percent of GDP and 63% of government revenue. Government [revenues](#) from the oil and gas sector in 2010 were more than \$5 billion. In 2009, oil [accounted for](#) over 85% of export earnings, which makes Yemen very vulnerable to fluctuations in the international price of oil. The Yemeni government [believes](#) that their deficit could be close to 8 percent of gross GDP as a result of the lost

oil earnings, compared to 6.3 percent in 2012.



## NATURAL GAS

Yemen is hoping to replace its oil revenue with income from natural gas. As part of this diversification effort away from oil, Yemen exported its first liquefied natural gas in October 2009. As of early 2013, Yemen's liquefied natural gas production accounted for approximately 3% of the world's total volume. Yemen's gas revenues are [set to total](#) US \$30-50 billion from 2008 to 2028.(sources: [1](#) / [2](#))



## OIL & GAS CONFLICTS

Yemen's oil and gas resources have actually destabilized the country rather than being used to develop the economy. The communities in which these resources are located have received very few benefits from the exploitation of their resources, and this in turn has led to intense anger against the government and foreign companies. This anger in turn has led to violent conflict between groups in these areas and the government.



## PIPELINE ATTACKS

There were 41 [attacks](#) on oil pipelines in Yemen over the course of 2013 (38 in Marib, 2 in Shabwa, and 1 in Hadramout.) There were also 23 attempted attacks. 37 attacks were recorded in 2012 and 21 in 2011. Halts in oil production caused by attacks on infrastructure caused the Ministry of Oil and Minerals to lose \$5 billion from March 2011 to the end of 2013, money that would have been used by the government to fund its budget requirements.



## SAUDI INFLUENCE

Yemeni media is increasingly [reporting](#) that there are huge previously undiscovered oil reserves in al-Jawf governorate, and that Saudi Arabia is pressuring the Yemeni government and local leaders to prevent oil and gas exploration in the area, which is on the border with Saudi Arabia.



## GAS & CORRUPTION

There are signs of clear corruption in Yemen's energy resource market. For example, 20-year contracts signed in 2005 [allowed](#) the Korea Gas Corporation KOGAS to purchase Yemen's liquefied natural gas (LNG) for only \$3.15 per million BTUs and France's Total to purchase it for \$1 per million BTUs, even though the actual market price is much closer to \$14 per million BTUs. Since the agreement was signed, the country has

lost an [estimated](#) \$5.6 billion in revenues due to the artificially low LNG price.

An American University Honors Capstone Project by Marie Zoglo and Olivia Brown

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