

# The Dual Role of Arab League Mediation in the Yemen Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of Regional Actors (2015-2024)

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## Abstract

This study argues that the Arab League's role in the Yemeni Conflict during the 2015-2024 period was ambivalent, serving both as a mediator supporting the peace process and as a political actor involved in regional conflict dynamics. The research method employed is comparative analysis within the framework of conflict resolution theory, comparing the roles of the Arab League, the United Nations (UN), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) based on four key variables: neutrality, institutional capacity, political and material leverage, and the inclusivity of the mediation process. The analysis reveals that the Arab League's involvement exhibits a contradictory dual pattern that limits the effectiveness of sustained mediation, despite the League possessing regional legitimacy and the capacity to drive peace initiatives. In comparison, the UN demonstrates a superior position in terms of neutrality and institutional capacity, while the GCC is resilient in regional leverage but limits its reliance on mediation. Various interests among Arab League members and the organization's limited capacity pose the primary challenges in the conflict mediation process. Lessons drawn from this experience highlight the importance of stronger coordination and a comprehensive approach that includes all relevant stakeholders in order to achieve sustainable peace.

**Keywords:** The Arab League, Yemen Conflict, Regional Security, Mediation, Middle East Stability

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa peran Liga Arab terhadap konflik Yaman periode 2015-2024 bersifat ambivalen, sebagai mediator dalam mendukung proses perdamaian sekaligus sebagai aktor politik yang terlibat dalam dinamika konflik regional. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah analisis komparatif dalam kerangka teori resolusi konflik, dengan membandingkan peran Liga Arab, Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa (PBB) dan Gulf Council Cooperation (GCC) berdasarkan empat variabel utama, yaitu netralitas, kapasitas institusional, leverage politik dan material, serta inklusivitas proses mediasi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan Liga Arab menunjukkan pola ganda kontradiktif yang memicu pada terbatasnya efektivitas mediasi yang berkelanjutan, meski pada satu sisi Liga Arab memiliki legitimasi regional dan kapasitas yang mampu mendorong inisiatif perdamaian. Secara komparatif, PBB menunjukkan keunggulan posisinya dalam netralitas dan kapasitas institusionalnya, sementara GCC kuat dalam Leverage regional namun terbatas dalam ketergantungan mediasi. Perbedaan kepentingan antar anggota Liga Arab dan keterbatasan kapasitas organisasi menjadi tantangan utama dalam proses mediasi konflik. Pembelajaran dari pengalaman ini menekankan pentingnya koordinasi yang lebih kuat dan pendekatan komprehensif yang melibatkan seluruh pemangku kepentingan untuk mencapai perdamaian berkelanjutan.

**Kata kunci:** Liga Arab, Konflik Yaman, Keamanan Regional, Mediasi, Stabilitas Timur Tengah

## Introduction

The Conflict in Yemen since 2015 has developed into a multidimensional crisis involving not only domestic actors but also regional and international powers. Initially rooted in a struggle between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, the Conflict rapidly escalated into a broader regional conflict following the intervention of the Saudi-led military coalition and the intensification of its rivalry with Iran. This complexity indicates that the Yemeni Conflict extends beyond a conventional civil war, constituting part of a wider geopolitical contest in the Middle East.

The impact of this Conflict has been significant, particularly in humanitarian terms. From the start of the Conflict in 2015 through early 2022, approximately millions of people have lost their lives, and the majority have been affected by violence, displacement, and limited access to basic necessities through 2024<sup>1</sup>. From a humanitarian perspective, the Conflict in Yemen has had far-reaching consequences, with the majority of the population in need of basic assistance and significant damage to health and education infrastructure<sup>2</sup>. This situation has been further exacerbated by the blockade, disruptions, and the supply chain<sup>3</sup>. However, beyond this humanitarian crisis, the Conflict in Yemen also reflects deeper structural issues, including domestic political fragmentation and prolonged external intervention<sup>4</sup>.

In the dynamics of this Conflict, various actors play key roles. At the domestic level, these include the Yemeni government and the Houthis, while at

the regional and international levels, actors such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, the United Nations (UN), the Arab League, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are involved. Academic studies indicate that, although regional rivalries contribute to the Conflict, its primary drivers are rooted in domestic political dynamics. External interventions, rather than resolving these underlying issues, tend to further complicate the prospects for conflict resolution.<sup>5</sup>

Among these actors, the Arab League warrants particular attention, given its institutional mandate to maintain regional stability and security. However, its effectiveness in conflict management is frequently questioned, especially in responding to armed conflicts, as it is often constrained by divergent political interests among member states and by limited mechanisms for enforcing collective decisions<sup>6</sup>. The Arab League's experience in other regional conflicts reveals a pattern of inconsistent engagement. In the case of Syria, the organization adopted relatively decisive measures, including suspension of membership and the deployment of an observer mission. However, it faced significant limitations in halting the violence due to operational constraints and divergent interests among member states<sup>7</sup>. Meanwhile, during the 2007-2008 Lebanese crisis, the Arab League was relatively successful in brokering the Doha Agreement. This suggests a tendency toward a dual role that is also worth analyzing in the context of the Yemeni Conflict.

Previous research has examined the role of regional organizations in conflict resolution, particularly with regard to their mediation capacity. Marco Pinfari, in "Nothing But Failure? The Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council as Mediators in Middle Eastern Conflicts," notes that these organizations often fail in their mediation efforts due to the fragmentation of interests among member states in the Middle East. Dakhallah dan Hinnebusch highlight the organization's efforts to establish a regional security framework, but also emphasize how the complex political dynamics in the Middle East limit its effectiveness. In the context of the Yemeni Conflict, Tom Ruys and Luca Ferro, in their article "Weather the Storm: Legality and Legal Implications of the Saudi-Led Military Intervention in Yemen," emphasize the legal aspects of the military intervention, particularly regarding the legal justification for the Saudi-led coalition's intervention. Generally, the literature tends to distinguish between the diplomatic role and the political involvement of the Arab League.

Based on the literature review above, several research gaps have been identified that need to be addressed. First, studies on the Arab League and the Yemeni Conflict have not yet been analyzed within the framework of conflict mediation. Second, most studies tend to be narrow in scope and have not yet employed a comparative approach to evaluate peace initiatives. Third, the existing literature tends to view the Arab League as a neutral mediator or to criticize its failure without analyzing the Arab League's dual role as a regional

mediator. Against this background, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the Arab League's involvement in the Yemeni conflict resolution process from 2015 to 2024 through a comparative approach within the framework of conflict resolution.

## **Theory Framework**

### **Conflict Resolution**

This study adopts the concept of conflict resolution with a mediation approach as an analytical framework for examining dispute settlement. This concept, proposed by Wallensteen, emphasizes three key elements in conflict resolution: a) reaching an agreement, b) accepting the existence of the other party, and c) ending violence. The agreement may take a formal form, such as the signing of official accords, or an informal form, based on unwritten understandings between the conflicting parties. Within this perspective, conflict resolution is understood as a post-conflict or transitional process that requires the willingness and sustained commitment of all actors to address the underlying incompatibilities and fundamental disagreements that gave rise to the Conflict. Accordingly, this approach extends beyond the mere cessation of hostilities and seeks to establish the foundations for a new and more constructive relationship between the parties involved.<sup>8</sup>

### **Mediation**

The concept, as defined by Christopher W. Moore, is a form of intervention in dispute resolution that involves the participation of a neutral third party. This approach provides a more constructive forum in which conflicting parties can explore common interests and work toward mutually beneficial, or "win-win," outcomes. The mediator's role as an impartial facilitator is central to this process, as it involves promoting communication, narrowing differences, and assisting the parties in identifying potential resolution options that may not have been previously recognized.<sup>9</sup>

The effectiveness of mediation lies in its flexibility in addressing a wide range of conflicts, from interpersonal disputes to complex international confrontations, as well as in its capacity to preserve the autonomy of the disputing parties in making final decisions. Moreover, mediation is generally considered to be more time- and cost-efficient than adversarial approaches and offers a greater potential for sustaining long-term relationships between the parties involved<sup>10</sup>.

### **Regional Organization on Comparative Mediation**

The primary comparative framework refers to the Regional Organization on Comparative Mediation theory as developed by Marco Pinfari. This theory emphasizes the importance of comparing both roles and the

effectiveness of regional organizations as mediators through cross-organizational and cross-case analyses of Conflict. According to Pinfari, the success or failure of regional organizations supported by several key factors cannot be assessed normatively alone; instead, they must be analyzed through empirical comparisons of the mediation process, capacity, and outcomes. Pinfari identifies several key variables in the analysis of regional organization mediation. First, institutional capacity, which includes the level of internal cohesion among member states decision-making mechanisms and policy implementation capabilities. Second, the level of mediator neutrality, where political involvement or support for one of the conflicting parties can affect the legitimacy of mediation. Third, political and material leverage, which is the mediator's ability to provide credible incentives or pressure. Fourth, the level of inclusiveness of the mediation process, particularly the extent to which all key actors in the Conflict are involved in the negotiations<sup>11</sup>.

In this context of the Yemeni Conflict, this theory possibly compares the system between the role of the Arab League and regional actors encompassing the other international organizations, including the United Nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Kuwait, and Oman. The Arab League has advantages in terms of regional legitimacy and resource mobilization, but faces limitations in terms of neutrality and internal fragmentation of interests. Conversely, actors such as the UN and Oman demonstrate higher levels of neutrality and inclusivity, despite having limitations in political and material leverage. This framework is used to evaluate the relative effectiveness of various mediation approaches applied in the Yemen conflict.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The Dynamic Yemeni Conflict from a Regional Perspective**

Yemen has experienced several domestic conflicts since the unification of North and South Yemen. The Conflict in Yemen has drawn international attention; it has been ongoing since 2015 and has yet to reach a peaceful resolution. A number of studies suggest that the escalation of the Conflict is linked to the geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran<sup>12</sup>. The Conflict, which initially stemmed from political differences, escalated into a civil war that has caused immense suffering, particularly among civilians. The United Nations reports that the death toll has reached 7,500 civilians since the Conflict began<sup>13</sup>. Since then, the Yemeni Conflict can no longer be viewed as a purely domestic conflict; it is multidimensional, as it is influenced by the dynamics of regional power in the Middle East. Several countries allied with Saudi Arabia held meetings regarding the Conflict and mobilized the Saudi-led military coalition to carry out a military intervention against the Houthis. This pattern indicates that the Yemeni Conflict has evolved into a proxy war, resulting in an increasing complexity of actors due to conflicting external interests.

These regional dynamics have also shaped the alliance configurations, with fragmented alignments among external actors contributing to the protraction of the Conflict. The involvement of actors such as the United Arab Emirates, whose interests at times diverge from those of Saudi Arabia, particularly regarding support for different Yemeni factions, has further complicated coordination and prolonged the duration of the Conflict<sup>14</sup>. This has led to fragmentation within the regional coalition, complicating efforts to resolve the Conflict. The United Nations Security Council has urged all parties to engage in dialogue and is working to dispatch a special envoy<sup>15</sup>. Other regional actors, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have demonstrated varied approaches in responding to the Conflict. At the regional level, the Arab League has convened meetings to address the escalation. However, the nature and extent of its involvement have remained closely shaped by prevailing political dynamics. The Arab League's engagement in Yemen, characterized by its support for the status quo, reflects a dual role as both mediator and political actor. This duality, shaped by prevailing regional political considerations, has influenced and at times constrained the organization's effectiveness in facilitating conflict resolution.

From a regional perspective, the dynamics of the Yemeni Conflict have sustained fragmentation among alliances, even as alternative approaches to conflict management have been pursued. This fragmentation is driven by interactions among rival actors whose geopolitical interests diverge. Consequently, the involvement of external actors has proven largely ineffective in containing the Conflict's scale; instead, it has introduced additional layers of complexity that complicate the resolution process.

### **The comparison between the Mediator Role in the Yemeni Conflict**

This section examines the effectiveness of mediation in the Yemeni Conflict during the 2015–2024 period by directly comparing the role of the Arab League with that of other mediation actors, particularly the United Nations (UN), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Kuwait, and Oman. This comparative approach is employed to identify differences in the characteristics of each mediator and to assess their implications for the mediation process and its outcomes. The analysis focuses on four key variables: the mediator neutrality, institutional capacity, political and material leverage, and the inclusiveness of the mediation process as outlined in the comparative mediation theory of regional organizations<sup>16</sup>.

The Arab League occupies a unique position compared to other mediating actors because it plays a dual role as a regional organization and an actor that provides political legitimacy to the Saudi-led military coalition's intervention. Unlike the UN and Oman, which seek to maintain distance from direct military involvement, the Arab League institutionally supports the internationally recognized Yemeni government. This position means that the

Arab League functions not only as a mediator but also as part of the broader regional security dynamics in the Middle East<sup>17</sup>.

### **1. The comparison of The Mediator Neutrality**

In terms of neutrality, the Arab League shows significant limitations compared to the United Nations and Oman. The direct involvement of a number of Arab League member states in the military coalition in Yemen has created the perception of bias towards the Yemeni government, thereby reducing the Houthis' level of trust in the Arab League's role as mediator. This situation is in line with Pinfari's findings that regional organizations in the Middle East often face a dilemma of neutrality due to the political interests of their member states. In contrast, the UN seeks to maintain a relatively neutral position through multilateral mandates and the appointment of special envoys, as reflected in the 2018 Stockholm Agreement facilitated by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen<sup>18</sup>. Oman also demonstrates a higher level of neutrality by choosing not to get involved militarily and consistently opening informal communication channels with all parties, including the Houthis and Saudi Arabia. This comparison confirms that neutrality is a key factor in building the legitimacy of a mediator.<sup>19</sup>

### **2. The comparison of Institutional Capacity**

In terms of institutional capacity, the Arab League possesses strong regional political legitimacy as a collective representative of Arab states. This capacity enables the organization to issue political resolutions and foster regional consensus, as demonstrated by the 2015 Sharm El-Sheik Summit, which endorsed the formation of an Arab military coalition. However, fragmentation of interests among member states has frequently undermined the effective implementation of such decisions. When compared to the United Nations, the Arab League's institutional capacity is relatively weaker in managing long-term mediation processes. The United Nations benefits from a more institutionalized bureaucracy and clearly defined operational mechanisms, although it continues to face political constraints imposed by major powers. Meanwhile, Kuwait and Oman, despite their limited institutional capacities, have been able to leverage the flexibility of bilateral diplomacy to facilitate dialogue, as evidenced by the Kuwait Peace Talks in 2016 and the Muscat Dialogue in 2023<sup>20</sup>

### **3. The comparison between Political and Material Leverage**

In terms of political and material leverage, the Arab League holds a relative advantage due to the political influence and economic resources of its Gulf member states. This support provides the organization with potential means of exerting pressure on the conflicting parties, both through diplomatic engagement and economic assistance. However, existing research suggests that such leverage has more frequently been employed in support of military

strategies rather than to promote inclusive political compromise, thereby limiting its effectiveness as an instrument of mediation<sup>21</sup>. By contrast, the United Nations relies primarily on its international legitimacy to facilitate limited humanitarian agreements, including temporary ceasefires and arrangements for humanitarian access. Oman, meanwhile, exhibits a distinct form of leverage that is not based on material power but on political trust cultivated through a consistent policy of neutrality. This trust-based leverage enables Oman to facilitate communication and engagement between parties in ways that are less accessible to other mediating actors<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. The comparison between the inclusive mediation process

In terms of inclusivity, the Arab League's mediation approach tends to be more exclusive because it focuses on the internationally recognized Yemeni government. This approach limits the involvement of other key actors, particularly the Houthis, in the formal negotiation process. This condition has an impact on the weak implementation and sustainability of the resulting agreements. In contrast, the UN has consistently promoted a more inclusive mediation process by involving various conflicting parties and elements of civil society, as reflected in the 2018 Stockholm Agreement. Oman also applies inclusivity through flexible informal dialogue, although this does not always result in formal agreements. This comparison shows that inclusivity is an important prerequisite for the creation of sustainable conflict resolution.<sup>23</sup>

#### 5. The Implication of the Yemeni Resolution Conflict

The Arab League and the United Nations (UN) have a crucial role to play in mediating the Conflict in Yemen. Some of the key aspects are mediator neutrality, institutional capacity, political and material leverage, and inclusiveness of the mediation process<sup>24</sup>. To summarize, the following aspects are compared in detail in the table below:

Figure 1. Table Comparison of Mediation Aspect

Table of Comparison		
Mediations Aspect	Arab League	United Nations
<b>Mediator Neutrality</b>	Limited: The involvement of Arab League member states in the military coalition in Yemen has undermined perceptions of neutrality and reduced trust among certain conflict parties, particularly the Houthis.	High: Maintains a relatively neutral position through multilateral mandates and the appointment of special envoys, enhancing credibility among conflicting parties.

<b>Institutional Capacity</b>	Moderately Strong: Possesses regional political legitimacy as a collective representative of Arab states, enabling the issuance of political resolutions and regional consensus-building, though implementation is often hindered by internal divisions.	Very Strong: Supported by an institutionalized bureaucracy and clear operational mechanisms, allowing sustained engagement in long-term mediation processes
<b>Political and Material Leverage</b>	Relative Advantage: Benefits from the political influence and economic resources of Gulf member states; however, this leverage is often used to support military strategies rather than inclusive political compromise.	Moderately Strong: Leverage is primarily based on international legitimacy and normative authority, enabling the facilitation of humanitarian agreements and confidence-building measures.
<b>Inclusiveness of the Mediation Process</b>	Exclusive: Mediation efforts tend to focus primarily on the internationally recognized Yemeni government, limiting the participation of other key actors.	Inclusive: Encourages broad participation by involving multiple conflict parties and stakeholders in the mediation process.

Source: Edited by the Authors

Based on a comparison of these variables above, the result of the study shows that the effectiveness of mediation on the Yemen Conflict is determined by the balance between neutrality, institutional capacity, leverage, and inclusiveness in the process. The Arab League possesses notable advantages in terms of regional legitimacy and its potential for resource mobilization. However, its dual role as both mediator and supporter of military intervention limits its effectiveness in promoting peaceful conflict resolution. These findings are consistent with Wallenstein’s conflict resolution theory, which emphasizes that successful conflict resolution should not be assessed solely on the basis of formal agreements, but also on mutual recognition of the other party’s existence and a reduction in the level of violence.

Consequently, the role of the Arab League in the Yemeni Conflict is more accurately understood as part of complex regional security dynamics, while

actors such as the United Nations and Oman demonstrate relatively higher effectiveness in facilitating dialogue and reducing conflict resolution.

### **Conclusion**

The study demonstrates that the effectiveness of mediation in the Yemeni Conflict during the 2015–2024 period can be fully understood only through a comparative approach that situates the Arab League alongside other mediating actors, particularly the United Nations and Oman. The findings indicate that while the Arab League possesses regional legitimacy and considerable potential for resource mobilization, its dual role as both a regional organization and a supporter of military intervention has constrained its neutrality and undermined its credibility as a mediator.

This condition has directly contributed to the comparatively low effectiveness of the Arab League's mediation efforts when measured against those undertaken by other actors, thereby highlighting the importance of neutrality, institutional coherence, and role clarity in mediation processes within complex regional conflicts.

In terms of institutional capacity, the Arab League has demonstrated relative strength in articulating regional political positions; however, the fragmentation of interests among its member states has undermined policy coherence and hindered the effective implementation of mediation outcomes. By contrast, the United Nations, supported by a more institutionalized organizational structure, has been better positioned to facilitate long-term mediation processes, while Oman has relied on trust-based informal diplomacy to open channels of dialogue outside formal negotiation frameworks. These variations suggest that extensive institutional capacity alone does not necessarily translate into effective mediation in the absence of internal cohesion and political legitimacy.

Moreover, the findings indicate that strong political and material leverage, such as that possessed by the Arab League, does not automatically correlate with successful mediation outcomes. When leverage is not accompanied by neutrality and inclusiveness, its effectiveness as a tool for peace facilitation tends to diminish. Conversely, the trust-based approach employed by Oman and the international legitimacy of the United Nations have proven more effective in fostering dialogue and achieving partial agreements. Accordingly, this study concludes that the role of the Arab League in the Yemeni

Conflict is more accurately understood as an element of broader regional security dynamics rather than as that of a neutral and dominant mediator. This conclusion is consistent with the comparative mediation theory of regional organizations, which underscores the necessity of balancing neutrality,

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