



3-1-2021

## From Obama to Trump to Biden: U.S. Involvement and Policy Tactics in the Yemeni Civil War

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### Recommended Citation

Choi, Anthony (Sungho) and Mahoney, Patrick, "From Obama to Trump to Biden: U.S. Involvement and Policy Tactics in the Yemeni Civil War" (2021). *Glatfelter Gazette*. 1.  
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# From Obama to Trump to Biden: U.S. Involvement and Policy Tactics in the Yemeni Civil War

## Abstract

The analysis intends to overview the history of U.S. involvement in the Yemeni Civil War, starting from the presidency of Barack Obama to Joe Biden. Given that the Biden administration recently has decided to end the U.S. support for Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, this article hopes to explore what events got the United States up to that point and the U.S. foreign policy tactics and strategies that factored into causing a long-term devastation in Yemen. This analysis will also provide a brief, condensed history regarding what led the war in Yemen to begin.

## Keywords

Yemen, policy, war

## Disciplines

International Relations | Political Science

## Comments

Journal Subfield: International Relations

International Relations

# From Obama to Trump to Biden: U.S. Involvement and Policy Tactics in the Yemeni Civil War

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## **From Obama to Trump to Biden: U.S. Involvement and Policy Tactics in the Yemeni Civil War**

By Anthony Choi & Patrick Mahoney

[About 24 million people are currently in need of help, 100,000 people killed, and 4 million people are left displaced](#) - these numbers represent the hefty cost of a war that has completely enveloped the country of Yemen since 2015. Many Western countries, including the United States, have played key roles in the conflict, and debate over the effectiveness of these efforts has become more widespread as the war has progressed, particularly in the U.S.

The war in Yemen commenced, partly as a result of the political instability in Yemen after the Arab Spring. At the time, then-Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi transitioned to the presidency, ending the longtime rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. President Saleh was pressured by [pro-democracy protesters](#), and he ultimately resigned from office. Once President Hadi took over the presidency, he tried to shift the government through “[constitutional and budget reform](#),” but Houthi rebels from the north rejected them.

In 2015, the Obama administration declared the United States’ support for the “[Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen](#).” Saudi Arabia sees Houthis as “[Iranian proxies](#)” and supports Hadi’s efforts to take Sana’a, Yemen’s capital, back from the Houthis, who had pushed Hadi into an exile. In the midst of the war, the administration also offered [\\$115 billion worth of weapons, including “other military equipment and training.”](#) to Saudi Arabia, but the casualties caused by the conflict in Yemen resulted in some members of Congress calling for restrictions on the arm sales. The Obama administration conducted a total of [154 drone strikes](#) over their eight years in power, with [1,020 deaths](#) resulting from such strikes from 2009 to 2016. In 2019, however, members of the former Obama administration were “[pleading” with congressional leaders](#) to defund U.S. support for Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni Civil War. Even when President Obama left the office, his policy on Yemen was passed onto the Trump administration to adapt.

One of Donald Trump’s campaign promises revolved around pulling U.S. troops out of the Middle East, but when it came to Yemen, Trump [doubled down and expanded](#) on Obama-era policies, declaring additional provinces as “[active areas of hostility](#),” opening the door for increased drone strikes and raids. By October 2020, U.S. armed attacks had [killed at least 86 civilians](#) during the last three years, according to a study conducted by Airwars, a British watchdog group. The study also found that the [most intensive U.S. military intervention in Yemen since 2001](#) had occurred during the Trump administration, exceeding that of Obama.

Trump’s tenure as commander-in-chief got off to a rough start in Yemen when a planned military raid to capture an Al-Qaeda leader in the Yemeni province of Al Bayda [went awry](#), resulting in at least 23 civilian deaths, including many women and children. The raid had initially been

approved by the Obama administration, but it had been repeatedly delayed due to “[operational reasons](#).” The botched raid made national news, and brought a renewed spotlight onto the crisis in Yemen and U.S. involvement in the region.

In early 2021, the Trump administration announced that it was branding the Houthi movement, the Iran-backed armed group that had helped spark the conflict when they seized Yemen’s capital in 2014, as a terrorist organization. This move sparked condemnation from international aid groups, who feared that the designation would [negatively affect access to administer aid](#) to the millions of Yemeni citizens in Houthi territory. The move ended up being the last major military decision made by the Trump administration before Joe Biden was inaugurated.

One of the first major foreign policy reforms made by the Biden administration was to [end U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition](#). Biden reversed the decision to label the Houthis as a terrorist group, arguing that Saudi Arabia and Iran should work towards a peaceful diplomacy and that U.S. support had not helped de-escalate the conflict. Thus, direct U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen came to an abrupt stop, and arm sales to the Saudi’s for the war effort were discontinued.

Though the U.S. has removed itself from direct involvement, the war in Yemen continues to rage, and a solution has yet to be found. The UN has called the war in Yemen the [worst humanitarian crisis in the world](#), and the long-term devastation done by all actors in the war, both politically and socially, will continue to be a pressing issue long after the last gunfire rings out into the desert air.